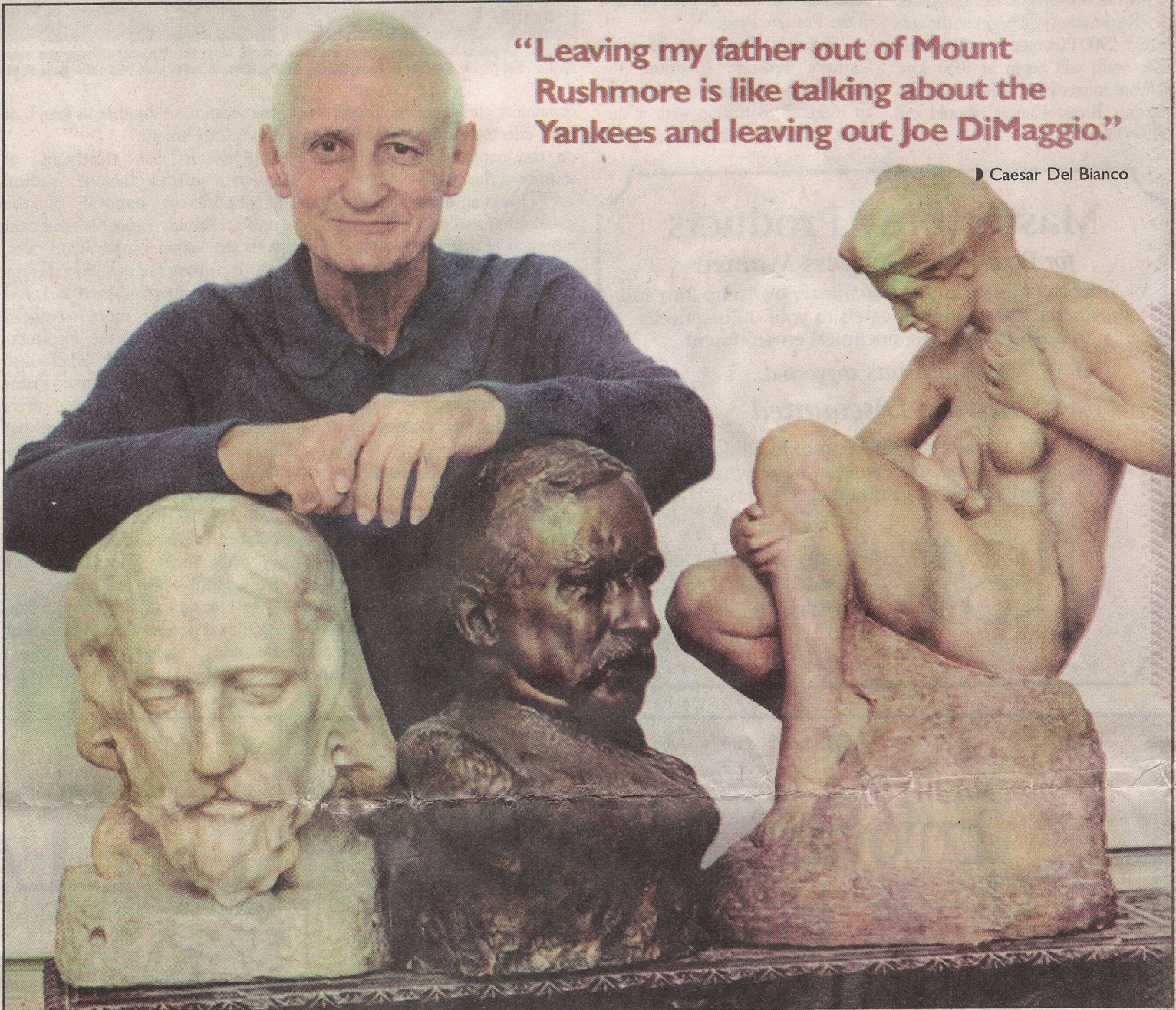


**“Leaving my father out of Mount Rushmore is like talking about the Yankees and leaving out Joe DiMaggio.”**

► Caesar Del Bianco



Caesar Del Bianco poses with smaller-scale statues.

Photo by JAMES H. KARALES

# A chip off the old block

**Port Chester's Caesar Del Bianco shares memories of his father, Luigi, who helped carve Mount Rushmore**

BY HILARY S. WOLFSON

No faces on a mountain loom as large in people's consciousness as these. Spanning 60 feet from the tops of their heads to the ends of their chins, Mount Rushmore's Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt and Lincoln epitomize "America, The Beautiful" and its glorious, rich history of democracy and leadership.

Carved in our history as one of America's grandest monuments, Mount Rushmore stands at the pinnacle of manmade achievements. Begun in 1927 and completed in 1941, Mount Rushmore is the sum parts of many and the mastery of a few, including one artisan, Luigi Del Bianco, a stonecutter and carver born in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of Italy.

Luigi's contribution to this South Dakota monument is deeply etched in the heart and soul of his son, lifelong Port Chester resident, Caesar Del Bianco. Caesar (who's turning 69 on Friday the 13th) worked for years as a drill press operator for an airplane parts manufacturer, but has virtually dedicated his life to keeping his father's legacy alive. The senior Del Bianco, a former Port Chester resi-

dent, passed away in 1969 at the age of 76.

It is a legacy that is recorded on typewritten memos, letters and documents written by Mount Rushmore sculptor/engineer Gutzon Borglum—papers that are now safely housed at the Library of Congress and National Archives in Washington, D.C.

"I needed to find out as much as I could about my father," said Caesar, "especially after Rex Allan Smith's book came out in 1985. Here was this

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author writing a book, 'The Carving of Mount Rushmore,' and nowhere in this book did he mention my father. I just couldn't believe it. It was like all of his contributions on this monument were erased from history. I needed to make sure that my dad received the recognition he was entitled to."

People in the community can hear for themselves what this devoted son and researcher discovered over the past 10 years. Caesar will be giving a lecture at the Port Chester Council for the Arts CASTLE on Oct. 13 at 7:30 p.m. entitled, "The Making of Mount Rushmore." Admission to the lecture is \$5.

"Leaving my father out of Mount Rushmore is like talking about the Yankees and leaving out Joe DiMaggio," said Caesar, whose propensity for baseball metaphors comes from a love for the sport and his need to emphasize the importance of "every" team member.

What this proud son will also tell you—in no uncertain terms—is that sculptor Gutzon Borglum was "the true master and genius of Mount Rushmore. He had the last word on the mountain. No one did anything without Gutzon Borglum knowing about it."

The tapestry of people, place and things that weave Luigi's life with Mount Rushmore is as rich and color-

ful as the man himself. Luigi, who reminded his son of Maurice Chevalier, was this tall, dashing charismatic figure that made his presence known simply by walking into a room.

Born in a little town in Italy called Meduno in 1892, the young Luigi went to Austria to apprentice under an Austrian stone carver, working with sculptor Borglum beginning in 1920. Moving to Borglum's Stamford estate in 1922 with his new bride, Nicoletta Cardarelli, this man "who could do magic with his hands," drove his car to South Dakota in 1933 to begin his first seven-month season of carving on the "new Jefferson head."

"When my father came out, there was only one head," said Caesar. "It was Washington. To the right was the original Thomas Jefferson, which was only half done. They found a lot of bad rock on this head. So when my father came, he started the new Jefferson on the left. He stayed there for seven months and came back again in 1935, 1936 and again in 1940 to repair Jefferson's lip."

Luigi was employed by Borglum to carve "the refinement of expression," or detail, in the faces, said Caesar. This meant, in part, sculpting the eyes, which were designed to be visible from long distances.

"To highlight the pupils," said Caesar, "my father would carve wedge-shaped stones, and embedded

them in the eye cavities. The eyes would then reflect the light, making them sparkle and more lifelike. This idea was probably Borglum's, but my father was responsible for executing it."

The idea to do Mount Rushmore in the first place, said Caesar, didn't come from Borglum, but rather from Doane Robinson, the state historian for South Dakota. Back in 1923, Robinson wanted to attract tourists, said Caesar, and originally wanted to have a sculpture with the likenesses of Western heroes, like Bill Cody, Lewis and Clark and Indian Red Cloud.

They decided to do something "with a more serious theme," said Caesar, so the idea evolved into the U.S. presidents.

Borglum's son, Lincoln, who was the chief pointer on the project, was the one who completed Mount Rushmore after his father's passing in 1941.

"As the chief pointer and one time superintendent," said Caesar, "Lincoln was the one who calculated the measurements of the faces, which second to Borglum's job, was the most important. The thing that most people don't realize though is that every carver, like my father, is also a pointer. My father didn't have anything to look at when he was carving except this five-foot plaster models of the faces. He'd be up on the scaffolds, hanging in his har-

ness, staring at this face, and then carve it. He'd know how to do it simply by gazing it this large face. How he got any perspective is beyond me. He just knew and he did it."

Caesar said that during his father's lifetime, two other great national monuments had the Del Bianco hand-carved stamp on them. His father also worked with Borglum on the Wars of America Memorial in Newark, N.J., which is one of the largest bronze castings in America, and the Stone Mountain Project in Stone Mountain, Ga.

Luigi eventually settled in Port Chester where he set up a stone cutting and stone carving studio on Clinton Street. There he carved statues and gravestones, said Caesar, setting many works as well in the community, such as the statuary at Corpus Christi Church and the Our Lady of Fatima statue at Holy Rosary School.

Rushing around a few days prior in preparation for his Friday lecture, Caesar sounded tired but pleased. He referred to his papers, which could be heard rustling in the background, quoting Borglum in one of his letters to the Hon. John A. Boland in Rapid City, S.D., about his chief carver.

Caesar read, "We could double our progress if we could have two like Bianco"

"What did I tell you," he added, wistfully. "He was quite a man."