

1995

Eulogy: Vito Spinelli

Roger J. Miner '56

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/memorials_eulogies

Recommended Citation

Miner '56, Roger J., "Eulogy: Vito Spinelli" (1995). *Memorials and Eulogies*. 9.
http://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/memorials_eulogies/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Speeches and Writings at DigitalCommons@NYLS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Memorials and Eulogies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@NYLS.

Eulogy
December 1, 1995

Family, friends, fellow mourners:

You never had to turn on the lights when Vito Spinelli walked into a room, because he brought all the illumination you ever would need. "Hey, hey," he would yell, with a big smile on his face. He always was happy to see everybody, and everybody always was happy to see him. Uncle Vito was like Will Rogers -- he never met a person he didn't like. And everyone who ever met Vito liked him, because he was such a likeable guy. And that's how I'll always remember him -- good-natured, good-humored, big-hearted, ever willing to laugh, ever willing to have a friendly libation. I raised many a glass with Vito -- "A Salud," he would say -- "to health." "L'Chaim," I would say -- "to life." Yet, we both knew, as all of us know, that neither health nor life endures forever. And now we mourn his passing, and the light is a little dimmer.

Vito Joseph Spinelli was born on December 18, 1912 in Bari, Italy, the son of Alessandro and Dorotea Netti Spinelli. He came to this country at the age of three. He grew up with only one sibling, his younger sister Vera, who still remembers how he protected her and looked out for her. Vito lived in Thompsonville, Connecticut and eventually found employment at Mohawk Carpet in Windsor Locks. He was about 22 years old when he moved to Mount Vernon, and first worked for the Alexander Smith Carpet Shop in Yonkers. Vito later worked as a barber in several barber shops in Mount Vernon and had a part-time job with

Plaza Taxi there. He also worked for the Post Office and served in the U.S. Army. His last employment in Mount Vernon was at Wolta Electric.

But the defining moment in Uncle Vito's life came in 1936, only a few years after he arrived in Mount Vernon. It was then that the young and handsome Vito entered the Mariani family store to buy a pack of gum. It seems that he lived only a few blocks away and walked past the store frequently. Aunt Theresa had had her eye on him for sometime. She was behind the counter when he first came in. During the gum transaction, their eyes met, their fingers touched and the sparks flew. Theresa breathlessly reported the event to her sister Esther, proclaiming that she was in love with a "gorgeous man." On August 27, 1940, four years after they met (I guess that it wasn't the sort of "whirlwind courtship" that you see today), Vito and Theresa were married. And when I think about the story of how they met, I always wonder: "Where did Vito buy his gum before that?" I just don't think he went there only to buy gum.

The happy couple moved permanently to the Catskill farm in 1969. By then, four children had arrived on the scene: Ann, Dottie, Eugene and Mary, in that order. Vito found employment at Ulster Electric, where he was a very highly regarded employee. His employer persuaded him to stay on long past the age when most men retire. I think that he used Vito as a role model for the younger generation of workers in his business. Vito sometimes took Aunt Theresa with him when he made deliveries, because he

could not bear to be away from her for very long. His sunny personality and generous disposition made him a pleasure to work with, and he was greatly admired, loved and respected by the customers, the other employees and the bosses at Ulster Electric.

Vito worked hard throughout his lifetime, but his life was not centered on his work or on his garden or on any hobby. It was centered on his family. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather and a wonderful uncle to all his nieces and nephews. We loved him, and he loved us -- it was just as simple as that. In the last couple of days, I asked a number of people how they would describe Vito. "A good man," was the most common reply. And a good man he was -- kind, considerate, charitable, outgoing, religious and forgiving.

Uncle Vito was always the happiest when he was helping others, strangers as well as family members. He worked on charitable projects for the Elks; he delivered meals on wheels to those who could not come out; he sympathized with the less fortunate; and he prayed for everybody at this Church. When I was recovering from my heart surgery, he came over every day to walk with me and to encourage me. That's the kind of fellow he was. He always was more than a little proud of his own physical condition, his "physic" as he called it, even as he grew older. Not too long ago, he told me that he had pedalled 6,000 miles on his stationery bicycle. I told him he could have travelled to California and back for that many miles, and he said that he should have gone.

One thing that Vito enjoyed very much was the trip to the

Saratoga Race Track that the Catskill Elks sponsored in August of each year. Vito always recruited a number of family members and friends to accompany him on that occasion. According to reports, everybody had a good time on those trips, even if some contributed more than intended to the improvement of the breed. Family rumor has it that, even in his younger days, Uncle Vito enjoyed making an occasional wager.

But the sun and the moon for Vito was his beautiful and saintly wife, Aunt Theresa, his "honey," as he called her. Vito just never was the same after she passed away and not a day went by that he did not mention her and mourn her and miss her. He loved her intensely, devoutly and entirely, and she returned his love. Theresa and Vito set the example for all marriages in their devotion to each other. Theirs was a marriage truly made in heaven, and it lasted for 49 years, through good times and bad times, anchored in the solid rocks of mutual respect, sharing, generosity and, certainly, love.

Shakespeare could have been referring to Uncle Vito when he wrote:

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man."

We have lost the man, but we who knew him and loved him will have him with us always. Whenever we laugh, whenever we lend a hand to others in need, whenever we raise a glass, whenever we look at the sunny side of life, whenever we see the good in our fellowman, we will remember and celebrate Uncle Vito. And we are secure in the knowledge that Vito and Theresa are together again, united for all eternity.