

**The Falco Family History,  
1884-2010  
In Italy and the United States  
By  
Maria Josephine Falco, PhD**

**My grandparents, Joseph and Maria Josephine Falco, were both born in Italy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. With very few facts to go on, I was able to trace my grandfather, Joseph (Giuseppe) to the village of Castelluccio Valmaggiore near the city of Foggia in Puglia (Apulia). Because my father, John, was his oldest son, I concluded that Giuseppe's father must have been named Giovanni, according to the Italian tradition of naming first borns after their paternal grandparents. I myself was named after my father's mother, Maria Josephine. Other than my grandmother's maiden name (D'Elia) and the fact that she had been born in Calabria, I was unable to find out anything else about her, until recently. I searched through the Ellis Island records and discovered a Maria Giuseppa D'Elia, age 13, who entered the country in 1898, from the town of Rogiano-Grovino, Calabria. This is the closest I could come to finding someone of the same approximate age as my grandfather, with that name, who came from Calabria. I also know that the name and area are of Greek origin, but I have never visited the place, and therefore have no other documents concerning her to share.**

**I learned of the town of Castelluccio Valmaggiore because of a will Giuseppe and his brother Antonio had made out in 1954, willing me a plot of land with a house when I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study at the University of Florence after I graduated from College. I did not claim the land at that time because of a very negative reaction from the family of his maternal grandparents named Ranieri (mentioned in the will) because they had taken care of his parents after he and Antonio had emigrated to the United States.**

**From various sources I collected copies of his citizenship papers and the birth certificates of my parents, along with their wedding certificate and other documents, in a rather haphazard fashion. Then a few years ago I began systematically writing the history of my mother's family (Barbieri) because I had been able to keep in touch with all of her siblings plus my cousins over the years. However, my parents' divorce when I was nine years old had caused a deep rift with a major portion of the Falco family, and, having lost touch with**

most of them, it was not so easy a task to do the same with them. I remember two of my father's sisters, Millie and Lina, coming to my graduation from college, and my father's brother Tony (named after his uncle, Antonio, Giuseppe's brother) coming to my mother's funeral in 1964. I also remember as a child visiting Antonio, Giuseppe's brother, and his wife Ray (Rachel), and meeting Robert, their son, over Christmas. I was especially fascinated by the electric train they had laid out in their living room for the holidays.

I have some other rather haphazard memories of several members of the Falco family: for example, that Tony was a professional boxer whose career my father helped to manage. His professional manager was Chris Dundee, the brother of Angelo Dundee, the Boxing Impresario. Tony had been what was called a "Club Boxer"—and a lightweight. He had been outmatched by the much more experienced Benny Bass, and that fight had been his last. Chris Dundee had been my Godfather when I was baptized, and my mother's cousin, Clara, had served as my Godmother. Many years later, when Clara and her husband Henry Onorati had retired to Florida, I tried to contact Mr. Dundee to see if I could get them together, but he never returned my phone calls.

I remember, too, that another of my father's brothers, Danny, had received a sports scholarship in boxing to Temple University and had later served as an Administrator for the Philadelphia School District. He was also a musician and played the guitar with some talent. As for Gus, all I had known about him until just recently, is that he had served in the Navy during World War II, and had eventually decided to settle in California.

Only my grandfather, Joseph, had tried consistently to maintain a relationship with me over the years, and I had visited him and Josephine several times after they left their home in Philadelphia and had moved to Wildwood on the Jersey Shore. My mother and my grandmother (her mother) also had homes in Wildwood, and after their deaths, I too purchased a house at the shore, not too far from Wildwood, so that I was able to visit Joe and Josephine periodically throughout that period. Not too long ago I found the materials to substantiate those memories in a box in the attic which I had not opened in decades.

When I moved to New Orleans in 1979, I found a note from my grandfather stuck in the back of an old desk drawer with the name and address of his oldest daughter, Rose, who had married a New Orleanean while he was in the army during World War II and was stationed in Philadelphia. I looked up Rose and her husband Henry LeRoy in 1980, and until her death in 1984, was a frequent visitor to their home; I met their daughter Margaret there for the first time. It was while I was attending Rose's funeral that I met up with Millie who had come all the way from Philadelphia to attend as well. In 1980 it had been well over 40 years since I had seen Rose, and in 1984, it had been 30 years since I had seen Millie. Needless to say, whenever I visited the graves of my mother (deceased in 1964) and grandmother (deceased in 1960), after that meeting, I also visited Millie and her husband, Max Wolfson, in suburban Philadelphia, and met their daughters, June and Joan

as well. In all that time, I think I saw my father only once, briefly, when he crashed my high school graduation in 1950. He had re-married during World War II and spent most of his time with his second family. I have never met his second daughter Theresa, named after her mother, nor the son he supposedly fathered in Britain while stationed there (so said Max Wolfson on one of my visits). I also know he had received the purple heart for having been wounded at the battle of Nancy-Metz during the war.

After I retired in 1993 and returned to the New Orleans area, I spent some time using documents found on the Ellis Island website and on Ancestors.com to fill in the history of my mother's family. I also tried a time or two to do the same for the Falcos. In 2001 and again in 2003, I visited the town of Castelluccio Valmaggiore, near Foggia, and with the help of the clerk at the Municipio (City Hall), I was able to find the birth certificate of my grandfather, Giuseppe di Giovanni (Joseph, son of John). I asked the clerk if there were any Falcos left in the town (with inhabitants numbering about 1000) and she told me how to find the few that were still there: the brothers Giuseppe and Giovanni, and their sister Leonarda. Immediately we struck up an acquaintance and kept in touch. Finally, last summer (2009) I found that box in the attic and re-discovered the documents in them, including the will naming the Ranieri family as being that of my grandfather's grandmother, the ones I had not wanted to visit in 1954!!

In October of 2009, I returned to Castelluccio Valmaggiore and once again visited the same clerk at the Municipio, showed her a copy of the will (I did not want to give anyone the impression that I was going to claim the land) and asked her if there were any Ranieris left in the town. She replied, yes, two ladies, who only visited in the summer and spent most of their time with their children in Turin. One was still there and had not left yet, so, with the help of Leonarda, I immediately tracked her down. Imagine my amazement when I saw a woman with red hair, blue eyes and freckled skin! She said all the Ranieris had red hair! (I had off-blond hair at 11 months of age, but it had turned chestnut brown by age three.) The land, by the way, had been sold over 30 years ago—much to my relief!

Not long after I retired, I also tried to locate members of Antonio's (my grandfather's brother) family. I used "switchboard.com" to find "Robert Falco" and came up with two entries in the Philadelphia area. I contacted both of them and not long after, Robert, Jr. and his wife Dorice, came to visit me in New Orleans while she was on a business trip. I then visited Robert Sr and his wife Dolores while they were vacationing in Wildwood, not long after I sold my house at the shore (Town Bank, NJ) in 2001. We also got together after Robert Jr had moved to New Hampshire following the birth of their first child, Gabriella, and I was serving as a discussant on a panel of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia in 2006. We have stayed in touch ever since.

The documents and pictures I have posted in the power point file accompanying this history constitute the sum total of my efforts over the years to cover the Falcos on both

sides of the Atlantic. About a year ago I was contacted by a man in Vienna who said he was the son of Gus Falco, my father's brother. But he called himself Gustavo, not Cosimo (as listed on the 1930 Census). He had found me the same way I had located the census forms—through Ancestor.com. I told him what I knew, gave him the names and telephone numbers of June, Margaret and Robert. I discovered his “Wikipedia” entry describing him as a musician. He did say he wanted to establish himself as a musician/artist in Italy, but I was unable to confirm whether or not he had succeeded, until I contacted him again about this family history. He recently informed me that he was serving as an Adjunct Professor of Film and Photography at Webster University in Vienna and was still contemplating a move to Italy, but was unsure when that move might take place. He also told me that his father Gus/Cosimo was born in 1915, married Rita Rose Gambino in 1940, who gave birth to him in 1945. They were divorced in 1948; but Rita married again to Homer Horace Nelson in 1949, who adopted him and changed his last name to Nelson. Tav resumed his original last name when he became a professional artist and musician. The last known address he had of his father, Gus was at the US Naval Station in Tongue Point, Oregon—married and with two children. He, too had lost contact with the rest of that family.

I am still waiting for more information on Antonio, Giuseppe's brother, as well as Danny, Lena and Tony (my father's brother), and their families. A few gaps also remain about the Ranieris, which I hope to be able to fill shortly.

This history is being posted on my website: [www.falcosaerie.me](http://www.falcosaerie.me) temporarily. When I have more data, I will update it.

Maria J. Falco.

June, 2010