

LST 6/9/94

Native of Rome remembers day it was liberated

WILLIAMSTON — For Assunta Williams of Williamston, The Day came two days before D-Day.

Born in Rome, Italy, Williams was 16 when American troops liberated the city on June 4, 1944.



Williams

"It was a wonderful day of rejoicing for us after all those horrible years of war," Williams wrote in a letter to me. "The memories are still vivid

in my mind of the jubilation of the entire population of Rome.

"Nothing is written about it in the papers and nothing is ever mentioned about it on television. I realize that this happened only two days prior to D-Day, therefore it was overshadowed by that bigger and more newsworthy event, but for me and millions of others, the liberation of Rome was a great cause of celebration."

Talk about a tough adolescence. Williams was 12 when World War II started and 17 when the shooting stopped. Her father, Enrico Parpagnoli, died at age 40 during a typhus epidemic caused by contaminated water in 1943.

"They were horrible years, full of fear and tragedy," she wrote. "After my father died, my mother and I had to scrounge for food and we traded his clothes for food in a nearby village where we had some distant relatives."

Williams' mother had to hide the food under her clothing and pretend she was pregnant in order to get it past German guards and back into Rome.

JUNE 6 1944



L to R SAM LUCIDO ANITA BEN

Liberation

"Finally on June 4, 1944, the 3rd Division of the 5th Army liberated Rome. We lived near the Appian Way and we ran out to greet our liberators who were arriving from the south."

As a matter of fact, June 6 also was a pretty big day for Williams. It was the day she met the American GI she would eventually marry. Here's how it happened:

"On D-Day, my aunt Anita and I were in downtown Rome, returning on foot from a job in a convent of nuns, where we cooked soup daily for Rome's hungry. We happened to pick up a newspaper that told of the landing in Normandy. The press had just started functioning and telling the truth after all those years of suppression and lies."

The two were approached by two American GIs, one of whom spoke Italian. His name was Sam Lucido and he was from Detroit. Williams read him the story about the Normandy landing. It was the beginning of a romance. Lucido returned to Rome in 1946 and the two were married. They returned to the United States. Sam died in 1958.

Williams would love to hear from anybody in the Lansing area who participated in the liberation of Rome. She can be reached at 655-3481.

New friends

Last month, during the D-Day anniversary celebration, I relayed the experiences of Assunta Williams of Williamston, who was a resident of Rome, Italy, on June 4, 1944, when American troops either liberated or captured the city, depending on your perspective.



Williams

As Williams saw it, it was a day of jubilation. She wondered if there were any Lansing-area residents who participated in the operation.

Williams wrote last week to say that she had, indeed, made a couple of connections as a result of the column.

She heard from Harry Kloeckner of Lansing, a member of the 59th Armored Division — the very first division to enter Rome — at 4 p.m. on June 4, 1944. Williams and her husband recently had lunch with Kloeckner and his wife.

Williams also heard from Robert Greer of Lansing, who was also in Rome, with the 88th Division. She hopes to meet him in the near future.

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175. His column runs daily.