

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. Essex County Executive

"Make Your Mark"

2020 Theme

Winning and Honorable Mention Stories
From the

Essex County Division of Senior Services
2020 Legacies Writing Contest



May 30th 2020

Essex County Division of Senior Services 2020 Legacies Writing Contest

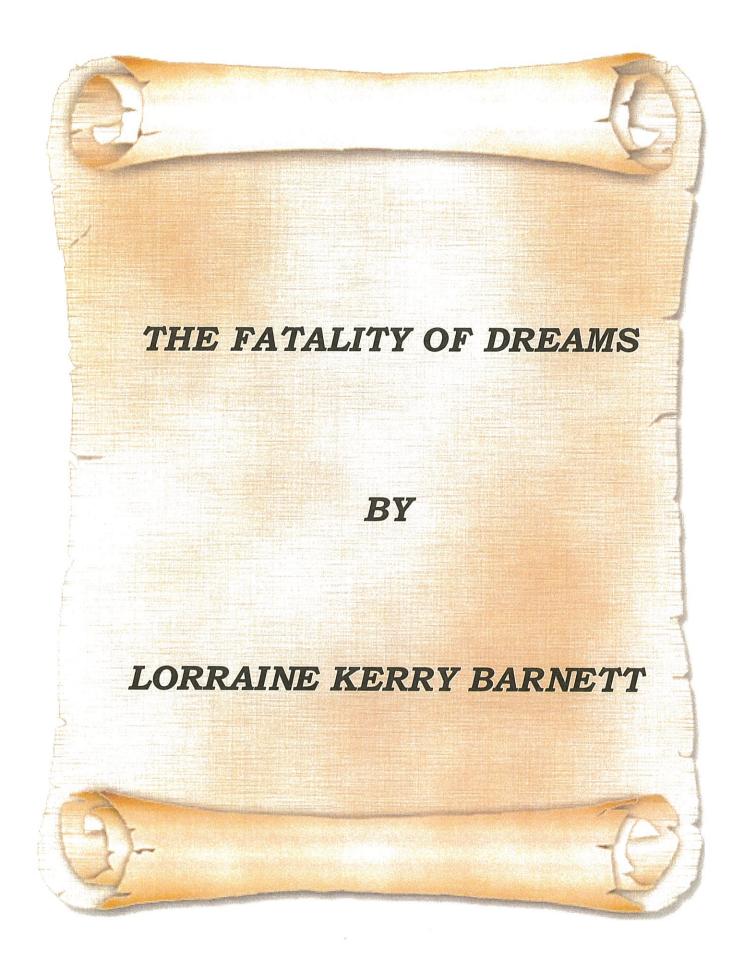
Winning and Honorable Mention Stories

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The Fatality of Dreams

I should have known better. After all, I learned in Sunday School what happened to Joseph when he told his dream to his brothers. They threw him in a pit then sold him into slavery.

And what about Martin Luther King? He made a speech in 1963 before 250,000 people. declaring, "I Have A Dream" and in 1968 someone shot him dead. So what's wrong with me? I had these examples; why didn't I get it? If you have a dream, keep it to yourself. If you tell your dream you'll live to regret it; or maybe you won't live. That may be the end of you and your dream.

It was the summer of 1969. I had just completed my junior year at Rutgers University. I was looking forward to my senior year when most, if not all, of your required courses are behind you. Now, you can take a few courses simply because they interest you.

I made my decision to go to summer school. Well, actually, I did not just decide to go to summer school. I had failed Biology. I mean, what did they expect? You take a girl out of the ghetto, living in not so pleasant surroundings, give her a rat and say "dissect it." Are you serious? Cut up a rat? I couldn't bear to stay in the same room with it. I grew up next to a yard where Mr. Jimmy, the proprietor, sold coal and wood. We had our share of rats, and they were big, and charcoal-gray, and ferocious. They were not afraid of humans. At night they ran in the walls as though waiting for you to fall asleep so that they could join you in bed. The laboratory rats, were not ghetto rats. They were sophisticated and clean and white. Some of the suburban students thought the white rats were cute. They cooed and swooned over them. When I was given my rat, I closed my eyes as tight as I could. However, feeling the weight of it on my tray, I hurled it in the direction of my lab instructor, hitting him squarely in the face, then ran out of the room screaming hysterically.

I resolved to try again that summer, and registered for an additional course just to get the extra credits. I chose an English course, and while I can't remember the name of the course, I do remember the name of my professor. It was Professor Allman. He was a small built man with lots of gray hair. He spoke deliberately as though he had made a practice of always choosing the right words. Even though it was summer, he still came to class with a lightweight suit and tie. It was clear that he honored tradition and wanted to make sure that the dividing line between student and teacher was clearly defined.

I was doing well with Professor Allman. His notes, on my papers that he returned to me, were extremely complimentary. I found it encouraging that he took time to notice and comment upon something that I did well..

"Good use of imagery. Interesting approach. Very good. Expound on this idea." I felt my success as he voiced his approval of my work over and over again.

One day, during our 10 minute break, Professor Allman called me aside. "Miss Kerry," he began in a very congenial tone. I moved closer giving him my full attention.

"Yes?" I responded with the question in my voice. I had no idea what he wanted.

"Miss Kerry," he continued. "You write extremely well. You like to write, I take it."

"Oh yes," I beamed trying not to reveal my excitement. But I couldn't hide it. My professor was complimenting me on my writing and this time, in person. I was ecstatic. "I love to write," I continued. "Writing enables you to create situations the way you want them to be. It's like magic, you know...being able to change situations and make them better or totally disappear."

He gave me a somber look. I was revved up and ready to talk. Maybe I could do something with my writing. Maybe one day I would be recognized. Maybe I would publish a book or something. He looked at me curiously then asked, "What do you want to do when you graduate? What are your plans?"

"Well," I began cautiously. "I haven't really settled on that but I do know that I want to be something...something great....something more than I am now. I want to go to graduate school." I told him my dream.

He inhaled quickly as though he had to catch his breath. "Graduate school?" he said a bit too loud, as though the mere mention shocked him.

"Yes," I continued, still very excited. "I want to go to graduate school and be some kind of doctor. I want to be a doctor of something, I just don't know what yet."

He hesitated and the pause was so long, I thought he had forgotten what he wanted to say next. "Well," he said in a fatherly, placating voice. "Graduate school is not for everyone, Miss Kerry." Funny that he should put my name right there but I missed it and continued in an excited voice.

"I know it's not for everyone. That's why I want to go. It would distinguish me. Set me apart. You know?"

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Professor Allman's facial expression changed. He was no longer the kindly old professor who was trying to encourage one of his best students. No! Now he was the voice of discouragement. He wanted me to know that there were limitations to what I should or could aspire to become.

"Miss Kerry, I don't think you understand. Graduate school is not for everyone."

Suddenly I heard all the words that he never said. "How dare you think that you are entitled to become more. Do you think that you can elevate yourself to my level? Who filled your head with this notion and why don't you stay in your place."

I looked at him directly. I did not lower my head. I did not look at my feet. I did not say "Yes, suh." and turn away. Now I understood what he meant.

"Professor Allman," I began again. "Aren't you a doctor?"

He stretched his neck like a peacock. His nose seemed to point up to the ceiling as he responded, "Yes I am. I have my doctorate in English Literature with a concentration in Medieval Studies."

I forged ahead. "Then one day I will have my doctorate too." I turned and walked away.

The next time Professor Allman returned my paper to me, it was anything but complimentary. It had red writing, exclamation points and indications that I had missed the mark. "It is clear that you did not understand the assignment. See me!" all in red. I should never have told him the dream.

The summer ended as did the course and my grade was a heartbreaking D. Did I protest? No. Who would take my side? Who would tell the Doctor that he was wrong and take my side against him? No one. But hard as it was, I learned my lesson.

When I returned to campus in the fall, I saw my friend Barbara. We had known each other since our freshman year. Although we never socialized off campus, I regarded her as a friend.

Barbara seemed really glad to see me. "So, Lorraine, how was your summer?"

"I took a couple of courses. Glad it's over. I had no vacation at all."

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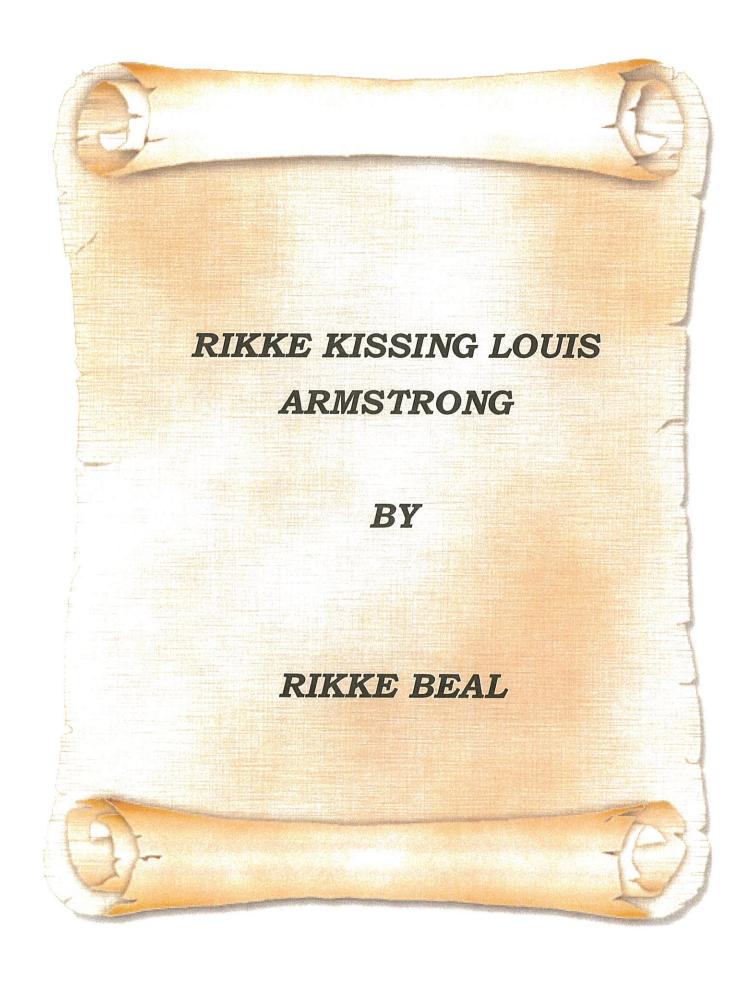
Barbara chimed in again. "Well, this is it. After this year, we're out of here. So what do you want to do afterwards? Any job prospects?"

It was that question again. Different words but same meaning. *Tell me your dream*. I won't fall for it this time. I tried to talk myself out of the fear but it didn't work. She was a student like me. What could she do to hurt me? I looked at Barbara's face. It was white like Professor Allman's. Why should I be afraid to tell her the dream? I was trying to convince myself that she was alright; that she could be trusted but I couldn't pull it off.

I looked Barbara directly in her eyes so she could not tell that I was lying. "What do I want to do afterwards?" I said repeating her question. "Girl, I said in my most soulful voice. I just want to get up outta here!" She seemed quite satisfied with my answer.

Four years later I graduated from Rutgers School of Law with my Juris Doctorate degree. When I went to the State Capitol to be sworn in as an Attorney-At-Law, Professor Allman's voice tried to invade my thoughts. I quieted his voice with my own.

"Professor Allman, you should see me now!"



Rikke Kissing Louis Armstrong

It's Copenhagen in 1957. During the lunch break, in a corner of the school yard, my posse of teenage classmates and jazz fans were snapping fingers and singing tunes by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross when the news spread like hot fire: Louis Armstrong and his All Stars were coming to town. Yippie.... Finally some LIVE jazz.

Getting tickets was a priority. We had two weeks before the concert, but tickets would sell out quickly. Each of us had to scramble to find enough cash. I was lucky that my parents gave me an advance. I bet my dad would have liked to go, too.

Next day in school, Erik and I sneaked out, skipped the next two classes, and raced through Copenhagen to the KB Hall on our bikes to buy the tickets for everyone. (Kids in Denmark had the freedom of gratis mobility, thanks to our bike-friendly society.) I was later told that while we were gone, our German teacher look around in the classroom and asked, "Where is Rikke? I thought I saw her this morning!" Nobody knew... Luckily we were fast enough to make it back to school in time for the math class. Mrs. Jakobsen, our math teacher, would surely have investigated, if we had been absent.

A little background of how I became such an avid jazz fan. The handful of radio stations in Denmark at that time were state owned and operated.

Jazz programs were few but excellent, usually a couple per week with educational talks by knowledgable aficionados. Needless to say that my

jazz-fan friends and I were glued to the radio listening to those programs, followed by heated discussions in school the following day.

This is when I got my first record player and started to collect a small jazz library. Buying records was a great experience. The record store had individual turntable stands with several earphone sets attached. This allowed several of us to listen to the same record together before we decided to buy. If the store was not busy and nobody was waiting to use the turntable, we were allowed to listen to several different records, mostly ones we had been introduced to from the radio jazz programs.

By luck and good fortune, after school summer vacation, a new, young and cute teacher walked into our classroom introducing himself and announcing that he was here to teach us music history and theory. He asked what we wanted to learn, classical or jazz. "Jazz" we roared. The teacher, Erik Moseholm, a basist, (I had a crush on him) had just received the Danish Radio's Annual Jazz Award. With his connections he had obtained free tickets for us to go to the club, Jazzhus Montmartre, to listen and learn. As underaged, we agreed to discretely stay in the back of the club and only drink soft drinks. That was not a problem since we had no money for alcohol. Most of us still had curfew and needed to be home by 11 PM. We were smart enough to behave so the club let us stay, knowing we would be good customers in the future. This is where we heard that Louis Armstrong and His All Stars might be coming to the club for a jam session after their upcoming concert in Copenhagen.

The evening of the concert came up fast. The KB Hall was packed. Our seats, as usual, were the cheap ones, all the way up in the back balcony, but the atmosphere up there was boiling. Satchmo was magnificent. We LOVED him. The band played all the tunes we knew by heart and we enthusiastically hummed along. When the band ended with *Mack the Knife*, the hall was rocking, people shouting, clapping and cheering.

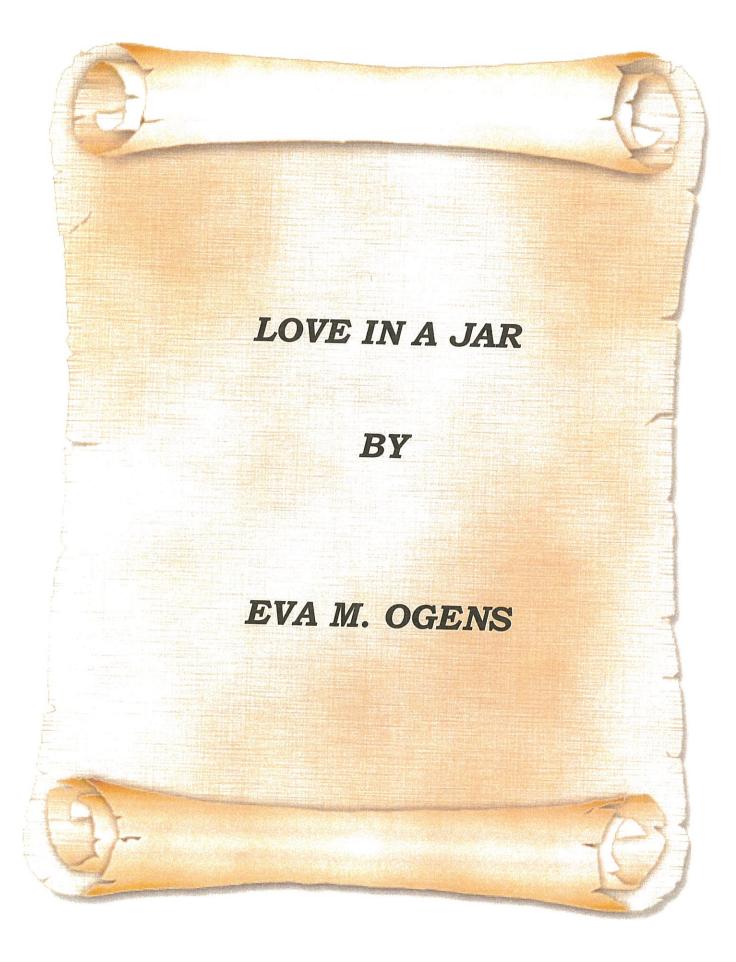
Now the challenge was to get out of there, get to our bicycles, and race through town to the jazz club in time to get in, then hope and pray for Satchmo to turn up for a jam session.

If the KB Hall was crowded, the jazz club was worse. We elbowed our way in to our usual spots in the back as the band arrived and slowly made their way towards the stage. Everyone wanted to touch Satchmo and shake his hands. He was incredibly gentle and let his fans push and shove each other around him while he smiled and chuckled.

Getting close to Satchmo through the crowd was nearly impossible. He was in front of us and we could only see him from the back. I was not going to let the opportunity go by, so I bullied my way towards him while my posse shouted encouragements. I got closer and closer, but still could only see his back. Finally I was close enough to reach out and touch his shoulder. While the posse cheered in the back, I placed a big smacking kiss on Satchmo's back, right between his shoulder blades.

Next morning, arriving in my classroom in school, I saw a big sketch on the blackboard showing "Rikke Kissing Louis Armstrong." I was the hero of the day.

Many years later, after I ended up settling in the States, I remember how frustrated I was in the early years here that I could not find a radio station with good jazz. After all, jazz was, and is, America's most important creative art form to ourselves and the world. Fortunately, for me here in the Northeast, this has changed with WBGO, Satellite radio and YouTube. I am grateful that I can satisfy a lifelong daily craving to replenish my body and soul listening to jazz. I am sure I have Satchmo's consent when I urge: "Keep Jazz Alive!"



What exactly is a legacy anyway? According to Google, "a legacy is the story of some one's life, the things they did, places they went, goals they accomplished, their failures, and more. **Legacy** is something that a **person** leaves behind to be remembered by. Legacies are pathways that guide people in decisions with what to do or what not to do."

LOVE IN A JAR

The writing was on the wall. It was September, 1939. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, and two days later Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, starting World War II. By this time, over half the German Jews had emigrated to other countries.

My parents were lucky to have been in this fortunate group. They came to the United States in 1939 to start a new life, leaving their childhood homes and old lives behind. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, my father decided to enlist in the Army to fight for his new country. My mother patiently and faithfully waited for the years until he returned home. They were married in 1947.

They lived in Manhattan until 1952, and bought a house with a 50' by 100' yard in Bergen County. Having grown up on a farm, my father loved nothing more than puttering around the yard. They had a small garden but it was amazing what they grew on this tiny plot.

There were tomatoes, potatoes, rhubarb, lettuce, and three kinds of berries: gooseberries, raspberries, and red currants. My mother would transform the bitter rhubarb stalks to a sweet and refreshing compote we enjoyed for dessert on hot summer nights.

Every summer, my sister and I would collect the currants and bring them to my mother. She would cook the berries over the stove, reducing the berries to extract the juice. Mind you, we had no air conditioning and the kitchen became hot! She extracted the juice, somehow worked her magic, adding sugar and pectin, and placing the jelly into glass jars sealed with wax. (For some reason, she did not use mason jars- maybe they were too expensive at the time?)

This activity was truly a labor of love. I can assure you that there was no one on my block whose mother made this homemade jelly, or even had currants and raspberries growing in their yard! Because of all the work that went into producing it, these jars of jelly became gifts when my parents visited someone's home. My mother was very disappointed if someone did not recognize the love and effort that went into this unique, homemade delicacy.

Last summer I had an abundance of home-grown tomatoes from which I made tomato marmalade. I shared it with friends and family, while recalling my childhood memories of my mother and carrying on her tradition making food with love.

Food *is* love! Scientists have found that our brains are wired to remember food events and the people associated with them. Sharing food gives us a sense of well-being and belonging. Every culture has its feasts and we all can remember sitting down with family on holidays, and eating dishes native to our cultures.

My mother made a special pastry crust called "mürbeteig." "Mürbe" means crumbly, tender, soft and "teig" means dough. It is technically translated as a "short crust." The difference is that pie crust is made of three ingredients- flour, shortening, and water, but the pastry crust has sugar, butter, and an egg along with the flour. It is a rich, tender, crumbly crust that is great for fruit tarts and pies. My mother would make plum, or apple pie which she called "cake" using this crust, and sometimes berry tarts with the berries from our garden.

When I make this pastry for my own family, I will always think of my mother and her love of our family. Given a choice between regular pie crust or mürbeteig, my daughter always requests "Nana's apple cake." Nowadays, I fill these crusts with apples from my own apple tree, which has fallen over several times in storms, and has been pulled up, clinging to survival and managing to produce blossoms in spring which result in tasty apples!

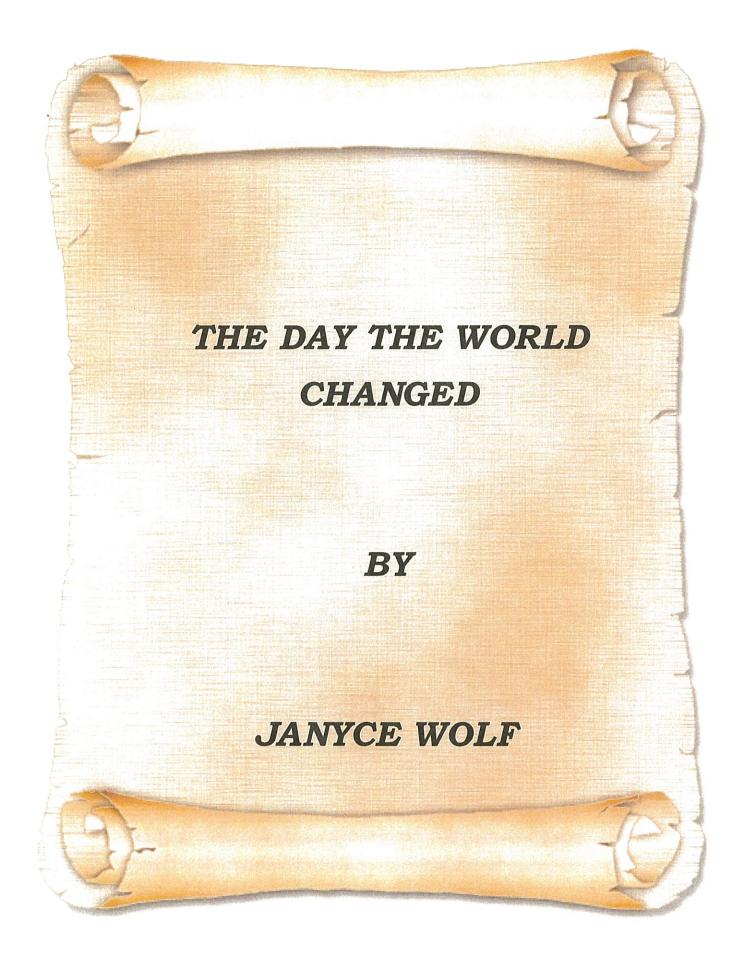
Whenever I am invited to a family dinner, my son's father-in-law asks if I "happen to have a pie" in the freezer! I am expanding the circle of love my mother started with her berry jelly in the jar and her traditional German pastry delicacy.

People who don't know me well wonder why I bother to make homemade pies, cookies, and desserts when it's so much easier to go to the local bakery. How different times are now!

We are used to everything fast- internet, Door dash, Uber eats, pre-cooked, and packaged foods.

Many towns have farmers' markets and our community gardens don't allow pesticides which leads me to believe that organic and farm-fresh foods are coming back into vogue.

I am continuing the legacy of making homemade pies, cakes, cookies, jam, and jellies to grace the tables of family and friends as we celebrate holidays, birthdays, and just life. Through my delicious creations, I am perpetuating and sharing the love that was so sweetly packaged in that jar of jelly and reinforcing the value of homegrown goodness and love, hand made and carried from my heart to their appetites!



The Day the World Changed

I was walking through the concourse of the World Trade Center on my way to a staff meeting at Chase Plaza in lower Manhattan. It was a beautiful fall day in 2001—blue skies, people hurrying to their jobs with coffee cups in hand, fall clothes in the shop windows. A completely normal Tuesday.

The meeting was on the 60th floor at Chase Plaza, near Wall Street, in an enormous room with floor to ceiling windows on all sides. The views, north, south, east, and west, were spectacular. This was an all-hands meeting for the information technology staff, to talk about departmental plans, encourage rapport, and meet up with colleagues and old friends from different locations.

We were chatting before finding our seats when suddenly someone came running over, shouting, "A plane has flown into the World Trade Center!"

"How could that be?" we said, as we rushed to the west windows to look. Smoke was coming out of the building from very high floors. Someone said a small plane must have lost its way. I stood there mystified and had turned away to ask someone a question, when suddenly I saw an enormous fire ball coming out of the other World Trade Center building. A second plane had struck.

Everyone ran to the emergency stairway. No one knew what had happened, but it had to be bad. Still, I went to my seat to fetch my carryall bag, then started down the stairs with 200 other people. Sixty flights is a long way, and at about the thirtieth floor, I said to my friend Tony, from Network Services, "let's see if the elevators are running."

We had heard an announcement—*The emergency is not in this building. Please be calm.* Tony and I got on an elevator and rode down to the Plaza level. Everyone was milling around, watching the sky, trying to make sense of something that most had never experienced—a direct attack. One man, who'd seen

war, said it was definitely an attack. Some people were moving towards the World Trade Center. "That isn't a good idea," I said to Tony. "We'd better go down to New York Plaza", another Chase building.

We joined the throngs that were moving towards Water Street and went to the 11th floor where the Technology Division had some offices. No one knew what to do.

I called my husband from someone's desk. He wanted to know how I was doing. I was numb—not particularly frightened, but with many confused thoughts and feelings. The owner of the desk came in and looked at me helplessly. Some of us went into a conference room and watched the events on television—the news helicopters were already there. Suddenly we heard that another plane had flown into the Pentagon. Who was doing this? Why? On the television there were views of the buildings with black smoke coming out of the upper windows and talk about people jumping out holding hands.

I talked to some of my staff who were in Brooklyn who could see what was going on from their windows. I asked the secretary to call my father in Massachusetts and let him know that I was all right. He had not heard about the situation yet, but later told me he was grateful for this call from a woman with a "New York" accent.

Suddenly the world outside the windows went black. At the same time, on the television, I watched the first World Trade Center building collapse. It was the most surreal experience of my life, I believe, watching an electronic account of the world as it crumpled outside my windows. Then the second building fell. This was a true disaster. I thought about the busy but calm concourse I had walked through just a few hours ago. Gone forever.

Around 11AM the word came that all of lower Manhattan was to be evacuated. The subways were not running. My office was at Metrotech, just over the Brooklyn Bridge, so I decided to walk. Fortunately I had on walking shoes. As hordes of people started north, I saw women removing their high heels as

they walked. Looking straight ahead I saw autumn blue skies, looking back I saw grey and black smoke rising over the site. My eyes filled with tears.

Emergency crews at Chase were preparing so people could spend the night at Metrotech, since no one knew when trains would resume service. The phone connections became spotty as much of the communication technology was at the WTC. I went out and bought some clothes and food for an overnight stay, as the emergency people delivered cots to various offices. No work was done that day as people tried to figure out how they were going to get home; people lived far out in Brooklyn and Queens, in Westchester County, in New Jersey. Everything had stopped as the city, state, and federal governments tried to figure out what had happened, what else might happen, and how to deal with it. The fear in the air was intense. The directive was to get home if you could.

About 7PM the word came that the subways had started again, though not stopping at all stations. NJ Transit was also running, so I decided to go home. Not many people were on the train, and everyone was really, really serious.

I spent most of the next week reading the New York Times and crying. As much as I could with intermittent phone service, I talked to my boss and my staff on the telephone. Our instructions were to work at home or at least stay at home. Nevertheless, several people tried to drive into Brooklyn—not a good idea as there were multiple checkpoints and horrendous traffic. One woman told me she had to go to the bathroom so badly, she just got out of her car and squatted right there on Cadman Plaza.

One of my colleagues, Kelvin, had been stuck on the subway for several hours on that September morning, and was badly traumatized—he had no idea what had happened and didn't know if he was going to get out of it alive. Several weeks after the attack, Chase held a Memorial Service—a meeting to acknowledge the event and allow people to come together to mourn and gain some catharsis. Kelvin

didn't want to go, but I insisted. The boxes of Kleenex placed throughout the auditorium were used up by the end of the session. Public support is unbelievably important even for an introvert like me.

As time went on, things became slightly more normal. Ultimately over 2600 people died in the World Trade Center attacks. By the grace of God, no one close to me was killed, though I knew several people who lost friends and relatives. Walking around the city looking at all the posters of missing people was very sad.

The Government decided it had to go to war with Afghanistan, since that is where Osama Bin Landen was said to be headquartered. Many people I knew joined me in protesting this action. The Patriot Act was passed, another knee jerk reaction to the event. Scams quickly appeared to defraud hurting families, and misformation was rampant, as when Christy Whitman, head of the EPA at the time, said it was perfectly safe for workers at the World Trade Center Site.

One of the major tenets of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Qi Gong practice that I follow is *There are no Accidents*. Everything happens for a reason. Why did this occur? We can see the results of the 9/11 attacks in two ways. In many ways the world is not a better place: wars, more surveillance, hucksterism, racism, economic instability. But individually people drew together, learned from each other, helped each other. Many people grew to know more about the world outside their own lives.

We are now, in 2020, in the middle of a situation that surpasses 9/11, Hurricane Sandy, or the Great Recession. The same dichotomies are being replayed. The response of the Federal government is again badly lacking. Hoarding, fraud, propaganda, and lies sprang up overnight. People all over the country are ignoring the social distancing directives. But within 24 hours of Governor Murphy's stay at home order, people in my town had organized a system to provide food for families who rely on School Lunches, and within a week there was a process in place to support seniors and other people in need. Individuals are making personal protective equipment for local hospitals on their 3-D printers. The only

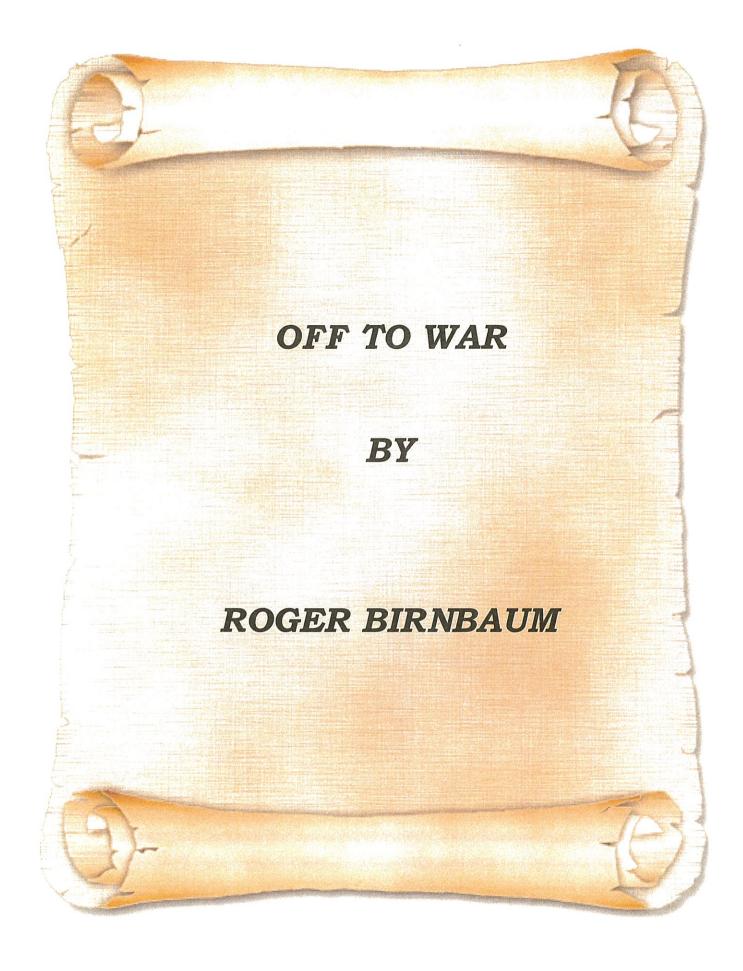
things we can control are our personal responses and our personal actions. We can take care of ourselves and our loved ones.

Today I don't know the reason for the coronavirus pandemic, but I know that at some point we will find out.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

WRITING "Forget all the rules. Forget about being published. Write for yourself and celebrate writing." "Melinda Haynes

@ Belinda Witzenhausen 2012



OFF TO WAR

It didn't occur to me then – nor, for that matter, even to this day – that I had been abandoned. It was what it was.

We (my fraternal twin brother and I) had been told at school that the country was at war. Little more than a year later, in April of 1943, when we were six-years old, my mother, a registered nurse, left home to join the U.S. Army Nurse Corps [USANC]; the family Airedale Terrier, Jesse, followed shortly after to the Army Canine Corps (soon to be rejected as unacceptably friendly and unable to respond to the command "Attack!"); and my father (too young for WW I and too old for WW II) stayed behind in our Flushing, NY apartment, close to his work at Lily-Tulip Cup Corp. My brother and I were dispatched to the Freehold Military Boarding School in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

No explanation was given. Perhaps we were too young to understand. But even after the family was reunited less than a year later, and for the following 55 years until my parents' death, the matter was never discussed. Any motivations or explanations were taken with them to the grave (or, in their case, to Tampa Bay in Florida, where their ashes were scattered at their request.)

Of course, it could have been a burst of patriotic fervor. My mother's two brothers were in the service, and my maternal immigrant grandparents proudly hung three blue stars in their window. But this seems an inadequate explanation for a mother to send two very young children away to military boarding school.

More likely, I came to believe, it was the action of a young woman who felt trapped in the traditional role of wife and mother as defined in the 1940s. [Being the mother of twins did not make it easier: first, she carried us both to term during what was to date the hottest summer on record in New York City, with of course no air conditioning in those days; then, she told us later, she would forget which twin had been fed, probably overfeeding one while starving the other. Distress over the loss of a subsequent baby during pregnancy certainly didn't help.]

Perhaps as with others who joined the war effort, this was a chance to escape conventional, even suffocating boundaries. For some women, it was "Rosie the Riveter." For my adventurous mother, it was the USANC...her departure from home a precursor to the plot of the film "Kramer vs. Kramer," but with the kids stashed away in military boarding school rather than enjoying enhanced father-child bonding as in the movie.

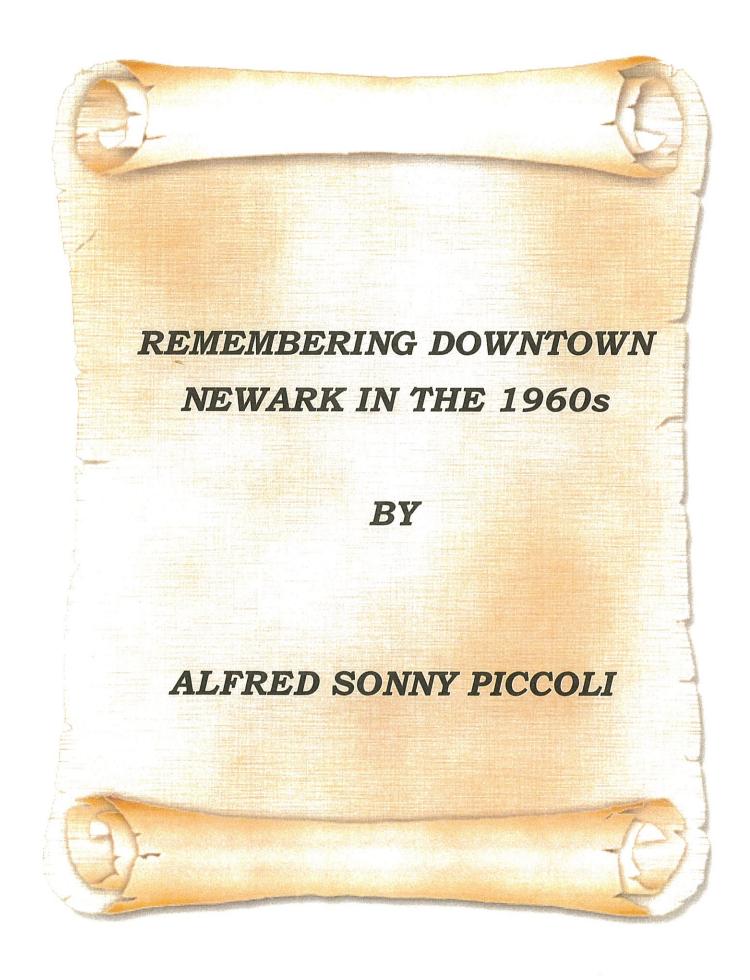
My memories of Freehold Military School after all these years are few and dim. I recall strict regimentation (of six-year olds?), soldier-like uniforms, Episcopalian church on Sunday, and not much in the way of nurturing. (I still remember a paddling I received for venturing out of a second-story window onto the adjoining

rooftop to retrieve a wayward game piece...what else was a young soldier to do?) My grandparents lived in Freehold and must have visited, but I have no recollection of that. My mother was stationed at nearby Fort Monmouth, but without a car (not easily available during the war), getting to the school meant taking a bus from the base into New York City and then another bus from there out to Freehold. (She later said that on occasion a sympathetic soldier would lend her a car to make the short drive.) I don't recall any visits from my father.

With my mother's discharge from the USANC, the family reunited in a comfortable 2-bedroom apartment in Flushing, Queens. My brother and I were enrolled in the relatively relaxed civilian atmosphere of P.S.24's second grade. But as our family life resumed, my mother's restlessness continued unabated. While neighborhood moms tended to their domestic duties at home, her priorities were relative independence and personal fulfillment. She worked as a private-duty nurse, returned to college while my brother and I picked up some household chores, including food shopping and cooking duties; and with her newly-minted BA degree from St. John's University, took a job as school nurse-teacher in suburban Roslyn, Long Island. The housekeeping left much to be desired. "Ozzie and Harriet" it was not!

But my brother and I learned self-reliance; my mother's earnings made it possible for my parents to put two sons through college at the same time; and she provided a powerful role model that I hope made my brother and me more understanding and supportive husbands and fathers.

In sum, my mother, while loving and devoted toward her family, believed that women should have an identity separate from their husbands and children, the freedom to pursue their own intellectual and career interests, and their own source of funds and bank accounts so they wouldn't have to depend on their husbands for spending money. But what became the accepted norm half-a-century later, was not viewed kindly by American society in the 1940s and 50s. My mother was an underappreciated pioneer some two generations ahead of her time. (Perhaps Eleanor Roosevelt was her inspiration.) I came to really admire her for these traits but, to my regret, I don't believe I ever told her so.



REMEMBERING DOWNTOWN NEWARK NJ IN THE 1960s

Growing up as a young boy in Newark NJ during the early part of the 1960s, I began to realize that New Jersey's largest city provided many interesting things to do and places to enjoy. Eventually, I discovered at its epicenter in Downtown Newark, the busy intersection of Broad and Market Street, also known as Four Corners. This was where people of every race and religion, both rich and poor would mingle, playing their part in a great American melting pot experience. As I reminisce about some of my own nostalgic experiences, I realize how very lucky I was to also be there at this important time and special place in American history. In 1960, I was 10 years old living in a North Newark public housing project. I used to earn money by finding empty soda bottles that I would return to local stores so I could receive the 2 & 5¢ deposit refunds. One day I met an older boy named Michael who told me about a place called, "Downtown," He explained that there were stores filled with toys for sale, and even though we had no money to buy any of them, we could still play with the ones that were on display for free. That was all the convincing I needed for me to board the 10¢ independent #18 bus to the place that would become my frequent playground throughout the next decade. I felt a sense of awe the first time I stepped off the bus onto one of the Four Corners. In every direction I looked were vast numbers of department stores, movie theaters, commercial businesses, historical sites and places to eat.

We decided to head up Market Street to inspect a massive ten-story department store named *Bamberger's*. Upon entering, I was amazed by seeing an escalator for the first time in my life. It was fun riding up several flights on these futuristic steps to the toy department. There I discovered a giant room filled with shelves of toys. I felt like I had arrived in paradise! Later back at home, I was happy to have found an enjoyable place I could always go to, even in some of my darkest hours. The lyrics of *Petula Clark's* 1964 hit song *Downtown* expressed my sentiments when she sang: "When you're alone and life is making you lonely you can always

go – downtown. When you've got worries, all the noise, and the hurry - Seems to help, I know – downtown. Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city. How can you lose?"

Sometimes my friends and I would play in *Military Park* on Broad Street. The park featured the bronze statute *Wars of America*, created by *Gutzon Borglum*. The colossal monument was comprised of forty-two humans and two horses set on a massive granite base. I remember we would have fun playing on the statute a form of tag called, "army."

One of my favorite places, I used to love to go to was the pinball arcade on Market Street. The mesmerizing sights and sounds of the nickel a game pinball machines captivated me. And right down the street was a pizzeria with delicious 15¢ slices. On the corner was *Nedicks* renowned for their hot dogs and signature orange drink that I always found to be a treat. On Market street was the *Army&Navy* store with a large selection of inexpensive clothes. Another store offering low-budget merchandise was fittingly named *John's Bargain Store*. Unfortunately, I hardly ever had any money at this time in my life. Nevertheless, I always enjoyed feeling like I was on an adventurous journey. I never got bored exploring the many department stores such as *S. Klein On The Square, Haynes, Kresge*, and *Orbach*. They competed with each other selling everything imaginable while keeping pace with the rapidly changing styles and trends. I still have vivid recollections of when iridescent pants and highroll shirts became the latest fashion rage. Bright color Banlon shirts also quickly became a fad. I admired the stylish Italian knit shirts. They were expensive but still sold well because they helped make anyone wearing one look distinctly modern.

Thom McAn, a shoe store on Market Street began to sell Beatle-boots because the rock & roll group *The Beatles* wore them. These were an ankle-high, Cuban-heeled style boot with a pointed toe that I imagined would help to make me look cool too. Eventually, I was able to buy a pair with money earned selling *Newark Evening News* newspapers on McCarter Highway.

I will never forget being on Broad Street in *Woolworth's*, as part of a crowd, watching a demonstration of a new invention. The salesman was swirling eggs around in a *Teflon* coated frying pan. His, "never to stick" sales pitch claim convinced a lot of people to purchase this

amazing \$1.00 cooking innovation. A block away was *McCrory's*. The store had a photobooth that my friends and I would cram inside to take fun snapshots.

At the free *Newark Public Library*, on Washington Street, was the fun, safe place where I began a lifelong passion for reading. There I discovered a huge endless treasure of books that sparked my imagination and curiosity for knowledge. From there I would take a short walk up Washington Street to *The Newark Museum*. I marveled at the major collections of American art and extensive art from around the world. I became fascinated with astronomy from exploring exhibitions in the museum's planetarium. Behind the museum, I would unwind in a beautiful garden with sculptures and then visit the historical *Newark Fire Museum* that I thought was interesting.

I was often drawn back to downtown Newark because of my love for the movies that were shown in the spectacular theaters built back during the Vaudeville era. They had ornate architecture consisting of high-lighted dome ceilings, balconies, brass railings, and huge curtains that would open before and close after each movie presentation. I recall paying 25¢ for admission to the Adams Theater on Branford Place, and 10¢ for popcorn. The show began featuring cartoon previews of Popeye the Sailor Man and Mighty Mouse. Then followed was a series of short films of the comedy slapstick team The 3 Stooges, Moe, Larry & Curly. Throughout the 1960s decade, I enjoyed seeing dozens of extraordinary movies in the theaters throughout downtown Newark. At the Paramount Theater on Market Street, I viewed Goldfinger, the third in a series of James Bond spy films. I still can recall the lyrics of the unforgettable 1965 hit song Goldfinger, sung by Shirley Bassey. In the RKO Proctors, I received an important history lesson of when Spartacus, starring Kurt Douglas led a gladiator revolt against the Roman Empire. The cinematic classic depicted a compassionate story of men who fought against being held in bondage and oppressive tyranny. The Bradford was another one of my favorite theaters where I would go to see blockbuster films such as The Great Escape. The compelling film was based on a true story of allied POWs escaping from a Nazi prison camp in WWII. I held my breath when Steve McQueen made a daring motorcycle jump over a barbwire fence. In 1967 in the Loew's Theater on Broad Street, I watched In The

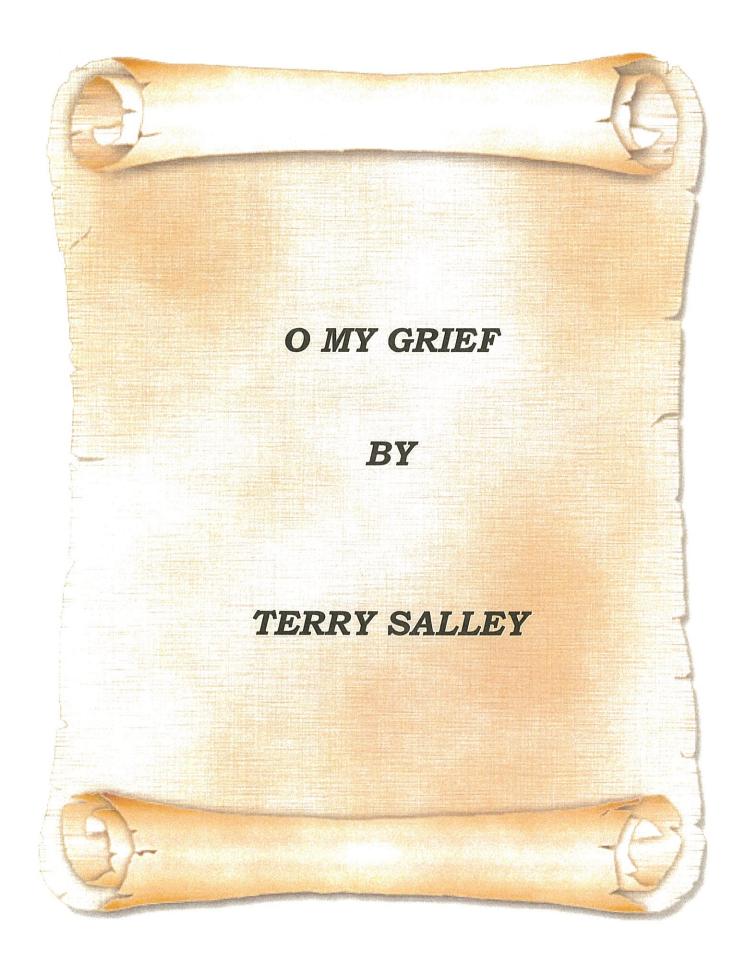
Heat Of The Night, the groundbreaking, thought-provoking film about race relations in America. Sidney Poitier portrayed Detective Tibbs, a black detective from Philadelphia, who becomes involved with a murder investigation in racially explosive, rural Mississippi. A bigoted, white sheriff reluctantly seeks his help to find the truth. In the process, Detective Tibbs gains the respect, and friendship of the southern police Chief. The film won the Academy Award Oscar for Best Picture that I believed it truly deserved.

Sometimes I used to walk up Market Street to sit on the bench attached to the side of the inspiring, bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln, overlooking the Old Essex County Courthouse.

The magnificent, larger than life sculpture, provided me not only physical comfort but, also uplifting my belief that courageous people with integrity did exist. While I sat in contemplation next to Lincoln, I felt I belonged, and was a part of this diverse, great city. This strengthened my faith in humanity, leading to my better understanding and acceptance of

As a young man, I was faced with difficult fundamental questions of what should I do in life. One day while walking on Raymond Boulevard my eyes became fixed on *Newark Penn Station*. The impressive Art-Deco designed major transportation complex seemed to beckon me toward it. I watched people bustling about in their rush to board transport upon the multiple train rail and bus carriers leading to any destination in the world. I began to realize with a calm clarity that my future was filled with endless possibilities too. Growing up in Newark prepared me with confidence and optimism for my journey in life along the roads ahead.

others.



O My Grief

the weather outside was gray and cold on this particular morning, as I laid awake, thinking of my conversation with my oldest daughter "Terrell" the day before.

She is my so call 'SGT" in our family and keeps the rest of the family informed and in lin. My other daughters-Stacy, and Towanda after years of bumping heads with (SGT) just decided to let it go.

However, it was brought to my attention again of my wife "Marilyn's" health which was slowly deteriorating, that we would have to move out of Brooklyn to be closer to the children who resided in New Jersey.

I was currently working at F.E.M.A. after retiring from the NYPD, I must say that I loved it. however, I wasn't aware of how serious her health was.

I complained about the hospital, the doctors and everything in between, all because I didn't want to move to New Jersey nor any other state. I even stated that she could move and I would stay with the house.

As the days drag by, I bought a (Stairmaster mobile chair) so "Mom" as I called her, could be mobile and not have to climb the stairs.

Well it came to a head months later at a family gathering. And the finality was; we were going to move.

So, after 43 years in our home in Flatbush, Brooklyn, we were going. But mentally I was very angry, depressed and just couldn't get my head around it. However, it all went well "God Bless my Girls" yes family and friends coming together to make the transfer happen. My daughters had checked out some areas and settled on a luxury dwelling in South Orange, New Jersey in which we fell in love with and Marilyn seem to love the special attention also. And yes, the family were at her beckoning call. She was "Still my Queen", their Queen and the world was good.

Time has a way of moving in snap- shot periods. Our moving, settling in and readjusting.

Take for instance; when crossing the street, I realize that cars slowed or stopped allowing me to cross. However, when I'm Brooklyn, I have to run-for life.

So, our routine begins with home attendees, technicians, lab work, and doctors' appointments. It becomes a numbing blur.

The months come and go and the then another year. But deep within our minds we as family are now realizing that only a miracle could stop the slow eroding possess that was taking her further from this earthly realm.

Her doctors and specialist advised us that all was being done to sop or slow the failing kidneys and liver. How about Dialysis? we implied. Well Mom had stated that no matter what she didn't want to be hooked up to any machine, for her sake or the family.

It was brought to our attention by our granddaughter Kaya, of having a post birthday for Marilyn, whose birthday was in July which was a great idea. So early August after texting family and friends across the country, we came together at the luxurious Highland Pavilion located in West Orange, NJ.

After getting the green light from her doctors, we began working on Mom from the top of her head to the Cinderella slippers. (by the way she had a Tiara for her head also) yes, she was the Queen of the Ball that evening. It was a story book evening with family and friends, old and new from near and far.

There was plenty of good food, music and even a magician for the kids. It was truly a Grand Ball for all. However, like Cinderella, we had to leave the ball to return Mom to the hospital.

Well it was one day later that she was transferred to the Center for Hope in Hospice. Another night of so little sleep, and I had to returned home at 10:00 PM. After leaving Marilyn at the Stately Complex Center of Hope in Scotch Plain, NJ only to return the next morning.

The room was nice and comfortable, and I sat at her bedside trying to be strong but it was very hard. I believe she knows what I'm thinking, yes after 56 years I guess we can read each other's thoughts.

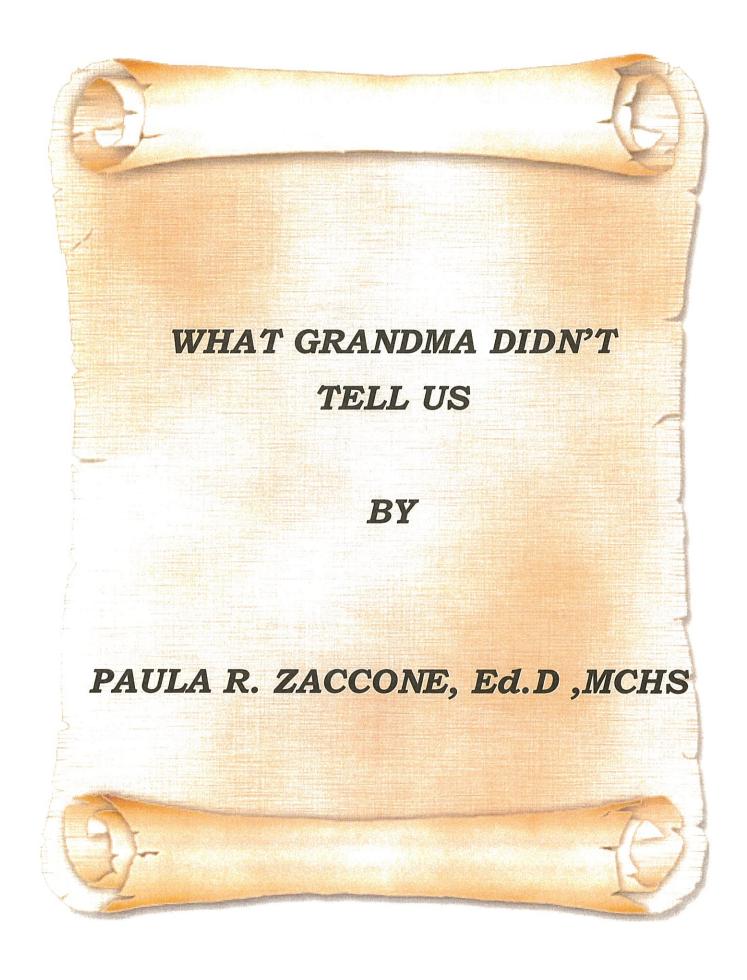
Now she doesn't talk and barely eat or drink. She waves her arms up towards the ceiling time and time again. I ring the buzzer for the night nurse who checks her for pain that she may be experiencing. "They do that sometimes before passing "says the nurse. So, Mom is given a little morphine which settles her down.

Now it's after 4:00 am and I'm dozing on and off when Marilyn turns on her back and raises her arms, open her eyes then her mouth like she wants to speak. Then

closes her eyes and bring her arms down slowly. I called the nurse who then checks her vitals then turns to me and says "I'm sorry Mr. Salley.... your wife is gone".

So, It's the night afterwards while trying to sleep that I heard her calling me to come move her legs or bring her some water.

May God Bless Her for she was my "Earth Angel'



What Grandma Didn't Tell Us

In the time spent with Rosina Pico, my maternal grandmother, we experienced many understandings though neither of us spoke the other's first language. Grandma Pico, from whom I learned core values, communicated well especially on matters of discipline. Upon reflection, I wished that I had asked questions to learn more about her youthful life and family in Italy.

My generation of family members attended to matters of the present with little regard to details of life in Italy from where my grandparents emigrated near 1900. In fact, my speaking in Italian was never encouraged except to meet academic requirements. The year 1990 was a time before maps were replaced by GPSs and web searches for one's ancestry were available. Unlike present times there were no websites and commercial invitations to discover facts regarding family heritage.

More than twenty years after all four Italian grandparents were deceased, my husband planned a European tour from Paris enroute to southern Greece where we would celebrate a family wedding. Our travels included historical and cultural stopovers in the respective countries. While riding along the highway of Southern Italy, I uttered: "I think that my grandparents were from this area". My husband questioned: "Why do you think that"? Not knowing the name of the town in Southern Italy, I sensed that it must be near the green hills visible in the background. Road signs indicated that we were near the village of "Benevento".

It was my husband's suggestion to call my mother and plan to stop in Italy on the return trip. I was certain that Mom would know the town's name but would likely say that there were no remaining relatives. Sure enough, Mom confirmed the town of "Cassano" as the birthplace of both her parents and assured me that no living relatives remained.

On the last Friday in August, our return to Paris airport was planned to allow two days for the hunt of the little town in the province of Avellino. We stopped at a pharmacy where the employees pleasantly searched maps to direct us. Nearby, I noticed crowds of people headed to a church. Driven by curiosity I peeked through the church door. There stood a familiar statue adorn with brightly lit candles. I immediately identified the honoree to be that of St. Bartolomeo, the patron saint annually honored by my grandparents and many loyalists in our New Jersey town.

With joy I became assured that we must be in the right area. It was more than a coincidence that this was the fourth weekend in August, the same calendar dates that the local Jerseyans would celebrate the feast of the blade-bearing saint with parades, fireworks, nightly concerts, and dozens of stands of foods, toys, and mementos on our decorated street.

Our finding inspired us to further search for Cassano. We stopped at a waterfall, only to notice a poster announcing the feast of St. Bartolomeo and festive lights atop of nearby hill. A short ride up a steep hill was where we met a few men in the square who questioned our destination. The challenge was to communicate our interests in locating the original habitat of my mother's late aunt whose name was unknown. When I mentioned the surnames of New Jersey neighbors who once visited the town, no connection was made. It was when I related that my grandmother's

sister lived to be 100 years of age and the town gave her a festival, that the small group chanted "Carmela, Carmela" and fled from the square. Almost instantly a group including an elderly gentleman with a cane, a nun, and at least four others appeared who seemed eager to meet the two Americans.

They pointed to Carmela's former home that was uninhabited and damaged from a recent earthquake. We expressed a desire to visit the local cemetery where Carmela might be buried. The elderly gentleman, Giuseppe, eagerly offered to accompany us. He led us to the flower-laden tomb of Aunt Carmela. In my frail Italian, I asked Giuseppe who placed fresh flowers. He admitted with joy that he had done so. Again, I feebly asked how he was related to Carmela. Enthusiastically, he responded "Mi Mamma". With shared excitement, we immediately embraced.

Upon return to the square we reassured my newly found cousin that we would seek a hotel and return for the evening of Saint's festival. Onto the nearby village of Montella where we rested before being greeted by a gentleman whom we recognized from the afternoon meeting. He announced that others were waiting as he led us to a building adjacent to the main square. Like obedient and trusting children, we followed him to be warmly greeted at Giuseppe's home. Seated around the food-laden table were familiar faces from the afternoon meeting. They were all family: Giuseppe and his wife, his adult children, his sister the nun, among other cousins. His ten-year old grandson, Giuseppe II, was pre-occupied by the amusements offered at the festival. My heart pounded as though I struck gold. All were happy to share stories of the centurion, my mother's aunt. Clearly, the Italian-born relatives knew more of their American relatives than the Americans knew of their relatives of Cassano. The annual feast drew extended relatives who otherwise resided outside the region. Had our visit occurred on any other date, it would have been less eventful for all involved. In my ecstasy I thought: my parents, sister, and all my American relatives will never believe this. We could not leave for the evening without promising to return the next morning.

A tour of the family farm allowed us to sample fresh fruits and vegetables. A pond of water was introduced as my grandmother's laundering facility. Nearby on the Apian Way, we were told that digging would produce human bones. Next, we hurried to the top of the hill near a castle. We were in plain view of St. Bart as he was carried by the faithful. With tears and a ritualistic donation, the familiar saint passed us by on the hill of Cassano. Emotions were heightened by the warmth of my newly found family and the reminiscence of my childhood memories. I had vivid flashbacks of my youthful experiences and the white dress I wore while dutifully pinning donations on ribbons adorning the statue.

With well wishes, hugs, and good-byes, I was gifted with an antique platter and told: "Your grandmother ate on this". It sits in an unreachable site in my home to remind me of the riches of my Italian heritage and the enduring bond. Upon return to the U.S., I related the details of the Cassano experiences to every living relative. Additionally, I composed a descriptive and photographic account for each set of cousins. In so doing the door to Cassano opened for Pico family.

Four years later I prepared to speak at an international health education conference in Torino. I contacted the Cassano relatives to arranged for a short return visit and learned that I had a cousin living there. After a short flight from Torino to Naples and a bus ride to Cassano, I stayed at the home of Giuseppe I's son and family. Giuseppe II had grown into his teen years and introduced me to his young sister Stephania, an addition to the family since my last visit.

In Torino, Adriano Petriello, another of my grandmother's nephews, met with me and proved to be quite a family historian. From a copy of my great-grandfather's Italian army discharge papers, Antonio interpreted the historical Italian report of the soldier's height as two meters tall with eyes the color of the sea. He provided me with a copy of our ancestral tree and accompanied me to dine with his sister, another cousin. My union of Grandma's nieces and nephews expanded further. Thereafter, no holiday existed without exchanges of best wishes from both Northern and Southern Italy.

Before beginning his career as an athletic trainer, Giuseppe II ventured to our New Jersey home for the summer. Together we toured landmarks in New Jersey, New York, and Washington D.C. The trip must have been pleasurable for Giuseppe. Years later, he and his wife Palma based their honeymoon at my home. The couple enjoyed travels among the states and a visit to a Caribbean Island. Four generations of Pico's from as far away as California attended a family celebration held at my home.

Indications of the success of my discovery are that four American cousins have since visited with Pico family members in Italy. While it has forever been my quest to leave behind a positive difference in the world, my Italian discoveries have linked multiple generations of family in two countries. Through differences of politics, language, and geography, the bonds among Pico's exist among members of the current third and fourth generations, and hopefully hereafter.



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