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Young Peppino

GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI WAS BORN July 4, 1807, in Nice, which at that time was part of the empire of Napoleon Bonaparte. Records of his birth show that he was originally given his Christian name in the French form, Joseph Marie Garibaldi. However, after Napoleon's defeat in 1814, Nice reverted to the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the youngster officially became Giuseppe Garibaldi. The language that Giuseppe grew up with was a local Ligurian dialect called *Nizzard*. French was his second language. It wasn't until he was in his teens that he learned the Italian language, but his accent revealed that it was not his natural tongue.

Nice, or *Nizza* as it is called in Italian, is located on the Mediterranean coast, and Garibaldi was born in the old port section of the city. His father, Domenico Garibaldi, was a sailor who came from the town of Chiavari in what used to be the Republic of Genoa. In 1794, Domenico married Rosa Raimondi, a girl whose

family had also moved from Genoese territory to Nice. The couple had six children: Maria Elizabetta, who died at the age of two, Angelo, Giuseppe, Michele, Felice, and Teresa. The Garibaldi family lived in a house facing on the harbor front at the north side of the old port. All of the Garibaldi children except for Teresa were born in this house, which is no longer there. When the harbor was enlarged in 1897, the house was demolished, and the area is today covered with water.

In 1816, the Garibaldi family moved to a larger house on Quai Lunel, the street which runs along the west side of the harbor front. This is where Teresa was born, and where Giuseppe and his brothers spent their childhood. The modest, three-story house at No. 3 Quai Lunel is still there today. However, it sits somewhat inconspicuously and would go unnoticed if it were not for the small marble plaque beneath one of the window sills. The plaque commemorating Giuseppe Garibaldi, was placed there by the Italian Society of Charity on the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Aside from this simple plaque, the site has nothing to commemorate the legendary hero who once lived there—there is no museum, no souvenir shop, and no information office. But then, we must remember, this is France and not Italy.

Today, the house faces out on a harbor filled with luxurious yachts and pleasure craft—it is, after all, the Riviera. In the time of Garibaldi, the same harbor was crowded with sailboats and fishing craft. This was the waterfront where young Giuseppe, or “Peppino” as he was called, would hang out and talk to the sailors and fishermen. He listened to their stories of the sea while he learned to tie knots, trim sails, and mend nets. Sometimes, the fishermen even allowed him to come along when they went trawling for shellfish.



The harbor in Nice



The Garibaldi family home, No. 3 Quai Lunel, Nice

As a youngster, Peppino exhibited the reckless courage so characteristic of him in later years. When he was only eight years old, he saved a woman from drowning. The story goes that she was washing clothes when she lost her balance and fell head first into deep water. Without hesitating, Peppino dove into the water and pulled her to safety! This daring rescue cast him in the role of a hero, one he was destined to play for the rest of his life. Again at age twelve, he saved three boys from drowning when their boat capsized. There are at least a dozen more recorded incidents in which Peppino Garibaldi saved someone from drowning.¹ Garibaldi himself never remembered learning how to swim but seemed to have been born a natural swimmer.

On days when he didn't frequent the waterfront, Peppino would go hiking in the hills above Nice. He would hike alone for hours, enjoying the solitude and acquiring a love for nature. He also enjoyed hunting game in the woods, and as he grew older, he became an excellent marksman. As a youngster, he attended church regularly, and for a while, his parents wanted him to become a priest. However, his love of the sea convinced them that the priesthood was not his vocation. As it turned out, he later acquired a dislike for priests and considered the Church an obstacle to the unification of Italy.

For the most part, Peppino's childhood was a happy one. His parents were kind and loving, and though he expressed his desire to become a sailor, they insisted that he receive a good education. They hired a private tutor to teach him proper Italian as well as mathematics, geography, and astronomy. Afterwards, he was sent to a school in Genoa, but his lack of interest in the academics caused him to drop out. So he got his way and became a sailor like his father and three brothers. When he was sixteen, he sailed to