

# My Accardo-Caronna Family

By Sandra Scalise Juneau  
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At their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary, which was Celebrated in New Orleans with family and friends on September 20, 1961 at the Blue Room of the Roosevelt Hotel, my maternal grandmother, Angelina Caronna Accardo remarked, "Ours was a Marriage made in Heaven!"

Both Angelina Caronna and Giuseppe Accardo had been born in *Poggioreale*; Angelina on July 26, 1891 and Giuseppe on June 24, 1888, and both had left Sicily as teenagers in the early twentieth century to settle in Louisiana.

Because Giuseppe's father, Calogero G. Accardo had died when he was just one month old, the infant was sent by his grieving mother, Antoinette Aloisia Accardo to live in *Poggioreale* with *Cugini*, Cousins of his mother's family. Despite this tragedy, Giuseppe grew into a healthy baby with rosy cheeks, clear blue eyes, with a head full of blond curls and was especially loved for his sunny disposition. After several years his mother remarried Vincenzo Oshello, who adopted Giuseppe Accardo, and the family left *Poggioreale* to settle in New Orleans where they, like so many *Siciliani*, established a grocery business and raised a growing family of four children.

For the Caronna family, it was decided by her parents, Antonio Caronna and Micaela Tridico Caronna, that Angelina, the oldest of their five daughters would accompany her father to establish a new home in Louisiana. By 1907 when Antonio and Angelina arrived, there were already many from the Province of *Trapani* who had settled in New Orleans, along with *Cugini* from *Poggioreale* who welcomed them with open arms!

Though sixteen-year-old Angelina missed Momma Micaela and her younger sisters, and yearned for the tranquility of *Poggioreale*, especially the aroma of *finicchia*, which covered her open fields in Springtime, she was grateful to be living with her *Cugini*, and especially loved the city's many beautiful churches where she could celebrate the traditions of her Catholic Faith.

It wasn't long before Antonio found a house on St. Philip Street for them to purchase, and very soon after, he started in business by buying and selling produce from the French Market, delivering to the small grocery stores owned by native *Siciliani* which dotted the many neighborhoods across town. After a time, Antonio decided to venture into a small store of his own, where he sold fresh meats, vegetables and the many dry goods that had quickly become necessities to the immigrants. He soon realized that his *compadre*, many of whom were in New Orleans still without their families, were hungry for the familiar foods of *Sicilia*. With hard work and the help of his daughter Angelina - who was already an accomplished cook of traditional *Trapanese* specialties, could easily calculate sums in her head, and had a natural gift for leadership, their business thrived. Antonio soon expanded the business to install a long marble counter where fresh oysters, delivered daily from Louisiana's abundant waters were embedded in ice to be shucked to order and served to their customers.

In just three years, Antonio was ready for his family to be reunited. By 1910, Micaela and their daughters Annie, Nuncia, Rosalie and Baby Marguarita left *Poggioreale* for the trip to *Palermo*, where they boarded the ship that would take them across the vast Atlantic to their new home in Louisiana. When they arrived in New Orleans, they heard the continuous tolling of church-bells, and wondered what was being celebrated. They soon found, to their dismay, the bells were tolling for the funerals of those who had succumbed to the dreaded Yellow Fever epidemic. Being quarantined aboard ship, and unable to learn of the fate of Antonio and Angelina, they spent the next week in dreaded fear that they would never see their beloved family again. Antonio and Angelina also shared the same fears, being uncertain if the ship and all passengers would be required to return to *Palermo*. After several more days of delay, the passengers were cleared through health inspections and Antonio was told he could meet his family on the docks for their reunion, where tears of joy were shared by all!

Since Angelina was by then nineteen years old, and with four younger daughters to consider, "For making a good match", her parents decided it was time to engage the services of a *Sensale*. The matchmaker lived in New Orleans, but was originally from the village of *Gibillina* in the Province of *Trapani*, not more than 20 kilometers to the east of the Caronna's ancestral home of *Poggioreale*. For a small fee, the *Sensale* would select from among the eligible young men of Sicilian heritage, a possibly candidate for the family seeking a husband for their daughter. Although they had not yet met his family, Antonio and Michaela had

inquired to learn that the young man being introduced to them was Giuseppe Accardo, the oldest son of his widowed mother, now remarried to Vincenzo Oshello, whose ancestral home was *Poggioreale*.

The contract was set, and on each Sunday afternoon for the following year, Giuseppe Accardo would visit in the Caronna home, and always accompanied by her parents, Angelina had little opportunity to converse with her betrothed. She noted though, that Giuseppe Accardo was always neatly dressed, and though he seemed shy, was always polite to her and her parents. The Wedding date was set for September 20<sup>th</sup> of 1911, *La Festa di Santa Theopistes di Roma*.



Angelina and Giuseppe Accardo's life in New Orleans followed the path of their fellow *Siciliani* who had preceded them. Very soon, with the help of her parents, the young couple established their own grocery business, and through hard work and faith in each other, their success seemed ordained. Using their God-given Gifts, Angelina took charge of ordering supplies, setting prices, paying vendors, and collecting from credit customers, while Giuseppe handled all the butchering, selecting fresh produce from the French Market, picking up and transporting purchased supplies, as well as stocking their vegetable bins, iced meat cases and shelves of canned goods.

The Accardo family grew to include nine children: *Calogero*, who they called Charles; *Antonio*, known as Tony; *Antoinette*, known as Lena; *Micaela*, who changed her name to Madlyn; *Giuseppe*, Joseph, Jr.; Niccolò, who they called Nickie; *Michele*, Baby Michael, who died in infancy; *Angelina*, who they called Angie; and their youngest who was born on October 12<sup>th</sup>, they called - Christopher Columbus John.

On the morning of their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary, a Mass was celebrated at their neighborhood Parish, St. Pius X Church, by Rev. Ignatius M. Roppolo, the youngest son of their *Cugini* from *Poggioreale*, Calogero Roppolo and Nuncia Stillone Roppolo. Sustained in this new life by traditions they brought from *Poggioreale* and with the strength of their Catholic Faith, by their hard work and tenacity, both Angelina and Giuseppe Accardo were acclaimed as leaders in their church and business community. Years after their passing, when interviewing Monsignor Henry Bezou for a feature story I was writing, having been a guest at their table on many occasions, he remarked, "When you remember your grandparents in prayer, don't pray for them, you pray to them!"

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Story written for Tina Anderson  
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