

AS YOU WERE

THE GALLEY, CIRCA 1950



75 YEARS

AT THE GALLEY

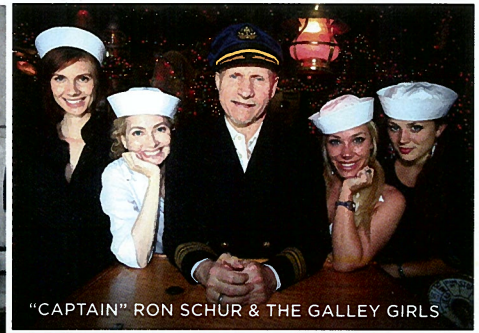
WRITTEN BY: BRETT PADEFORD



THE GALLO FAMILY OUTSIDE "THE STORE" IN 1934



RALPH STEPHAN & SOME DINNER GUESTS



"CAPTAIN" RON SCHUR & THE GALLEY GIRLS



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRETT PADELFORD

The oldest restaurant in Santa Monica is turning 75 this year. Most people know it as "The Galley," the kitschy place with the mermaid in a dinghy nailed to the front. For my Nana, it was always just "The Store."

Her Papà Gallo, my great grandfather, opened a restaurant there on Main Street in 1934 after his old place down the street nearly shook itself apart in the Long Beach earthquake the year before. Gallo Buffet offered his famous spaghetti with two meatballs, a bar with Anchor Steam beer on tap, and a piano where my Nana would pound out tunes for patrons.

Being first generation Italian immigrants (brought to America by Teddy Roosevelt himself, my Nana insisted), running The Store was, of course, a family affair. My Nana helped out by slinging beer and my great-grandmother cooked with the tomatoes she grew behind the restaurant.

Hollywood stars taking in Ocean Park's fresh air stopped by for the pasta. Actor and conservationist Leo Carrillo was a regular at The Store long before the Malibu beach bore his name. The dashing Tyrone Power would also stop by and steal my Nana's heart every time.

The place thrived through World War II with a steady patronage of thirsty GI's, including my grandfather, but Papà Gallo was murdered two months before V-J Day. There was now a vacancy at 2442 Main Street.

At around the same time, Ralph Stephan needed to find a place to move The Galley (which he had also founded in 1934) off the Santa Monica Pier. My Nana's tragedy provided an opportunity and, in 1946, my great-grandmother offered the space to Ralph. The Store now had pin-up girls on the walls and his trademark steamed clams on the menu.

Celebrities still dropped by. Charles Laughton of *The Mutiny on the Bounty* fame was a regular and legend has it that he brought in the massive wooden wheel from the movie that now hangs from the ceiling. Another night, Errol Flynn put a bullet hole in the ceiling when showing off his gun to patrons. A couple years later, Joe DiMaggio stormed out of The Galley after arguing with Marilyn Monroe at the bar.

Ralph ran the place for four decades. One of his patrons in his later years was Ron Schur, who'd regularly stop by with friends just to savor the Galley's famous salad dressing. He begged Millie, the

Galley's waitress of 30 years, for the recipe one night but she retorted, "If you want to know so badly, why don't you buy the place!" In 1989, Ron did just that and quickly got promoted to "Captain" by one of the regulars. He extensively renovated the interior while faithfully keeping the spirit of the place intact, so much so that Ralph's old customers would walk in and thank him for not changing a thing.

It could still be 1946 in the Galley. World War II propaganda posters decorate the walls and there are no televisions at the bar. The Hollywood elite still stop by for the stiff drinks and surf 'n turf but Captain Ron leaves them alone to enjoy the dark anonymity of the booths. He's proud to say that the restaurant is such a second home to patrons that when they don't want to go out to dinner they come to The Galley.

Three years ago, my Nana passed on and my family stopped by The Galley after the funeral. My mom gave Ron a picture of my Nana with her parents. It's posted on the doorframe as you walk into The Galley not far from pictures of Ralph. Even after 75 years, the old proprietors are still looking after The Store.