



## Robert Iulo

<https://robertiulo.naiwe.com/>

### A Photo of Some Italian Women

As I moved an old family album from one shelf to another, a photo slipped out. I was familiar with it and remembered when it was taken on Mott near Prince Street. That was the heart of Little Italy in the 1960s. There they were—the ladies of my old neighbourhood. They'd be together every day, in front of the building where they lived or at of Sally Yap's luncheonette. They were always well-dressed and looked busy, but they never seemed to actually do anything.

The petite one leaning on my Uncle Jimmy's car is Rosalie. She married JoJo Poof, a lug of a soldier and built like an ape. Her hand is in her jacket pocket. She's afraid the outline of her Beretta might show. She always carried it, knowing that something could happen to her husband at any time. Rosalie wanted to be able to protect him. She often said, "If anyone is going to kill my JoJo, it's going to be me."

The short one standing next to Rosalie—that's her older sister, Marietta. She was a shrew. Marietta never married and lived with her sister and Poof. I don't know how he put up with her.

Next is Camille. She and Rosalie were friends since before kindergarten. Camille was her maid of honour, even though Rosalie's future mother-in-law wanted her daughter to play that role. I heard some guys say that Camille might have more than just feelings of friendship for Rosalie. None of them said it too loudly.

The tall one with the red hair, she was my favourite. Our families were close, so I knew her real name. She was her grandmother Arcangela's namesake. But everyone except her grandmother called her Angel. Although known in the neighbourhood as being "very dignified," Angel knew that when I was younger, I had a little boy crush on her. She always acted flirty with me, and whenever she saw me, it was, "Hey, Sweetie." This photo was taken on her father's block. As a made man in charge, it was Augie Hat's block as surely as the Rockefeller Estate belonged to the

Rockefeller's. It was one away from my Uncle's Charlie's block. They were associates, and as I said, our families were close.

You can just about see that someone's standing behind Angel, concealed from the camera; that's Helen, Angel's younger sister. She was beautiful. Everybody said so. When you spoke with her, you couldn't concentrate on what she said, her beauty was so distracting. But what she said was never too important anyway. Helen wasn't very bright and got through school using her cuteness and charm to beguile the nuns. You hardly ever saw her alone. Helen was either with Angel or someplace she'd be safe where everyone knew she was Augie Hat's daughter.

And that fat guy—he's talking to Helen behind her big sister's back. He might have been taking a chance doing that. But maybe it's all right. He was sure to know her father would make him disappear if he ever stepped out of line with Helen.

The last one, the one with the cigarette, is Teddy. She's a waitress in the luncheonette and one of the ladies too. But she couldn't always hang out with them because she had a job. Sometimes, when there weren't too many customers, Teddy would help me with my homework—"Don't pay attention to those nuns. If you've got a problem, come to me."

She was so smart that people wondered why she was a waitress and not something that paid more. I knew that she worked at the luncheonette to make sure some of her cousin Augie's pick-ups and deliveries went smoothly. And for that, Teddy was paid generously.

The women of my childhood—I was happy to see them together again, even if it was only in a picture. Not all great beauties, they each had a striking elegance. They were tough and still remarkably feminine. This was what the younger girls on the block wanted to grow up to be. And what most of the guys would end up marrying. I knew them all and what they were. But to anyone else who saw this picture, it would just be a photo of some Italian women.