

## From dust shall he return?

By Artie Maglionico

Here's a story that I wrote for the Weekly News back in February of 2002. It's a true story about a Lodi Man whose ashes were lost and were, after some nifty detective work by his family, finally recovered.

Lodi's Rose Vilardo was born on January 1, 1914 {88 years ago as of this writing} She arrived in Lodi in the spring of 1933 from Torino Casella, Italy in the province of Cosenza. Rose and her soul mate Joseph spent the last 69 years of their lives in marital splendor. I called it The Case of the Missing Ashes.

Rose embraced her husband for the last time on December 15, 2001. It was on that day that Joseph succumbed to advanced Parkinson's disease. Keeping true to his wishes Rose had her husband's body cremated. "We let an out-of-town funeral parlor handle the process." Said Rose "It was a big mistake." Assured that her husband's ashes were headed to the final resting place at Cedar Lawn Cemetery in Paterson NJ the broken hearted bride went home to grieve. Days later, after paying the cemetery a visit Rose discovered that the final resting place didn't exist and as far as the cemetery director was concerned neither did Joseph. In fact the befuddled director never heard of Joseph Vilardo and had not a clue as to the whereabouts of his ashes.

The search began! "My grandson took me to three cemeteries." Said Rose. "They had no record of my husband's name." Her next visit was to the place where the mystery of the lost ashes originated, the funeral parlor. "They told me that the cemetery had no place to store Joseph's ashes. Recalled Rose. "It turned out that they gave them to my daughter whom I hadn't seen since 1990."

The searches for Joseph's ashes lead Rose and her grandson 80 miles south to Ocean Park Cemetery in Toms River NJ. "At first they refused to release my husband's remains to me." Said Rose. "But with the help of the local Sheriff I was able to embrace my Joseph one more." Today thanks to the brilliant detective work of Rose and her grandson, Joseph is back in his Lodi home where he belongs. Well at least his ashes are. "I feel that I have company at night." Said Rose. "I always say goodnight to Joseph before going to bed." According to Rose Vilardo its not saying goodnight to her husband that unsettles her, it's getting a reply that makes her turn the lights back on. "Whenever I hear a noise during the night I tell Joe to be quiet." Said Rose with a sheepish grin.

Rose admits that she still grieves over the loss of her beloved husband yet realizes that life must continue to go on. "Fortunately for me" she said "I have my husband back home where he belongs."