

A digital message in a bottle.

Joey Skee (August 14, 2008)



A test of the Internet and i-italy.org's power to connect.



A Los Angeles television researcher contacted me this week about information on Italian-American history. He is working on an American version of the BBC program "[Who Do You Think You Are? \[2\]](#)" that traces a celebrity's family tree. The first email I received read:

"We are looking into the family history of an Italian American family who came from Tuscany and settled in NYC around 1890. He became a sculptor, or molder. In 1920 census. They lived lower east side, also near Greenwich v. also in New Haven."

We spoke on the phone in what amounted to "Italian-American History 101," going over emigration patterns, North-South tensions, turn of the 20th century New York City, artisan craftsmen, etc. When I asked who the Italian-American celeb was, he offered to tell me on the condition I signed a non-disclosure agreement. I wasn't that interested.

His second email provided additional information on the celeb's immigrant ancestor:

"The artist (actually, perhaps artisan) is Mansueto Rigali, he arrived in 1890 from near Lucca and settled in Manhattan in 1890s, 1900s; he went New haven 1910 (metal worker) and in 1920 I find him in the census for Brookhaven, Suffolk county, NY as a sculptor with his own shop. Family lore says he made religious sculpture. I am interested to find out about his life, his trade, guilds, business and so on. I have other data, e.g. marriage, kids, death in Brooklyn in 1927, (he had 10 kids, 6 died). [. . .] They lived Pearl ST and also Madison for quite a while, I think that's lower east side."

He wasn't asking for specific information on Rigali but sources for photographs, historical accounts of the time, etc., which I provided to the best of my knowledge.

But this TV researcher's query got me thinking about the power of the Internet. A number of people have contacted me about my various posts to the i-italy blog with invaluable information and contacts I was unaware of previously. What would happen if I posted this little something about Mansueto Rigali? Who would respond? How long would it take?

Here's my digital message in a bottle. I'll keep you posted.

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Links

[1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/3861studio1218733808jpg>

[2] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/familyhistory>