

Rudy Bettoli: From Wine Maker to Toy Maker

by Catherine L. Gowdy

Rudolph William Bettoli was born in San Francisco on December 16, 1889, the son of immigrants Stephen Bettoli and Frances Plistil. Stephen Bettoli was born in Switzerland on April 3, 1865, and arrived in New York at the age of 17 years on December 27, 1883, having sailed on the St. Laurent from France; his destination was San Francisco. He made his living in the city as a waiter.

Rudy is documented as living with his parents on the 1900 and 1910 San Francisco censuses. In 1908 he is noted in the Oakland city directory as a student. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1916, but even before that he was working as a chemist for Italian-Swiss Colony (1915) and as superintendent of Petaluma Winery (1916).

In 1917 he registered for the World War I draft. By then he had married and had a child and was an office manager for a wine company. Of interest is a note on his draft registration that he was partially blind in his right eye. The 1918 Rudy living on Stanyan St. in San Francisco and working as a bookkeeper for Ciocca-Lombardi Wine Company. The 1920 census shows Rudolph in San Francisco with his wife Edith, nee Belluomini, and their children Hilda Marie, age 5 years, and Philip, age 2 months. Edith's mother, Marie Belluomini, was living with them. Rudolph's occupation is again given as chemist.

Rudy moved to San Rafael in the early 1920s. In an article in the *Marin Journal* dated October 15, 1925, he is described as "one time head chemist for the California Wine Association" and "now an invalid, confined to his home, with a wife and two children dependent upon him."

Unable to work any longer as a chemist, Rudy decided to make his children a doll house and, using only a small pen knife, he did just that. The kids loved it and so did their friends. Neighborhood children brought their dolls with them to see the "new, two story fairy home."

But when the house was finished how were the dolls to live as they should without tiny furniture, cooking kettles and dishes? So Rudy set to work once again and made tables and chairs, benches, a cradle for baby doll, a stove and all the things a doll house should have.

Soon Bettoli became known about town as a toymaker and by 1925 was making miniature houses and furniture for trade. Many of his pieces were used in store windows about town as advertisements, one of which was in the window of real estate man Peter Bacigalupi. And so it was that Rudy, though an invalid,

Clearly a very clever man, he invented a nursing bottle and patented the design.

Rudy died in Marin County on February 18, 1931, still a young man. The funeral was held February 20th at the Masonic Temple in San Francisco. Cremation was at Cypress Lawn where his father, Stephen, was subsequently buried.

Jan. 17, 1928.

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R. W. BETTOLI

NURSING BOTTLE

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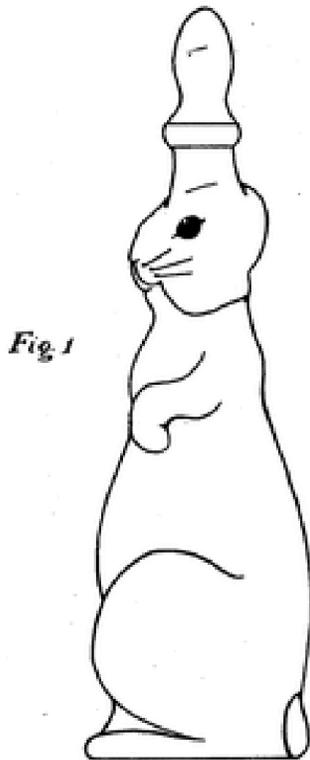


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Rudolph W. Bettoli

INVENTOR

BY *J. E. Trabucco*
ATTORNEY