



## Month of Memoir

B. Amore (March 13, 2008)



Celebrate International Women's Month with a powerhouse of writing by Italian American women authors!



Corresponding with the month of March being International Women's Month, New York is celebrating with several readings by Italian American women authors. On March 7th, a day long symposium, *The Ethnic Eye/I: Memoir and Italian American Cultures* was offered at Stony Brook University. Organized by Dr. Mary Jo Bona and Jennifer Kightlinger, it was generously supported by the National Italian American Foundation and the Centers for Italian Studies and European Languages.

The presenters provided a powerhouse of Italian American writing, and memoir in particular. Josephine Gattuso Hendin read from "Who Will Marry You Now," her provocative memoir which further explores the questions raised in her well-known coming of age novel, *The Right Thing to Do*. Both pieces raise the question of the uncertainties involved in choosing change and self-transformation, and the issue of how that can be mined as material for writing.

Louise De Salvo described the stages by which she "discovered" her Southern Italian identity through the writing of two memoirs, *Vertigo* and *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Despite the difficulty of trying to research family history in a culture whose members reluctantly speak of their oppression, she has masterfully deconstructed the silence surrounding many of her family's painful experiences during the diaspora.

Edvige Giunta, a first generation Italian American with roots in Sicily, drew from her rich experiences both in writing and teaching the memoir. De Salvo and Giunta co-edited *Milk of Almonds*, a collection of Italian American women's writings on food and culture. Giunta's most recent book, *Writing with an Accent* highlights the vibrant literary movement of Italian American writing by women. She gave an insightful presentation of her work in teaching memoirs to first, second, and third generation immigrant students.

Unsent letters, unfinished stories and other bits of material culture inspired Mary Cappello to write her new book *Awkward: a Detour* which ruminates on the ambiguous borders of identity as she lives the questions raised through her own life journeys. *Night Bloom: An Italian American Life* drew on the fragments of writing left by her cobbler grandfather and is a tour de force of collaged writing which gives voice and resonance to the secret lives that immigrants often lived beneath the surface of their daily labor.

My own contribution was a sharing of images and writing from my visual memoir, *Life-line, filo della vita*, which premiered as a multi-media exhibit at Ellis Island Immigration Museum and has recently been published as a bi-lingual volume, *An Italian American Odyssey*. Using memory as a thread in the weaving of past and present, I also drew from a work in progress which explores the themes of immigration, ethnic identity and generational change.

NOT TO BE MISSED ! ! !

Coming up is an exceptional reading by Jean Feraca, poet and Wisconsin Public Radio host and producer of "Here on Earth: Radio without Borders." She is presenting her just published memoir *I Hear Voices: A Memoir of Love, Death and the Radio* at the Strand Bookstore, 828 Broadway, New York City, 7PM on March 13th. Music will be provided by her son, local noise artist Dominick Fernow, a.k.a. Prurient. Feraca's memoir is an unforgettable journey tracing her own emergence from her sprawling Italian American family, through becoming a prize-winning poet and Wisconsin Public Radio's Distinguished Senior Broadcaster. Feraca's compassion and humor bring the characters as close as members of our own families. She is the author of three collections of poetry: *South from Rome:Il Mezzogiorno*, *Crossing the Great Divide* and *Rendered into Paradise*.



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