

JULY 2021

# HEALDSBURG

LIVING



*The Raffaini Family*

# The Raffaini Family



Corrin and Rick

cents a bag. Rick relays the stories he heard about how hard his great-grandfather worked, "It would take him several days to make charcoal. He would sleep next to the mound making sure that everything was good and that a fire didn't start."

Attilio's 1957 half-ton Chevy pick-up still sits in the old barn. Rick framed the original invoice from Bell Chevrolet Company, a forerunner to McConnell Chevrolet. The extras itemized on it include a heavy-duty clutch, 4-speed transmission, V-8 engine, speedometer fitting, lock equipment, and electric windshield wipers. His grandfather paid the tidy sum of \$2700.10. A year later, Attilio was featured in the paper when a pheasant shattered the truck's windshield. Or, perhaps, the truck shattered the pheasant. Either way, the pheasant did not die in vain. Having survived years of rationing during WWII, Attilio made a meal out of it.

When Attilio died, his oldest child, Elia, became the sole owner of the ranch. It remained in her family for decades.

### Back and Forth

Rick's been in and around Healdsburg his entire life. At the tender age of 4, he experienced two life-changing events. His Nonno died and his parents divorced.

At first, Rick and his two older brothers, Dean and Steve, moved to Willits to live with their mother. Rick loved living there because he could play his drums without disturbing neighbors. There weren't many. But, it was a little too remote for him, so every chance he'd get, he would head back to Nonna's house in Healdsburg.

"Nonna" was Eva Theresa Raffaini-Pieri. She was one of seven children of Attilio and Assunda Ballati.

As a young woman, Nonna worked at Italian Swiss Colony in Asti. She poured the first glass of wine for San Francisco's Mayor Rossi on the day Prohibition ended. It would be quite an honor for any local citizen to be invited to participate in this ceremony. It was especially so for an Italian-American, given that Rossi was the first mayor of 100% Italian descent of a major U.S. city.

Fiorino Raffaini was the first of Eva's three husbands, all of whom preceded her in death. Despite the heartbreak, she was funny, witty, and always the life of the party in her large, extended family. She loved gardening and cooking. Rick remembers Fiorino, "He was a well-known chef in San Francisco who, once he retired, used to make us Raviolis that were so big you could only eat three or four of them! He would always give my brothers and me a small glass of 7-Up with red wine mixed in it whenever we sat down to eat."

Like Eva, her siblings loved food, wine, and getting together with family and friends. You might recognize "Babe" and his wife, Lillian, as the long-time, former owners of a successful tavern business, Babe's Monte Carlo, at Pacific and Battery in the City. They were also Rick's God Parents.

Of his hardworking Nonna, Rick recalls, "She was an amazing woman. The rock of the family and the person I could always count on. She made these big, beautiful Italian meals even when it was just the two of us. Healdsburg's Memorial Day Parade used to go down First Street. We'd all sit on the porch, and they'd throw candy to us. We loved that!" The family still owns her house.

Rick's dad is Ray Raffaini. "Everybody loves my dad," says Rick. As a child, Ray attended the Sotoyome School. Ray recalls, "It was a two-room schoolhouse with first, second, and third grades in one room, and fourth through eighth grades in the other. When I was in fourth grade, there were two girls, and I was one of two boys in the class. I think there were 27 kids total at the school."



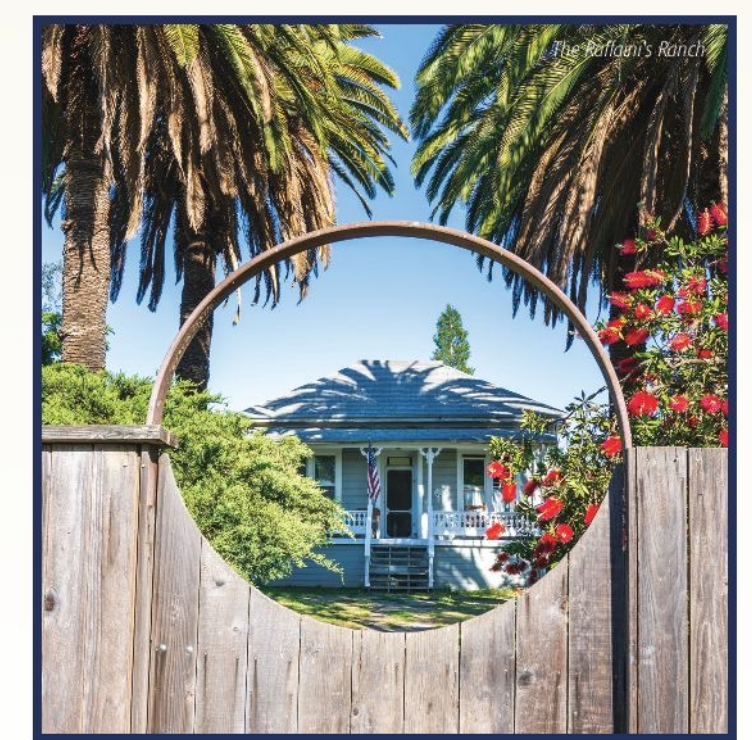
Eva Ballati, on behalf of the Italian-Swiss Colony, offers Mayor Rossi (left) a glass of wine from the first legal bottle, just after prohibition ended, in ceremonies at the Civic Center. On right, Edmund A. Rossi.

Eva Ballati pours wine for Mayor Rossi of San Francisco

After leaving the ranch, Ray moved to Santa Rosa and worked at Safeway both in Healdsburg and Santa Rosa for 22 years. Rick says, "He saved every penny he could to buy property. We had a skate shop in Santa Rosa across the street from Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) above Perry's Deli. I was eleven and renting roller skates to people. That's when I learned the service industry."

Ray is now a retired ex-pat living in Thailand. In 2005, he and Rick re-purchased the family's ranch.

A testament to the family's great Italian hospitality, Ray's brother, Dan Pieri, owns Matteucci's, which Marin Magazine called "The only true bar in San Anselmo." Pieri and staffers at Matteucci's call themselves "Preservers of history." Several photos of old celebrities in their prime adorn the walls, and the





Easily the most gregarious Raffaini, Rick loves good food and wine, friends, and sports, especially baseball. But ask him about his family, and you'll have to dodge the buttons bursting off his shirt. He'll gladly enumerate their many accomplishments.

Corrin and Rick host many of their family and friends at the ranch. There's an outdoor area for movie watching, a vegetable garden, fruit trees, a small vineyard, the old barn and a fruit stand. Most important, they are the very proud parents of their adult children, Jake and Bella.



Jake and Bella  
Photo provided by the family

Bella and Jake are both in college. Bella is a writer and visual artist who was away at Humboldt State at the time of

our interview. Though she grew up in Healdsburg, she attended SunRidge School in Sebastopol. It's a public school that follows the principles of Waldorf Education. She attended ArtQuest High School in Santa Rosa. Admission to ArtQuest is competitive, requiring student applicants to submit a portfolio of their work. Corrin proudly shares several of Bella's sculptures. Rick hands me an article she wrote in high school that was one of only a few selected for publication in the school newspaper.

Jake attends Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) and plans to pursue a career in psychology. He says with a big smile, "I really like therapy and helping people. The brain is so complex. It just amazes me." He was born deaf and has 2 Cochlear implants. Corrin says, "He doesn't sleep with them in, so in the mornings, he'll read lips. He's an amazing lip reader and can speak sign language." He's also an amazing athlete. Jake played baseball and ran track at Healdsburg High School, where he made the All-Star team every year. Rick gushes, "I loved watching his games. I miss those games. I coached him until he was a freshman in high school!"

Built in 1872, the Raffaini's home is steeped in their family's history and Healdsburg's.

Bella and Jake are the fifth generations of the family to live in it. As fate or coincidence would have it, Jake also shares the same birthday as his great-great-grandfather, Attilio Ballati.

**Attilio Ballati**

Attilio Ballati was born in Italy on March 14, 1886, and arrived at Ellis Island in 1906. He eventually made his way to the Italian Swiss Colony in Asti, married, and settled his family in Cloverdale. Sadly, his wife, Assunta, died at a young age. Shortly after she died, Attilio purchased the ranch on Eastside

Road across the street from the Sotoyome School and busied himself running it and raising his family.

The Canary Island Date Palm trees in the front yard were among those that initially lined the streets of San Francisco during the Panama-Pacific International Exposition during the 1915 World's Fair, which celebrated the completion of the Panama Canal. It was also an opportunity for San Francisco to demonstrate the progress made in its recovery from the 1906 earthquake. Once the fair ended, fair organizers relocated the trees to parks and homes throughout the Bay Area, including this one. At 106, the stout palms have lived twice their average lifespan and outlived the owners who had them transported there.

Attilio bought the 14-acre ranch on Eastside Road in 1944 during WWII when meat, milk, cheese, eggs, and coffee were among the food items "on the ration." The government called on citizens to plant "Victory Gardens" to provide their own fruits and vegetables. Farm families in Healdsburg, including Attilio, answered the call. In addition to French Colombard and Golden Chasselas grapes planted on the 4-acre vineyard, Gravenstein apples, pears, peaches, and the ever-present plums were grown elsewhere on the property.

Following the war, Attilio sold the grapes to Italian Swiss Colony and the other items at a nearby fruit stand on Old Redwood Highway. Attilio also made and sold charcoal for five

Assunta Ballati and her girls, Annie and Eva  
Healdsburg Museum



The Fruit Stand

Blues Brothers Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi, are immortalized on the roof.

Rick works as a wine broker at Grove Street Brokers (GSB) in Healdsburg. He's been there since 1996. He and his business partner, David Rosen, purchased GSB in March of last year. Their team of wine experts buys a wide variety of wines, primarily from boutique wineries. Serving as personal wine consultants, they curate wine purchases for their clientele.

**Back at the Ranch**

The Raffaini Family is warm, welcoming, and always advocating for their friends and family. They've opened their ranch to others whom they refer to as family rather than tenants. In some cases, these families have also lived on the property for multiple generations – a fitting legacy of Nonna's generous spirit.

Rick and Eva at her 80th Birthday Party



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