

COMMUNITY

WINNER

Son proud of father's place in sculpting history

By Chris Hansen

Sixty-eight years ago, in the midst of the Great Depression, a Port Chester man moved his life to South Dakota to help blast, cut and carve the faces of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt into a mountain in the Black Hills.

In 1936, he gave Lincoln his eyes. He worked on a scaffold 500 feet off the ground. He managed and trained unskilled and inexperienced workers. He quit a few times because of low pay, and, possibly, discrimination, but was considered irreplaceable, and returned again and again.

His name was Luigi DelBianco.

Today, his son, Caesar, is trying to let people know how important his dad was in the creation of the presidential monument at Mount Rushmore. He says that history's selective memory recalls only Gutzon Borglum, the Danish sculptor who directed the project.

Caesar, 69, says that his father rarely talked about his Mt. Rushmore experience. "I never heard him brag about nothing," he said. "He knew he was good, but never said a word." And although he visited his father in South Dakota when he was three, his memories of the trip are sparse. So after retiring, he decided to learn more about his father's work on the monument.

He took trips to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where he conducted extensive primary research. He calls the research trips to the nation's capital "the greatest single human joy in my life." He went in 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1994, and he says he wants to go back this year.

His research turned up many of the letters Borglum wrote during his time on the Mount Rushmore project. In several of them, Borglum writes about DelBianco, who he refers to as Bianco, the nickname he was known by.

Through these letters, the photocopies of which he keeps in a red folder, Caesar has better understood his father.

Borglum's letters, many written to the project's business manager, John Boland, often address DelBianco's departure, and always praise his value in

the effort. Some reflect Borglum's own frustration with the project.

"He (DelBianco) is worth any three men I could find in America, for this particular type of work, here and now, but Mt. Rushmore is not managed that way, and doesn't want that kind of service. He entirely out-classed everyone on the hill, and his knowledge was an embarrassment to the amateur efforts and lack of knowledge, lack of experience and lack of judgement. He is the only man besides myself who has been on the work who knows the problems and how to solve them. His absence is a great loss to the work this year."

Since beginning his research over 10 years ago, Caesar said that he has come to understand his father's crucial part in crafting one of our nation's greatest treasures.

"When my father used to tell me he was the chief carver on Mt. Rushmore, I half-heartedly believed him," the younger DelBianco said, "When I found these documents, I felt bad."

Borglum's letters also reflect his relief when DelBianco returned.

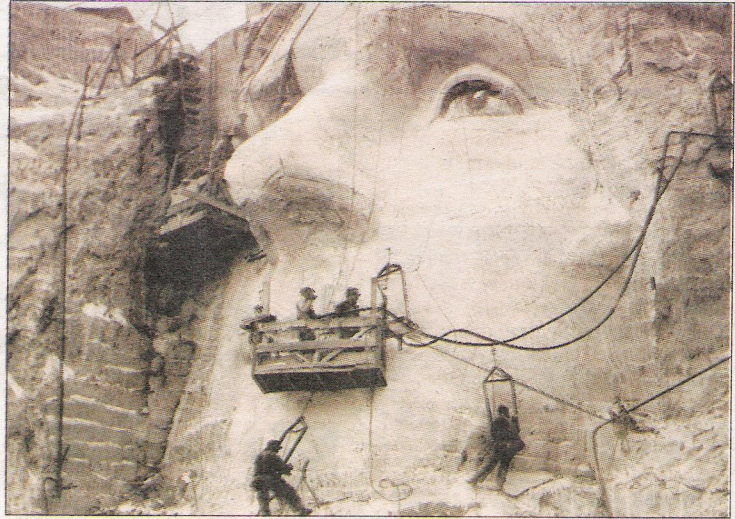
"Bianco, as you know, is back, and his presence emphasizes the frightful hardship this work labors under. He is the only intelligent, efficient stone carver on the work who understands the language of the sculptor."

In July of 1935, DelBianco left, in part because his salary was too low, 90 cents an hour. At the time, Borglum wrote, "His leaving will stop all work on the features of Washington and Jefferson." DelBianco soon returned when he was offered an additional 60 cents an hour.

Besides the financial struggle, Caesar said that many people in South Dakota gave his father a hard time about his ethnicity. "I really think they didn't like him because he was Italian."

DelBianco's brother-in-law, Alfonso Scafa, also a stone cutter, introduced him to Borglum in the granite quarries of Barre, Vt. in 1920. Their work relationship would last until Borglum's death in 1941. But Luigi's journey to Mt. Rushmore really began in Meduno, a town in the Friuli region of Italy, when he was just a boy.

"My father comes from a long line of woodcarvers," Caesar said. But Del-



Luigi DelBianco working on the Lincoln's left eye at Mt. Rushmore in 1936.

Bianco, unlike his family, had an affinity for stone. In 1903, at the age of 11, DelBianco's parents sent him to study stone carving in Austria. Later, he studied in Venice. When he was 16, he came, by himself, to Port Chester.

He worked throughout the East for decades. In 1933, he was called on by Borglum to replace Hugo Villa as the chief carver at Mt. Rushmore. There, he oversaw all of the stone cutters and approved each rock busting blast.

After spending five years at Mt. Rushmore between 1933 and 1940, DelBianco returned to Port Chester where he cut stone for contractors,

shaped over 500 gravestones in the area and continued to sculpt.

Years of breathing dust from stone caused DelBianco to suffer from lung problems late in life. The lung ailment led to pneumonia, and on January 20, 1969, President Richard Nixon's inauguration day, DelBianco died.

To raise awareness about the work his father did, Caesar lectures before various groups. His next lecture will be on April 9 at the Miller Place Historical Society, in Miller Place, Long Island. For more information about this or any other lecture, contact Caesar DelBianco at 939-8782.

TIDES

	Port Chester 3/9		3/10		3/11		3/12		3/13		3/14		3/15	
	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.
HIGH	10:57	11:24	11:47	—	12:11	12:36	12:57	1:25	1:43	2:15	2:31	3:09	3:24	4:11
LOW	5:01	5:32	5:51	6:17	6:40	7:00	7:29	7:43	8:21	8:28	9:18	9:22	10:19	10:29
Rye Beach														
HIGH	10:38	11:25	11:28	11:52	—	12:17	12:38	1:02	1:24	1:56	2:12	2:50	3:05	3:52
LOW	4:44	5:15	5:34	6:00	6:23	6:43	7:12	7:26	8:04	8:11	9:01	9:05	10:02	10:12