

“Trust life, and it will teach you, in joy and sorrow, all you need to know.” ~James Baldwin (1924-1987) Novelist

WildWood by-the-sea: Nostalgia & Recipes

DiSilvestro/Di Sylvester Family

is an excerpt from the forthcoming book by **Anita Hirsch**



1920 Family photo: left to right: Ralph, Letitia (Mom), Lena, Philomina (Aunt Mamie), Molly, Raphael (Dad), Victor and in front Mary and Harry. This photo was taken at the Allison Studios on Oak and the Boardwalk



Brothers Ben and Vic (Bubbie) in back of house in 1947



Harry DiSilvestro Sr. and wife Mary and their children, left to right Harry, Ronnie, Marie, Barbara and Rocco.

The DiSilvestro family has been a part of Wildwood for five generations or almost 100 years. Letitia and Raphael DiSilvestro married in Italy in Larado in the Abbruzzi area near the Adriatic Sea. They decided to immigrate to Philadelphia in 1906 where they had cousins who sponsored them. Raphael worked as a masonry contractor. One of his jobs brought him to Holly Beach and when Raphael saw the ocean, he told Letitia that he found “the perfect place by the sea”.

So Letitia and Raphael came to Wildwood in 1909, where Raphael built a duplex at Hand and Arctic: 163-165 West Hand Avenue, and rented out one half. This house was in the Italian section of Wildwood whose boundaries were from Taylor to Hildreth and Park to New Jersey Avenues. It was a safe neighborhood where no one locked their doors and kitchens were always open to guests.

Life in the DeSilvestro household was full of fun and family. Raphael worked for the local Wilson Dairy, which was taken over in 1945 by Abbotts Dairy. Letitia and Raphael's seven children were born in Wildwood: Mamie, Molly, Ralph, Victor, Lena, Mary and Harry. Harry D, a son of Harry, Sr, recalls that there was a time that to make money in the summer, the kids were told to pack up their clothing and sleep in the attic which was divided into two large rooms. Their bedrooms were then rented for \$5 a week to women students from Penn State who worked in Wildwood in the summer.

MAMIE (Philomena) DiSilvestro married James D'Amico, who was in the landscaping business in Wildwood. **MOLLY** DiSilvestro married Pat Santone and they live in Upper Darby, PA. where Molly and her brother **RALPH** became partners in a hair salon. Ralph married Sis and they had three children: Ralph, Jr., Richard, and Roberta.

LENA married Bill Ciccarelli and they have two girls: Letricia and Janet. **MARY** married James Bailey and they have a daughter, Pat.

Mama DiSilvestro's Pizzelles

~ Modified by Coleen D. ~



- 6 eggs (room temperature)
- 1/2 pound butter, melted and brought to room temperature
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 cups unbleached flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 teaspoons anise seed

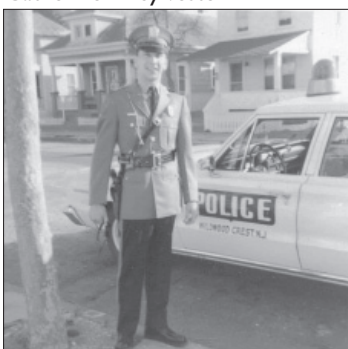
Add eggs and cooled, melted butter to sugar in a medium bowl. Add vanilla and anise seed to the sugar mixture. Combine the flour and baking powder in a small bowl. Add the flour mixture to the sugar mixture. Cover and refrigerate until you will be preparing the pizzelles. You can store the mixture up to 2 days. To make the pizzelles, place about one teaspoon of batter into each side of the pizzelle iron. Let cook for up to 65 seconds or until desired doneness. *Yield: 60 pizzelles*



At Hand and Arctic: left to right, rear Bubbie and Tootie, front, Lu, Ben and Catherine Di Sylvester



Ronnie, Barbara, Marie, Harry and Rocco DiSilvestro



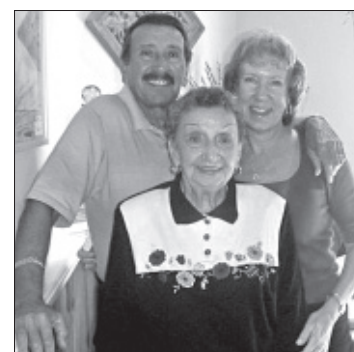
Harry D. as police sergeant in 1967



L-R: Charles Kuski, Mayor Vic Di Sylvester, Walt Cottman and rear left to right: John Hardin, Larry Snyder, Ed Herman (on Historical Museum wall)



Left Dominic Romeo & Larry Donahue, Wildwood Police 1963



Harry & Coleen DiSilvestro with mom Mary DiSilvestro at her 88th birthday lunch.



On the Boardwalk in 1945: Pat Santone and Vic Di Sylvester and in front Ralph, Richard, Bubbie, Lucille and Ben. Cousins: Ralph and Richard are sons of Ralph DiSilvestro and Bubbie, Lucille and Ben Di Sylvester are children of Vic

VICTOR Di Sylvester Sr, a shoemaker known as “Tootie”, married Catherine Versaggi, one of a twin from North Wildwood. They moved to the Arctic and Hand “homestead” and shared the duplex with Vic's brother Harry and his family. Catherine Versaggi also came from a family of seven children. The Versaggi Construction Company and Bennie's Café at 17th Street in North Wildwood (now Owen's Pub) were the family businesses.

One day, Victor Sr. got annoyed with the mail deliveries. Letters and bills always got intermingled, and mail had to be sorted between the houses, so Vic Sr said, “I am changing my name to Di Sylvester”, which is how two brothers have a different last name. Vic Jr. says the spelling change came about because Vic Sr. attended St. Ann's School and the nuns called him Di Sylvester instead of DiSilvestro. The name stuck and his children Lucille, Vic Jr. and Sebastian Bennie “Ben” are Di Sylvester's.

Lucille married Dr. Ed Flannagan and they have two children Vita and Valentino and three grandchildren. Ben married Maxcine and they live in Florida and California. Vic Jr. is married to Marcia and they have a daughter Lisa. Daughter Lisa married Bill Lova.

Vic Jr., known to the family as “Bubbie”, says that dinner at home meant pasta Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday nights: “That was a dinner that would stick to your ribs.” Tuesday and Thursday were spaghetti nights, and Sunday was macaroni night. Vic says he could “pick out his mom's gravy” at any family buffet. “There was always a pot of gravy and a pot of meat balls on the stove” when he came home from school. He'd dip into both pots with a wooden spoon and place some of each onto a slice of bread. “What a great after school snack, our comfort food!”

Vic Jr. and Sam Rosso bought the Sea Shell Motel in Wildwood at Rio Grande and Atlantic in 1975. It was expanded across the

street and then in 1976 Vic opened the house at the corner as Sea Shell Ice Cream. It was the first all ice cream business in the area.

In 1980, he was elected as Chairman of the Wildwood Charter Commission and led the campaign to change the form of government to a mayor/council type. In 1983, Vic ran for council and won and became the President of Council. In 1984, he was sworn in as the Mayor of Wildwood. Later he was appointed the Director of Tourism, Economic Development and Airport Operations for Cape May County, serving in that capacity for seven years.

He sold the Sea Shell Motel and Ice Cream in 1997 and lives in Florida in the winter, but still comes up to Wildwood in the summers to visit his many family and friends.

HARRY, married Mary Josephine Fanelle and followed in his father's footsteps and became a milkman, delivering house to house for the Wilson Dairy. He would say, “I have ten weeks of hurry and 42 weeks of worry.” Harry and Mary had five children: Harry Jr., Ron, Marie, Barbara, and Rocco.

Harry Jr. known as Harry D. retired after 25 years on the Wildwood Crest Police Force as a Sergeant. He and his wife Coleen spend part of the year in Florida. They are proud of his three children from his first marriage: Tony, Harry and Mary and their eight grandchildren. The children live in Virginia Beach where they work together in a business called Ynot Pizza, which is Tony's name spelled backwards.

Of the other four of Harry Sr's children: Ron retired and lives in Haddonfield, NJ and has three children and one granddaughter. Marie married Lawrence Donahue, a retired school principal, and they enjoy their eight grandchildren. Barbara is a hair stylist at Ambiance and married to Tony Flacco, the long time proprietor of Flacco's Produce and Grocery in Wildwood. Their daughter Barbara and her husband Michael Farrell, have one child, Brenna, and own Tony's Island Café and Grill. Rocco, married Joy and is now retired as a Deputy Chief on the Wildwood Police force. They have three children, Renee, Michele, Andrea and six grandchildren.

Vic Jr. has many fond memories of Wildwood and the “old homestead” and the neighborhood: he remembers buying Bazooka bubble gum at Joe Spuhler's Texaco gas station at Park Blvd and Rio Grande. At the property that is now Marvis Restaurant, there was a Studebaker/Pugeot car dealer. At the corner of Rio Grande and Pacific, a popular drug store and bowling alley have since been destroyed by a fire. His Dad had his first shoe repair shop in that block. His mom bought his Buster Brown shoes at Silens. At New Jersey and Hand, the northeast corner, was the premier Italian grocery store called Carnevale. “Not much has changed.” Says Vic. “It was a great town to grow up in”.

THANKS to the Wildwood Historical Museum, Harry and Coleen DiSilvestro, Vic Di Sylvester, Barbara Flacco and Marie Donahue for their help with this story.