

NEW YORK

TENEMENTS

Vintage Photographs and Special Echoes



Edited by

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(2012)

CMG Archives

<http://campbellmgold.com>

(The following material has been compiled from various unconfirmed sources)

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1890



New York Tenement Room, c.1890

Like most flats in New York old-law tenements (so named because they predate "new" turn-of-the-century laws mandating better living conditions per apartment) it's dark, squalid, and unventilated.

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c.1900-1910



Unverified Photo of a New York Tenement Room, c.1900-1910

Some commentators have questioned whether this photo is genuine

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1900



Officials investigate a squalid New York Tenement Room, 1900

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c.1900



Tenement Apartment, East Side c.1900

An Italian immigrant family in the kitchen

This must be an old-law tenement; the apartments in these buildings weren't required to have ventilation in each room. The window facing the kitchen appears to look into a smaller room or closet.

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c1900-1910



New York Tenements, c1900-1910

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c1900-1910



New York Tenements, c1900-1910

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c.1902-1914



New York Tenement Kitchen, c.1902-1914

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c.1902-1914



New York Tenement Toilets, c.1902-1914

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c.1902-1914



New York Tenement Room, c.1902-1914

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1905



New York Tenement, Back Yard, 1905

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1905



New York Tenement Room, 1905

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1907



Jewish District, Lower East Side, 1907

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c.1910



New York Tenements, c.1910

1910



New York Tenement Room, 1910

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1911



New York Tenement Room, 1911

Family at work shelling Pecan nuts

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1912



Row of New York Tenements, 260 to 268 Elizabeth Street, 1912

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1912



New York Tenement Room, Nov 1912

A Jewish family working on garters in the kitchen

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1912



Rear view of tenement, 134 1/2 Thompson Street, New York City, 1912

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1912



Tenement Hallway, 1912

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1912



Tenement, Possibly 36 Laight Street, New York, 1912

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1912



Rear of a New York Tenement, 1912

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1912



Entrance to tenements, 53 to 59 Macdougall Street, New York, 1912

Coats and flowers were made here

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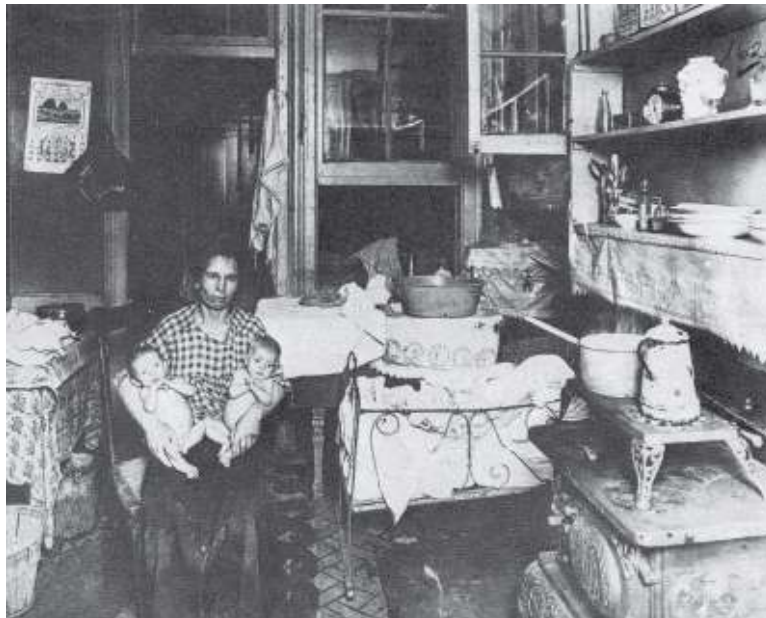
1912



Unknown Tenement Location, New York, 1912

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1916



New York Tenement Room, 1916

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c.1902-1914



New York Tenements, Orchard Street, c.1902-1914

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c.1902-1914



New York Tenements, c.1902-1914

Man and Two women in front of outhouses; one woman getting water

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c.1900-1937



New York Tenement, c.1900-1937

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c.1900-1937



New York Tenement "Playground", c.1900-1937

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1927



New York, East Side Tenement, 1927

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A Special Echo of 97 Orchard Street

Adolfo Baldizzi immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1923, and lived, with his wife Rosaria, and children Josephine and John, at 97 Orchard Street from 1928 to 1935.



97 Orchard Street, 1940

While Adolfo worked odd jobs and Rosaria found employment lining coats in a garment factory, the family faced struggled to survive the 1929 depression.

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Adolfo John Baldizzi (1896-1960)



Adolfo Baldizzi in Italian military WWI uniform - date unknown
b. 1896; d. 1960

Adolfo John Baldizzi was born in in Palermo, Sicily, in 1896. Unfortunately, Adolfo's father died before he was six; and his mother died sometime before he was married. Adolfo began learning his trade as a cabinetmaker before age five, and he became a very skilled craftsman, even creating decorative inlay work. Adolfo met his wife, Rosaria, when he bought eggs from Rosaria's mother.

Josephine remembered that her father could not find steady work for the years they lived on Orchard Street, and that he would go out in the mornings with his toolbox, walking up and down the street, asking if anyone needed odd jobs done. He made money as a handyman, and occasionally worked regularly, like when he made what Josephine describes as "home bars" for a firm on the Bowery. At least during 1938-1939, Adolfo had steady work through the *WPA.

(*WPA - The Works Progress Administration (renamed during 1939 as the Work Projects Administration; WPA) was the largest and most ambitious New Deal agency in the United States, employing millions of unskilled workers to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads, and operated large arts, drama, media, and literacy projects)

During the war, Adolfo worked in "home front" shipyards, doing, among other things, cabinetry work in ships' cabins. These were, perhaps, his "best" years. At some point, he also ran his own small shop doing custom work. Adolfo banked at Bowery Savings Bank; when he died, \$250 was in the account.

Josephine described her father as a very gentle man, whom she loved dearly. He seems to have spent a lot of time with the children, playing cards, games, and telling riddles; taking them for treats in the evening or with him to his favourite corner restaurant, or on walks around the neighbourhood and across the Williamsburg Bridge. Adolfo also spent a lot of time in the evenings and on weekends visiting friends in the building or in nearby neighbourhoods.

Josephine says her father always helped her with her math homework, figuring out the answers even though he might not have understood the "lesson" being taught. Adolfo could also read, at least to some extent. Book and newspaper reading, however, were not usual in the household in any language.

Both Adolfo and Rosaria, were Democrats, treasured their right to vote, strongly supported mayor LaGuardia and President Roosevelt, and as Josephine remembers, taught her not to be prejudiced against other groups of people. Adolfo and Rosaria made the interesting choice not to teach their children the Sicilian dialect, instead speaking to them in broken English. They tried to have them learn "regular" Italian by sending them to a neighbourhood Italian school that opened in the early 1930s. They may have been overjoyed at this opportunity, since they couldn't have taught the children themselves. But they were horrified to discover a few weeks later that their children were being taught to say "Viva Il Duce!" in homage to Italian dictator Mussolini. Josephine remembers her parents screaming and lamenting about the place, saying things about the Black Hand, etc. The children never went back. Josephine says her parents loved their new country and were horrified that Italy had become their country's enemy.

Adolfo never returned to Sicily, and he passed away in 1960 of heart disease.

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Rosaria Baldizzi (c.1906-1982)



Rosaria Baldizzi on the roof of a building, c.1925-1940
b. c.1906; d. 1982

Rosaria was born in Palermo to the Mutolo family, the youngest of four children. Josephine says the Mutolos were relatively well off, with a large family home and good jobs. Rosaria's two brothers worked for the police, and her sister was a dressmaker. Unfortunately her father was paralyzed and was confined to a chair.

As a young girl, Rosaria had some eye complications, and so had very little schooling. She knew how to write the letters of the alphabet, but could not read. As the youngest daughter, she was mainly left to herself, and without many household responsibilities. Josephine was shocked to learn years later that her mother had spent most of her youth having fun. Josephine said to her, "So why did you make me work so hard?" Her mother reportedly laughed.

Rosaria married Adolfo Baldizzi, a cabinetmaker, when she was 16 years old and he was 26. Josephine says that Adolfo met Signora Mutolo because he bought eggs from her. Adolfo had a good trade and was considered a fine match for Mutolo's youngest daughter. Adolfo and Rosaria married in Palermo in 1922 and left for the United States shortly thereafter. Adolfo left first, followed within the year by Rosaria. Both entered the country illegally: Adolfo perhaps by stowing away and jumping ship, and Rosaria with a U.S. passport of some sort. Rosaria apparently didn't bring enough money to meet the entrance requirements because, the story goes, Adolfo met her at the dock and tried to throw the \$25 to her over the rail. She didn't catch it and it fell into the water.

Once the couple were reunited they went to Canada and re-entered the U.S. "legally". The couple settled first on Elizabeth Street, a traditional first home for many Sicilians. Josephine believes they may have lived in several apartments on Elizabeth Street before moving to Orchard Street around 1928.

Josephine remembers her mother as a very passionate, emotional woman - when Rosaria learned her own mother had died, her screams drove Josephine to hide in the bathroom. Rosaria, who was dubbed "Sadie" by her garment factory co-workers, dressed nicely; "liked her china, silverware and linens"; kept the house spotlessly clean; cooked tasty and nutritious meals; washed and starched the family's clothing to the point where the clothes "almost stood up by themselves"; administered frequent enemas to Josephine in the bathroom; worked long hours in the garment factory until she was 66 years old, fearlessly travelled all over the city on subways and busses, and bargained ferociously with Lower East Side peddlers and vendors.

Rosaria kept in touch with her family in Palermo through packages and letters. She wrote her letters herself - spelling out the Sicilian words phonetically - but had to ask others to read the letters she received back. Josephine recalls that her mother would ask for these letters to be read and re-read endlessly.

Rosaria's first visit back to Sicily was in 1947; after that she made a few other trips. She returned from her first trip bearing Josephine's trousseau, kissing the American soil when she got off the plane. Rosaria's sister came to the U.S. in 1959, as did a number of other relatives in the years that followed. Josephine remembers her mother's descriptions of disappointment upon arriving in New York in the early 1920s - the lack of trees, the dirt, the small tenement apartments - but she says Rosaria became a great fan of New York and an American patriot as time went on.

Although we don't know much about Rosaria's work history, she may have taken in laundry and done other small jobs to make ends meet when the children were very young. According to Josephine, she started working in a garment district factory right before the family left Orchard Street in the mid 1930s, but stopped when an investigator came to the house, discovered she was employed, and warned her that she would lose home relief benefits if she continued to work. Not long after, she began working full time in a midtown garment factory, sewing linings into coats. Josephine remembers her being away for long hours, perhaps 7am to 6pm. The heaviest work came during the summer months, making coats for the upcoming winter season. Rosaria worked for the same employer for many years.

She finally stopped working in the early 1970s, when she was 66 years old. She was a member of ILGWU (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union) for at least some of those working years.

Rosaria passed away in 1982.

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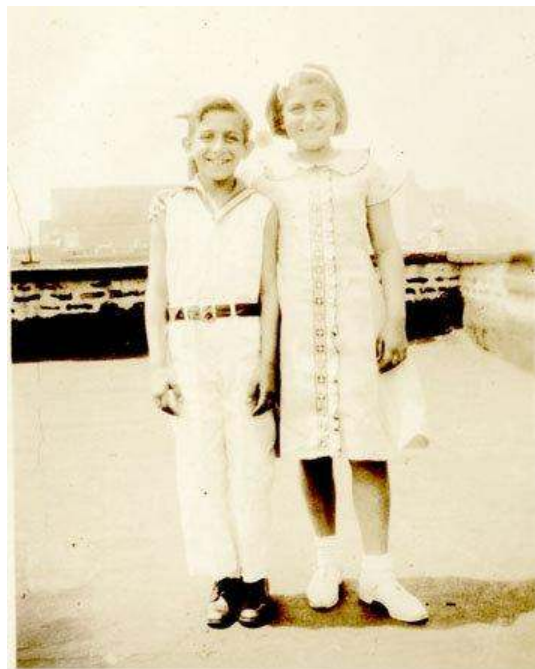
Josaphine and John Baldizzi



Josaphine and John Baldizzi,
on the roof of 97 Orchard Street, c. early 1930s



(L-R) Josephine Baldizzi, her brother John,
and their friend Rita Bonofiglio
on a building roof, c.1935



Josephine and John Baldizzi on the roof of 97 Orchard street c.1935.



Josaphine Baldizzi b.1926 (on left) c.9 yrs old and
John Baldizzi b. 1927 (on right) c.8 yrs old
lived at 97 Orchard Street
between 1928 and 1935

Photo taken of the roof of 97 Orchard Street, c.1935
(The baby being held by Josaphine is their neighbour, Vincent Bonofiglio)
Josaphine passed away in 1998 (72 yrs)
John passed away in 1970 (42 yrs)

Josephine Baldizzi (1926-1998)

Josephine was born on Elizabeth Street in 1926 and attended P.S. 42 located on the corner of Hester and Orchard Streets, then to Dewey Junior High School in Brooklyn and graduated from Brooklyn's Clara Barton High School. At the time of her death (1998), she was married and living in Brooklyn with her husband, George Esposito. In addition to her husband, she is survived by two children, Maria and Roger, and three grandchildren. Josephine raised her children and worked in offices. She believed she moved to 97 Orchard when she was two years old and left when she was nine.



Communion photo of Josephine Baldizzi,
seated, with Rita Bonofiglio, her Godmother and neighbour at
97 Orchard Street
c.1935 when Josephine was 9 yrs old

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Memories of Orchard Street

Her memories of Orchard Street remained strong over the years. When she and her husband used to walk by "97" on shopping excursions, she recalled repeatedly telling him how much she wished she could see the old apartment. She could hardly believe that The Tenement Museum existed, and that an apartment was organized around her family's story.

One of her goals was to inspire her father's family to communicate more with her about her father's early years and the history of that side of the family. Josephine remembered the years at Orchard Street as a time when the family had very few material possessions, but plenty of worries. She recalled never talking to her parents about her own problems because she didn't want to burden them.

Josephine had some bad memories of the tenement itself - waking up cold in the winter, taking cold water sponge baths and weekly cold baths in the sink, getting frequent enemas in the hallway bathroom. But she repeatedly explained that she was not really deprived: she had household pets (birds); flowers in the apartment; good food (although never enough meat); simple treats; close, loving relationships with her family; godparents; and at least one kind teacher.

As family fortunes improved slightly in the late 1930s, and there were also movies and other kinds of entertainment. By the 1940s and 1950s - during the wartime and post-war boom - times got much better. Josephine remembered lots of singing, dancing and partying in their house in Brooklyn. That is, until her father died in 1960, after which the household became more sombre.

Josephine remembered being a fearful girl. For years, she said, she would go to school sick with fear, unable to eat breakfast (which led to constant fights with her mother.) She described herself as never "being a child", but instead, acting like a "little old lady". She was worried about being a good little girl and copying her mother, and would hide her enjoyment of music and dance from her parents. When playing outside, she would mainly play around the stoop and once, she got a bit older, spent a lot of time doing household chores. Sometimes she disobeyed her parents when they were out at work, like playing "movie star" dress up with her mother's good things, or going to the refuse-strewn backyard against her mother's orders to play "beauty salon" with her brother.

She grew up into a girl who badly wanted to graduate from high school. Her mother thought this was a waste of time; it would be better if Josephine made a few dollars. Josephine's father supported her, however, and she did graduate from Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn. Her ambition had been to go into nursing, but she couldn't tolerate the blood and suffering, and so she instead did office work for the rest of her working years. Josephine had several close relationships with people who were not Italian; one was her "only girlfriend", a Jewish girl named Eleanor Ginsberg. The other was Ms. Hunt, a "mulatto" teacher at P.S. 42, who was very kind to Josephine and continued to send her Christmas cards up until Josephine's marriage.

According to Josephine, the main thing her mother taught her was how to clean. "When I was born she handed me a dust rag. This is how you clean." Rosaria herself didn't ever learn traditional skills like fine sewing, and so couldn't pass them down to Josephine. Rosaria was a very observant Catholic, and she and the children attended church three times per week: novena on Wednesdays; confession on Saturdays; and mass on Sundays. When Josephine spoke to a group of mainly Asian students about her experiences in the tenement, a boy stood up and told her that his family had a bathtub in their kitchen. Josephine said that she was shocked to learn that children still lived like that, and (from somewhere deep inside her) she told him, "Don't ever let anybody tell you they're better than you."

Josephine passed away from cancer on April 8, 1998.

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John Baldizzi (1927-1970)

John was born in 1927 on Elizabeth Street. The name John was his father's middle name. John never finished high school.



John Baldizzi with Ray Raspizzio, his godfather,
when John was 9 yrs old circa 1936

He served in the army during World War II and was stationed in Japan after the surrender.

In 1948 he married his first cousin from Sicily (also named Rosaria), and had one child, a boy. His son, who is still living in Brooklyn, was born with severe disabilities, and has had to spend most of his life in an institutional setting.

Most of John's working life was spent in a Brooklyn factory. He died of a heart attack in 1970 at the age of 42.

Josephine and John were very close. Every day after school when they lived on Orchard Street, Josephine collected John from his classroom and they walked home together, carefully crossing two streets on their way. They also played together on the stoop and in the back yard. John was always more adventurous than Josephine (he would frequently scavenge around the neighbourhood), but this was especially so after both kids joined "God's Providence House".

He competed in baseball and boxing on club teams, ran around the neighbourhood even more freely than before, and came home late for dinner. He was much less interested in school than Josephine.

Adolfo did not try to teach his son his woodworking skills. Josephine says that John never would have been patient enough. She describes him as always rushing around, and says maybe that's why he just bolted across Orchard Street on December 7, 1934, his seventh birthday, and was run over by a car. Luckily, only his leg was broken, and he was taken by ambulance to Gouverneur Hospital. Josephine remembers coming on the scene and finding her father bending over John and sobbing. In the 1930s, cars were still not common on the Lower East Side, but the dangerous mixture of street play and automobiles had become an increasingly severe public problem.

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The Return

In 1989 Josephine Baldizzi Esposito returned to her childhood home at 97 Orchard Street. As Josephine entered the apartment, a cabinet wedged in the corner of the kitchen caught her eye. The cabinet, which her father had built, reminded her of a long-forgotten Italian opera song. Slowly, a chain of memories unraveled and Josephine was transported back to her childhood.

As a little girl, 97 Orchard Street was Josephine Baldizzi's world. She rarely ventured beyond the stoop where she watched her favourite peddler load pots and pans into his cart singing "a nickel, a dime, rain or shine!" In the evenings, the Baldizzis would sit around the kitchen table to eat and talk. Sometimes, the conversation would drift to far away Sicily.

Josephine wasn't quite sure how her parents made the journey from Italy to America. According to family lore, Adolfo and Rosaria may have entered America as illegal immigrants. When they finally settled in America, the Baldizzis, like many Sicilians, made their first home on Elizabeth Street in Little Italy. It was here that Josephine was born in 1926, followed a year later by her brother, John.

Some time around 1928, the family moved to 97 Orchard Street. Describing her depression-era childhood on the Lower East Side, Josephine joked that she felt more like a "little old lady" than a young girl. She was sensitive to the anxiety that surrounded her, whether it was the fretful looks worn by the people in the bread lines or her father's struggles to find work.

Though he was trained as a fine woodworker in Italy, Adolfo was forced to patrol Orchard Street, toolbox in tow, in hopes of securing odd jobs. The family's finances improved when Rosaria found work lining coats in a garment factory. She later quit when the job threatened her family's Home Relief benefits.

Though Josephine spent most of her time at home, she was hardly an idle child. "When I was born," Josephine joked, "my mother handed me a dust rag," A zealous cleaner, Rosaria Baldizzi loved to iron and scrubbed her pots and pans with such zeal that she was known as "Shine 'Em Up Sadie".

On the weekends, Adolfo would gather the children around the kitchen table and entertain them with card games and riddles. Rosaria bustled about, cooking scrambled eggs with ketchup while listening to Italian soap operas and singers on the radio.

During the mid-1930s, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia embarked on a crusade to clean-up New York's slums and tenement buildings. Faced with costly renovations, many landlords, including the owner of

97 Orchard Street, evicted their tenants. The apartments at 97 Orchard Street were shuttered in 1935. The Baldizzis found a temporary home, again located on the Lower East Side. They eventually landed in Brooklyn.

Josephine married and gave birth to two children. Though she still lived in Brooklyn, Josephine often returned to the Lower East Side to shop on Orchard Street. As she strolled up her old block, Josephine never dreamed that she would re-enter the building she left as a girl, let alone gaze into her old home and see the cabinet her father made, sitting untouched in the corner of the kitchen.

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Endings or Perhaps New Beginnings



Josephine Baldizzi Esposito and her husband, children, and grandchildren, 1992;
Josephine passed away from cancer on April 8, 1998

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Adolfo and Rosaria Baldizzi were born in Palermo, Sicily in 1896 and 1906, respectively. Adolfo served in World War I. They married in 1922.

Fragments of their emigration story have been passed down through the family. As the story goes, they illegally immigrated to the United States shortly after they were married. Adolfo arrived in 1923, possibly having stowed away on a French ship; Rosaria arrived with doctored papers within a year.

They went to Canada together and re-entered the United States "legally". Their first home was on Elizabeth Street - the Sicilian Street - where Josephine was born in 1926, and her brother John eighteen months later in 1927.

The Baldizzi's may have lived in several Elizabeth Street apartments before moving to 97 Orchard in 1928 (Josephine is not entirely sure of this date). With this move, they crossed over the Bowery from Little Italy into the Jewish Lower East Side. A number of other Italians also lived at 97 Orchard during these years, including two families - the Bonofiglios and the Raspizzios - who served as godparents to Josephine and John.

In 1935, the landlord of 97 Orchard Street closed down the apartments rather than make legally mandated improvements.

The Baldizzis and some members of the Bonofiglio and Raspizzio families moved a few blocks west to another tenement on Eldridge Street. The Baldizzis lived on Eldridge until 1939, when they followed other members of the Bonofiglios to 40th Street and 8th Avenue in Brooklyn.

They spent the rest of their lives in this neighbourhood. John served in the Pacific Theatre during the war, and married a Sicilian cousin in 1948. Josephine also married in 1948, to George Esposito from the same neighbourhood. Josephine and George have two children. Josephine was the last of the Baldizzis - Adolpho died in 1960; John died in 1970, Rosaria in 1982; and finally, Josephine passed away in 1998.

But now and forever, the Baldizzis will live on in the memories and echoes of 97 Orchard Street...

End

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