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## Remembering Tommaso Restaurant's Thomas Verdillo

ELLIE PLASS ([HTTPS://BKLYNER.COM/AUTHOR/ELLENPLASS/](https://bklyner.com/author/ellenplass/))

DECEMBER 30, 2020 @4:30 PM ([HTTPS://BKLYNER.COM/2020/12/](https://bklyner.com/2020/12/))

Thomas Verdillo, the owner and founder of Tommaso Restaurant (<https://tommasoinbrooklyn.com/>) in Bensonhurst, passed away on Sunday, December 27th, due to complications from COVID-19.

Tommaso's celebrated its 51st anniversary in November, and has been considered a staple in the neighborhood for years, due in large part to its charismatic and friendly owner. The news of Verdillo's death, shared on the restaurant's Facebook page, has so far garnered nearly two hundred comments in sympathy.

"So sad to hear about Tom's passing. I worked for Tom [for] many years and have a lot of great memories working at Tommaso's," wrote Richard Scalise.

"Those lucky enough to have been part of it will never forget it," wrote Paul Slotwiner.

Born in 1943 here in Brooklyn, Verdillo knew from a young age that he wanted to enter the industry, and attended a culinary arts magnet high school. From there, he worked in catering, eventually starting his own firm, and studied at a Piedmontese restaurant for a month.

He harbored an intense love of music, taking singing lessons late into his life and performing regularly at churches and funerals. Tommaso's was known for the live piano and opera that entertained its guests every weekend.

When Dr. Michael Paglia first moved to Staten Island in 1964, just before the completion of the Verrazano Bridge, he and his opera-loving wife were invited to Tommaso by another local couple. Over the next fifty years, they became weekly regulars and maintained a strong friendship with both Verdillo and his childhood best friend and lawyer, Matthew Magnone.



L-R: Matthew Magnone, Esq, Dr. Michael Paglia, and Thomas Verdillo. Photo courtesy of Dr. Michael Paglia.

Paglia, who worked as a physician in Manhattan and has since retired to Florida, remembers Verdillo as a “very talented, very creative, and eccentric” individual.

"Tom made his own mozzarella, he made his own roasted peppers for the antipasto. His food was always excellent and top-notch," Paglia said.

Paglia and his wife, who was working as a physician in Staten Island at the time, used to meet each other after work at Tommaso every week.

"On a Friday night I would drive from New York, my wife would drive from Staten Island, and we would meet at Tommy's for dinner after a hard week. We would have dinner and then drive over to Staten Island, two separate cars, home," Paglia said.



Dr. Michael Paglia and Thomas Verdillo (right) at Tommaso Restaurant. Photo courtesy of Dr. Michael Paglia.

He remembers the restaurant as one with many loyal patrons, where the staff made a good salary.



Verdillo, quite literally, lived and breathed Tommaso. He occupied the upstairs apartment, for a time with his Aunt Jenny. He decorated the restaurant every holiday, even dressing up as a *pagliaccio* clown for Carnival before lent. He never married, nor had any children of his own. By his own words, immortalized on the Tommaso website, his mother held great influence over his love of food and cooking.

"My early years were spent helping my mother prepare dinner for her doctor and nurse friends, as well as arranging holiday banquets for friends and family," he wrote. "The fondest memories I have are going to Coney Island with my older brothers and having lunch, usually pepper and egg sandwiches prepared by my Mother."

Valerie Guida, Verdillo's niece, worked as the bookkeeper for Tommaso's after her mother, who had done the job since the spot opened, passed away in 2019.

Right now, she says, the future of the restaurant is up in the air. They're closed at the moment, mainly due to the indoor dining restrictions.

"We are hoping with our heart of hearts [that we can remain open]," Guida said.

The service for Verdillo has yet to be set.

"He did not want a wake, nor a funeral. There will be a memorial mass, but we're waiting probably at least until the end of the month," Guida said. "My uncle deserved a big send-off but is probably not going to get exactly that due to the times, and everything that's going on."

*Correction 12/30: An earlier version of this article named Verdillo's Aunt Judy, who was in fact Aunt Jenny.*

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## Ellie Plass

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13  
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**ON CANAL presented by wallplay**  
(<https://bklyner.com/events/on-canal-presented-by-wallplay/>)

Oct 13 @ 12:00 AM - 11:00 PM

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**Luminaries** (<https://bklyner.com/events/luminaries/>)

Nov 27 @ 08:00 AM -





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