

OUR 1ST ITALIAN AMERICAN FIRST LADY

By JOESANO



Dr. Jill Jacobs Biden is America's inaugural First Lady of Italian descent. In 1900, Gaetano and Concetta Giacoppo and their toddler son, Domenico, emigrated from the village of Gesso in Messina in northeast Sicily to America.

Her grandfather, Papa Domenico Jacobs (the misspelled Ellis Island registry name Giacoppa was changed to Jacobs), settled his family in the New Jersey suburbs of Philadelphia. Jill Biden's dad, Daniel, after his WW II service and GI Bill education stayed in the Philadelphia area to be close to his parents, to raise his family and start a successful career in banking.



Meanwhile back in Sicily, the sleepy, quiet village of Gesso (shown here) is now awaiting a re-birth of interest following the election and the post-COVID-19 world. Gesso risks being blown away from its perch of popularity by Castanea. Other researchers have found different documents claiming that her great grandfather, Giacoppo, who migrated to the States was a native of Castanea delle Furie and happened to marry a woman from Gesso. Well, welcome to the often-confusing world of Italian ancestry. So far, as opposed to Gesso, no distant relative of Dr. Jill Biden has stepped forward in Castanea delle Furie. While her family roots in one or more Sicilian villages may be fodder for those enthralled by such discussions, she remains steadfast in her pride for her Italian-American heritage.

Dr. Biden recalls in a recent interview, "...Every weekend of my childhood, my parents would drive my four younger sisters and me back to New Jersey to see our grandparents. My grandmother cooked traditional Italian dishes for Sunday dinner. We would go to my grandparents' house every Sunday because her cooking was the best. The red sauce and the meatballs and the pasta...I have beautiful memories of cooking with my grandmother, mom, and four sisters. It was at their house that I made homemade sauce for the first time...We loved the Annual Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Italian Festival. The rides, games, fireworks, and the grand procession of saints through the streets...it was a festival where many Italian grandparents would bond with their grandkids..."

Her family values have made her a proven believer in education and hard work. She has received a BA and PhD from the University of Delaware and two additional master's degrees from Villanova University. Since her marriage to President Biden in 1977, she has worked continuously in various secondary and college-level positions. Recently taking a brief respite from her duties at Northern Virginia Community College during the presidential campaign, she intends on returning to teaching while balancing the responsibilities of First Lady.

Her work ethic and her affinity to her Italian heritage merges nicely with all those throughout our nation who strive to weave their ancestral traditions, history, and roots into the fabric of their daily lives.

Congratulazioni e che Dio benedica l'America.
(Congratulations and God bless America.)