

Appendix A:

His Grandchildren Remember Grandpa Ullian

From David Ullian Larson – Son of Mary (Ullian) Larson

What will follow are memories and evaluations about my grandfather John Ullian. Due to the inaccuracies of memories, none of what will be included can be accepted as for sure. But the material included is the best effort I can make at this time on this subject. So to the best of my recollection, here goes.

Italy

John Ullian had a hard life as a youngster in the mountains of northern Italy. He often talked about his need to bury bread to hide it. When he dug it up to eat some, he had to brush off the ants. This activity by him was an indication of what was to come in his life.

Romano Ullian, the brother to John, was a few years older than John. When John was 16, his brother had already moved to Iowa to work in a coal mine. Likely, a recruiter for coal mines in Iowa had previously signed Romano to go to Centerville, Iowa, to work.

When John was old enough, probably 16, he was an easy sell to join his brother in Iowa. The surmise is that a recruiter would have an easy sell to convince John to go to Iowa. The recruiter then would give John a train ticket to Le Havre, France. In addition, he would have been given a ticket for the ocean voyage and then, once in New York, a train ticket to Iowa. He was also given money to buy food along the way. He went with another man from his village.

When John arrived in Centerville, Iowa, he arranged to live with his brother, sister-in-law, and nephew, Anthony. John worked in the mines for a couple years until he was drafted into the army for WWI. He was 18 at that time.

WWI

John reported to Camp Grant in Illinois. After basic training he was sent back to Europe. He fought in the Argonne Forest where he was gassed. He also was subjected to hand-to-hand combat with the Germans. He was bayoneted in his upper arm. The scar was quite evident.

He got separated from his unit but was returned. During this period, I am guessing he went on to visit with Linda Ferraro in Italy, obviously absent without leave. Eventually he was returned to Camp Grant. He settled in the northern suburbs of Chicago to work as a gardener. This was about 1919.

Chicago

Linda Ferraro, his future wife, arrived in Illinois with the Ferraro family. They went to Rockford because another member of that Ferraro family had previously moved to Rockford from Italy.

Shortly after her arrival, John and Linda were married. They lived in the northern suburbs of Chicago where they had 6 children: Mary, Livia, Gino, John, Joe and Virginia. One of the children, Mary, told of her experience as a very young child. She would answer the phone. Then she would pass on the message to her mother in Italian. This seems to indicate that Linda Ferraro Ullian did not speak English well enough to answer when the telephone rang. The calls were for John about jobs he was to do. He was an independent gardener primarily in Northern Chicago for well-to-do people.

This period from about 1920 to about 1929 was probably the best time of his life. His six children were born in this period. The end of this period was 1929 when Linda was overcome by the Epidemic of 1929 and she passed on.

John and his five children are in a photograph of the casket with Linda at the cemetery. Behind the casket are lined many Ferraros. They all repeated, "Poor Linda." Surprisingly the entire Ferraro family completely ignored Linda's children. According to several accounts, the Ferraro folks provided no support for the children. No visitation in the orphanages where they were placed, no oranges at Christmas. Nothing. So the entire Ferraro family exhibited very poor judgment by having nothing to do with the children, ever. Even later in life.

By 1930 John had placed his five children in an orphanage in Joliet and then in the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School in Normal Illinois where they would live until the girls were sent to a foster family, John A. was sent to a foster home and soon entered the Army, Gino joined the Navy directly from the Home in Normal, and Joe was removed from the Home by his father.

Once the children were in the Home in Normal, John went to Texas. I know very little about his time there.

Joliet

Somehow John was reunited with his oldest daughter, Mary in Joliet, Illinois. So in about 1945 John purchased a chicken ranch on Marcella Avenue. The surmise is that Mary encouraged him to return to Joliet. She had married David Larson which may have provided an anchor for him.

John worked cleaning tankers for Joliet Heating and Oil. This activity probably aggravated his lungs.

John was harsh in the treatment of his children. Livia had appendicitis and had surgery. Her father expected her to work after the operation. This would help pay

for their expenses at the farm. She could not work. John told her to get out. So she did.

The chicken ranch provided him a place to stay with his boys who had returned from military service. Mary said that Gino sent money to her to hold for his father. Eventually this was used to buy or rent the farm. John owned the farm from about 1945 to 1950.

The farm had a huge garage where a Diamond T huge flat-bed truck was housed. The truck was used to move household goods for others. And it was used to support his landscape business. John even demolished a brick gas station and hauled the bricks back to the farm. The huge pile of bricks was piled between the garage and the chicken coop. These bricks remained for years. *[See story below.]*

At some point John married Nina Salbego. There exists a photograph of her holding my hand. We were standing on the sidewalk between the farm house and chicken coop on Marcella Avenue near the pump house. Obviously, my memory at age 2 of her is confined to the picture. I estimate the photograph was taken about 1945.

Another memory of the farm house remains with me to this day. I was in a high chair in the kitchen. I tipped it over and hit my face on the floor. I must have had a couple teeth because they broke through my cheek. I carry the scar of that event to this day.

At this time David Larson and his brother Wayne Larson worked with John from time to time as needed. Wayne Larson remembers cleaning out the chicken coop. The activity so traumatized him that to this day he will not eat chicken.

The Brick Pile

In about 1947 with the help of Gino Ullian, John agreed to tear down a brick gas station in Joliet. He had a truck that was strong enough and he certainly had the strength with the help of his son, Gino. The building was demolished. The bricks that could be salvaged were dumped behind the garage on Marcella.

There the pile remained for many years. According to Gino, the building owner had not made clear that he wanted the bricks. A disagreement ensued. John retained possession.

As late as 1954, some of these same bricks were brought to 214 Anderson Avenue where they were used to build an outdoor fireplace and build a walkway from the driveway to the house there.

As an aside, a pile of bricks still exists behind a house on Ullian Avenue. Probably the same bricks from that pile. A photograph exists (that cannot be

located) which shows these bricks in a pile behind the garage on Marcella. Eventually it may surface.

Anderson Avenue

By 1950 all his children had moved away from the farm. He then was drinking wine to excess. He probably lost or sold the farm at this time. Because of his alcoholism, Mary had him move to Anderson Avenue in Ingalls Park, Joliet, to care for him. So until about 1957 he lived with David Larson, Mary Larson, and the two boys David and Terry. When my dad and I went to pick him up at the farm, he was passed out in his bedroom. I was about 7 and clearly remember the entire space under the bed was littered with wine bottles. After this, he probably never went back to Marcella Avenue. At some point he subdivided the land and named the new street Ullian Street which exists today. From this point until 1957 John lived with the Larson family.

As a young child I would drag home from the grocery store behind our house, every wooden box I could find. I would then take them apart under the watchful eye of Grandpa Ullian. Then I would attempt to make something from the wooden parts. As I worked to build something, Grandpa Ullian would hold parts as I nailed them together. He frequently said I should be an architect.

My grandfather never drank water. He was famous for saying water is for washing your feet which he also would not do except on rare occasions. He was in the crowd that took a monthly bath.

Some of the bricks from that gas station he tore down eventually found their way to Anderson Avenue where they were used to make a barbeque pit and a sidewalk. I remember spending time at the farm working to remove the cement mortar so the bricks could be repurposed.

When we watched television, which was new at that time, whenever the name of a town in Texas was mentioned, grandpa Ullian would say, "Houston, you" or "Dallas, you." He had connections to Texas that will never be fully known.

When the family went for a drive, invariably along the way, Grandpa Ullian would announce that he was "spitting cotton" which was the cue for my dad to find a tavern where they both would disappear for a half-hour or more.

Mostly my memories of my Grandfather centered on his alcoholism. He purchased a pint of wine every day in the 1950s. That would have been from about 1950 to 1957. He worked cleaning Tony's Tavern at the corner of Park Road and Washington Streets. Across Park Road was Gilkerson's Ice Cream Parlor. Grandpa would regularly bring home a pint of vanilla ice cream, or a couple chocolate bars. When he had drank too much, meaning every day, he

would fall asleep. He did end up in Hines VA Hospital due to his drinking. Arterial sclerosis. "Be nice, now."

John liked to heat his wine in the winter months. One time he tried to heat the wine in the oven. The pilot light was not on. He was overcome by the fumes and hospitalized. He spent a few days in the hospital. John would buy a pint of wine after work. He would drink it. Then the empties would be hidden in the concrete blocks of the basement on Anderson Avenue.

When he had been drinking, and anyone got after him for drinking, he would say, "Be nice, now." He was definitely a wino. And this infected my father, David Larson. They became drinking buddies. Frequently Terry and I would go with dad and grandpa to do something. Along the way, they would stop for a drink. Terry and I would be left in the car. Summer or winter, for long periods of time. These days that sort of behavior would be considered child abuse.

On Decoration Day, the family would visit the grave of Linda. The cemetery is somewhere near an airport.

Note to this day I do not drink alcoholic beverages and never did. In fact I have a long story about this but will not include it here. I not only do not drink alcoholic beverages, I do not like people who do. Go figure.

1957 to 1962

I have no idea what he did from 1957 to 1962. He did not live with us on Maple Road when I was in high school. Then I left for military service in 1962. I think he moved to Maple Road when I left.

1964

In 1964 John gave money to Terry so he could visit with me in France where I was serving in the Air Force. Terry stayed in France for about four months. While he was there, we visited the hill town where grandpa was from. He was a generous man.

General Notes

John repeatedly said he never did have a headache. Probably because he was constantly pickled from wine.

John liked hot peppers which he grew in the garden on Maple Road.

He shaved daily. He never smoked. He never had a mustache or beard.

He ate anything. He had no favorite foods.

He said if you put a rusty nail in Coca Cola, it will come out shiny.

He was not fat. He had the strength of a coal miner.

He was never mean. He used a number of swear words in Italian when he was upset.
Words like Maria Sanctissima de Deo [Mary Most Holy of God], aspetti moment [wait a minute], basta [enough], to remember a few, poorly.
He wore slippers most of the time.
He chewed *Sen Sen* to hide the alcohol smell.
He never had a broken bone.
He never wore glasses.
He walked slightly hunched over.
He lost most of his hair over time.
He had arthritis in his hands.

The last time I saw him was after his amputation of a foot. He spoke to me only in Italian at that time.

John lived a difficult life in a strange land which most likely contributed to him becoming an alcoholic.

RIP

From Barbara (Ullian) Thompson – Daughter of Gino Ullian

Grandpa lived with us one summer for about 3 months, I believe, when I was in grade school. We lived at 317 Luana Road, Joliet.

I remember Grandpa sitting very straight, with his hands folded gently on his lap and a quiet smile on his face, in a lawn chair in our front yard under the silver maple tree, just watching us, his grandchildren, play. His shirts were always buttoned up to his neck, no button left unbuttoned. I would stop and talk to him, mainly because he had a broken accent and I loved to hear him call me “Little One.” Uncle Johnny also called us that too. Every so often he would give us dimes. Why dimes, I don’t know, but he would get more joy out of giving than anyone, just like my Dad.

One other story I do remember which is comical to me, but I don't believe it was to my Mom. When we moved to Luana Road Mother has planted a small maple tree in our back yard on the northeast corner of our house. Mother loved that tree and took joy in knowing she planted it. When the tree was about 5 years old, Grandpa took it upon himself to cut the it down. I have no idea what got into his mind. My Mom went out to hang up clothes and saw the tree laying in the yard. I knew Mom was upset but she never yelled. She gently said “Dad, why did you chop down my tree?” and he just said “I didn’t think it should have been planted there.” I do remember Mother speaking quietly to Daddy when he got home. I really don’t know what Daddy ever said if anything to Grandpa. One thing about my parents. They never raised their voices, but I could see the sadness in Mother’s eyes.

The most vivid memory I had was, and if I close my eyes I can see the whole scene. Mother ran Grandpa a bath. We had a homemade clothes hamper Daddy made in our bathroom. It had fish and pearls as bubbles on the front. Mother laid Grandpa's clean clothes on the hamper. I remember standing in the hall behind Mother. Grandpa went in with his shirt buttoned to his neck and sat down on the closed toilet seat and folded his precious hands and just sat. Mother said now Dad you have to take your bath. Grandpa said OK. I must have been intrigued because I do remember not leaving the hall waiting for Grandpa to be done. I never heard any movement of anyone getting in the tub or any sound. Mother came by a couple of times and said Dad are you OK, his reply was always, yes Little One. After about a half an hour, Mother asked if he was dressed and he said yes. She asked if she could come in, and he said yes. She went in and he was sitting in the same place in his original clothes and his clean clothes were still sitting on the hamper. The water undisturbed, Mother asked him why he didn't take his bath and he said very gently, I did.

I do remember Mother telling Daddy about this that night. Again, I do not ever remember Daddy addressing this with Grandpa, although I imagine he did. Our son Marc was born on 12/2/70. I believe Grandpa died while I was in the hospital and the thought of the circle of life was so apparent to me.

Sweet memories that have always lived in my heart. I loved having him in our 850 square foot home with 6 kids at the time and two other adults. Even if it was just for a summer, maybe in 1959 or 1960. I always loved the fact that our house was so small yet my parents made a place for him. Three bedrooms yet they had my brothers sleep on the living room floor and gave Grandpa his own room. I am sure it was because they did not want him to feel intrusive. They were so unbelievably special and kind parents and gave us such good examples of demonstrating love. If the reason Grandpa did put them in "The Home" [orphanage] was to drink and party and my Dad knew that, he would never have told us. He always put a positive spin on everything in life. It does not matter really. What is important is that he produced great children. However, I do wish I knew my heritage and roots more.

From Linda (French) Wysocki – Daughter of Livia (Ullian) French

I remember Aunt Mary pouring soap flakes into the water and running a bath for grandpa and telling him, "Get In." I am sure that she figured out that he wouldn't use the bar of soap, so if she put soap in the water, at least he would get some cleaning done.

Grandpa lived with us for about one year, I remember that I was in the 3rd grade, about 1958, and grandpa got my bed and I slept on the couch. It wasn't so bad. He stayed with us until my dad got angry because grandpa would come home after dinner time and my mom would save a plate of food for him. Grandpa would scrape the dinner food into the garbage.

I remember my mom and dad finding pint size bottles of Mogen David wine hid above the furnace duct work in the basement.

Grandpa would always wear “Romeo shoes,” a sort of slipper. We had a small black dog and grandpa would tap his foot under the kitchen table and the dog would go nuts and attack grandpa’s foot. Grandpa knew what the result would be, so I don’t know why he did it.

When grandpa was working at the tavern, periodically he would bring home a Hershey bar, my brother Don and I waited for them.

I don’t remember talking much with grandpa. I remember “basta, basta” when my mom was dishing out food to him. But I don’t ever remember playing with him or carrying on a conversation with him.

Uncle John and Aunt Maxine had a newly built home on Elgin Avenue [Joliet]. It was on a steep hill and the lots stair-stepped down the hill. I thought it was really cool because it had a bedroom with two doors – one door led to the hallway that went to the bedrooms, and the other door led to the kitchen.

Uncle Joe & Aunt Lorraine had a house on a corner in Preston Heights [*an area in Joliet*]. They added on a big family room at the rear of the house. At one point in time they had one bedroom that was a room where they kept a monkey in a cage! Later, they moved to a big white two-story house on Cass St. in Joliet.

Uncle Gino & Aunt Clara also lived in Preston Heights. It was built on a concrete slab and was filled to the brim with their children. Later, they added on a bigger kitchen onto the rear of the house. Whenever we would visit them, Uncle Gino ALWAYS had a Tupperware glass with iced tea in it and if it needed refilling, he would shake it and say, “Girl, I need some tea, and one of the “girls” would fill it, usually Aunt Clara.

I don’t remember much about Uncle Dave’s & Aunt Mary’s house on Anderson Ave. But I do remember when they were building their new house on Maple Rd. They all lived in the basement while they were finishing the upstairs. The basement was set up in rooms, of a sort.

Aunt Mary and my mom [Livia] would get together every year for one full day of cooking Christmas cookies. They would trade off every other year at whose house it would be. I always loved that day because it would mean a whole card table in my parent’s bedroom full of tins filled with cookies. They would make Bird’s Nest Cookies, Sugar Cookies and Butter Cookies among others. I especially loved the sugar cookies and butter cookies because Aunt Mary would decorate them so cute. She would cut up green and red maraschino cherries and arrange the pieces so that they looked like little holly leaves. And the sugar cookies were all iced with silver balls or cinnamon pieces for eyes or buttons. It was great!

I always told Aunt Mary that she could take garbage and do something artistic with it and one time she proved me right! She took a bottle cap, a pull tab from a pop can (the old version that actually pulled off), some orange narrow ric-rac, white & yellow felt. She painted the bottle cap and pull tab black, glued them together to make it look like a frying pan, glued in the ric-rac and felt, so that it looked like bacon and eggs in a pan, glue a magnet on it and magically, it turned into a refrigerator magnet! It was great.

My mom stayed in communication with some of the foster parents/people she lived with after ISSCS .We would visit Gert Crowley in a nursing home on Center St. in Joliet. Gert had had a stroke and could not talk, but we visited her many times. (My mom had rented a room from Gert on Nicholson St. for a year or so.) Gert was the widow of Lawrence “Butch” Crowley. My mom would love to tell the story of Butch being in the Capone gang and living in a mansion in the “Silk Stocking” neighborhood of Joliet. Seems that Butch had a disagreement with them and was gunned down at his home and Gert witnessed the shooting. We would also visit Gert Nealis on Pleasant St. in Joliet and one summer I spent a week staying with Gert.

From John A. Ullian Jr. – Son of John A. Ullian

Many of my memories and those of my mother are already sprinkled through the chapters. In addition to these, my siblings and I want to add that Grandpa said “Capisce?” a lot – to verify that he was being understood. And he would exhibit surprise by saying “Mama mia!” or “Oh no you!” My brother Jim remembers riding with my dad to the Club Rio on Maple Rd. and Briggs St. to pick up Grandpa when he couldn’t make it to Mary and Dave’s home on Maple Road, where he was living. Mary would call my dad to ask him to bring Grandpa home. Grandpa always brought a bottle of wine home with him. My sister Linda remembers that whenever she saw him he would give her a Hershey bar (always plain, not almond), or if he didn’t have one, then a quarter. We all remember that he was always glad to see his grandchildren – with a big smile, though not with much conversation – a kind man, but quiet.

WHAT I WISH I KNEW

From Linda Wysocki:

One of my questions is how and where did grandpa meet grandma. Did they know each other in Italy? Did their families know each other before their marriage?

What was life like for them after they were married? What was their daily life like? What did they think about life in America, was it what they expected? Even though they worked hard for many hours a day, what did they enjoy in their off time? What made them happy? What did they miss about their lives in Italy?

What did grandpa think while working in the coal mine? What was his job? Was he ever sorry that he came to the U.S.? Did he wonder how different life would have been, had he not lost his wife so early? Of course, we will never know the answers to these questions.

From David U. Larson:

Who paid for John's travel to France and then to the U.S. and then on to Centerville, Iowa? Was it a recruiter for the coal mines? Did he have to work for them for a certain number of years?

Why did the state send Mary & Livia to foster homes in Joliet? Why Joliet? Possibly more availability of homes.

From John A. Ullian Jr:

I wish I knew everything about everything, but lacking any possibility of that, I'd be delighted to know anything more about any of the following:

I wish I knew more about grandpa's work history. We know bits and pieces, but I'd also like to know how much of the time in the northern Chicago suburbs he (and probably the family) was living on-site as the live-in gardener for some well-to-do family. My father had vague recollections of living in such places before his mother died. And of course I wish we knew when and where he had what jobs during the Depression in addition to the few we know about – and what was his overall experience of those years, which he didn't talk about.

I wish I knew more about his relationship with the Ferraros, especially around the time of his wife Linda's death.

I wish I knew more about the connection (if any) between grandpa's ancestors and the "Swiss Catholic Ullians" whose immigration into the U.S. pre-dated our great-uncles and grandfather.

I wish I knew how grandpa managed to elude census-takers and canvassers for city directories.

I wish I knew more about the story of the Marcella Ave. property and the adjacent Ullian Subdivision – especially about the purchase (?) by John and Nina of 1604 Marcella, and the details of the development of the Ullian Subdivision – including what agreements Grandpa had with the Connollys.

I wish I knew the details of the hints of stories we have heard about grandpa's "missing years" including working with Gene Autry's horses, the "Eureka Bank" that my father remembered Grandpa sending checks from, the various stories about having his car stolen, working on the King Ranch, and more.

I wish I knew more about the history of the Venetian Republic and that area of Italy before it became Italy, and how long our ancestors had been there – and where they had come from previously.

And to get real specific, I wish I remembered the details of a saying of Grandpa's that I heard, and my father had told me Grandpa said often, when a hole was being dug to plant a tree: "You don't put a [missing amount here] in a [missing amount here] tree" – e.g., "You don't put a 2 dollar tree in a 10 cent hole" or whatever the values were. Grandpa insisted that things be done right (as he saw it) when he worked, and when "his boys" were helping him.