

# American Italian Historical Association

## WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

### NEWSLETTER

*A people without a past is a people without a future*

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Bolinas, California

[www.aiha-wrc.org](http://www.aiha-wrc.org)

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#### **Book Reviews:**

*The Sugar's at the Bottom of the Cup*, by Elda DelBino Willits & Patricia Lynn Henley, Zuccherro Press: 2004.

Elda Del Bino Willits arrived with her family in San Francisco in 1916, a time when the city still had gaslights and horse-drawn wagons. In a memoir that she narrated in her kitchen to a tape recorder, and that was then transcribed, edited and organized by Sonoma County writer Patricia Lynn Henley, she tells us how it was to live the immigrant's life through the Depression, the fears of WWII, and a marriage that took her to a business in Marin County that left her wealthier than she could have imagined. Despite several illnesses, she was then able to return several times to her Italian village, be interviewed for the Ellis Island Oral History Project, meet WRC member Will Parrinello and be featured in his documentary *Little Italy*, and move from that to her memoir. Through it all, she seems to have maintained the buoyant spirit natural to her, which she then pours into her more than 90-year life story. The result is a book full of historical interest, courage, joy and sorrow, and a kind of generous familial wisdom encapsulated in her title: *The Sugar is at the Bottom*. One item of particular interest to WRC members at this moment is her story of the annual Italian Athletic Club picnic—held each summer in a public park in Fairfax. “We would get up early and—lugging all our picnic supplies—take a streetcar to the ferry building, a ferry to Sausalito, and then a train to Fairfax. All this to arrive by noon at a huge gathering, where there was constant music, dancing, and plenty of Italian food.” This is the same Fairfax to be remembered at our Marin event (see above).

One caveat: some conspicuous errors in the Italian jar anyone who knows the language. The book is available from Zuccherro Press, P.O. Box 529, Sonoma, CA 95476.