

# Story of My Parents

by Esther (Terry) Colchamiro

Elias, the 10th and youngest boy of Yesusla and Rachel Colchamiro was born in Yanina, Greece in 1886. He immigrated to the United States in the early 1900's and started a factory where he manufactured cotton goods like pajamas, night gowns and house dresses. One of the girls working in his factory caught his eye. Her name was Speranza Matza also from Janina Greece.

In 1910 they were married and started work on a beautiful family, 3 boys and 5 girls. A devoted mother, Speranza, better known as "Nancy" was a very bright intelligent woman, who feared for an education.

So when she was 40+ she decided to go to school to learn how to read and write English. Elias used to ridicule her . . . . but she was determined. She did learn to read and write very well. She started to read about politics and began to resent her position as "serving her master." My father used to play pinochle with his friends and my mother stayed in the kitchen serving fruit,

coffee, etc. My father would yell . . . . "Spiranza, café" . . . . and my mother would come hurrying from the kitchen with the Turkish coffee and Greek delicacies.

One day, my father called "Spiranza, Café" . . . . he called again and again . . . . but Spiranza had flown the coop. She went to the movies. From then on there was war . . . . but mother won out.

When I saw what was going on . . . . I vowed never to marry a Greek . . . . My brothers were very demanding (like my father) but their wives straightened them out pretty early in their marriages.

We had a wonderful childhood since my father always made a rather good living. My parents first lived in Harlem, which was very nice in the early 1900s. After their 7th child they moved near the beach in Brighton, Brooklyn. We had a houseful of happy outgoing kids. We could bring our friends home at all times. In the summer my cousins would come to enjoy the beach.

Especially the Kaplen family, for at this time they lived in the Bronx. I think we were very lucky since we still laugh about the

fun we had as kids. We all love each other very much and we are still very close.

During WWII we were very unaware of what was going on in Greece and Germany. It was later that we found out that my mother's family who lived in Janina (Matza) were wiped out, except for two of my cousins (brothers) who lived through it. Most of them were transported to Germany concentration camps from Greece and killed. One cousin (my mother's side) Sam Matza, came back to Athens and married again. (His first wife and two sons were killed in the camps.) He now has two sons. One a doctor in Athens and another a business man. The other brother (single at the time) went to Israel. He said he wouldn't trust living anywhere in the world any more except in his own country Israel. He is married and has two children in Israel.

My father Elias, always said that he loved this country, the United States of America. Speranza, my mother, also felt this was GOD's country. When they were married for 40 years and we were all quite grown we wanted to send them to Greece as an anniversary present. Neither wanted to go. I remember my

mother saying she never wanted to see that country again. She remembered the pogroms by the Turks. They were very poor and she had only bad - sad memories of Janina.

Our children are friendly . . . . although they are spreading out all over the U.S. Some live in Florida, . . . . Chicago . . . . NY, . . . and California. I think this is true of all the "Colchamiro" families.

*Transcribed from the original letter by Marty Colchamiro*