

**A Book
Filled With
Wisdom, Love
& Laughter**

On "The Virg"

*There are
two types of
people
in the world,
Italians
and those
that wish
they were
Italian.*

**Quote from
her 2015 book:**

**Virginia's
104 Life
Lessons
Learned**



Virginia Proia Rea

Stories of Our Italian Family

Written on the Occasion of My 105th Birthday



ON THE VIRG

Virginia
Proia Rea

**Stories of Our
Italian Family**

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Forward

July 25, 2016

My Dearest Family and Friends,

Another year has gone since I last sat down to write you. After the rave reviews I received about my first book, [104 Life Lessons Learned](#), this past winter I wrote down a couple of stories to share with my fans. After all, why should I deprive my



family and friends of more of my infinite knowledge, wisdom, and good sense? That was meant as a joke, so you can now begin laughing! Well, one story led to another, then another, and finally, to many, many more. I just couldn't stop!

It was important to me that I share more about our family. There are a few things you might not have known or, possibly, details I've never shared. Though, as much as I like to talk and tell stories to anyone who'll sit down and listen, that's almost too difficult to believe! It's pretty safe for me to assume that

if you are reading this letter, you're at least going to try my second literary effort, written to celebrate my 105th birthday. You'll find it chocked full of tidbits of information that I think you'll enjoy!

To some of our youngest family members, it might come as a surprise that when I was a kid, there was no television in our home. In fact, to shock you even more, TV had not yet been invented! To take it further, even if TV's had existed when I was born in 1911, we didn't have any electricity to power a TV or even to turn on lights in the evening to brighten our home. As you read this, I can almost imagine you thinking,

“What in heaven’s name did you do for fun?” Well, let me assure you there was plenty of fun to be had, especially in a large family like ours with eight kids.

The one thing we all enjoyed was sitting around our big kitchen table listening to our parents tell stories. They might be about what kind of things they did when they were kids, what our grandparents back in Italy were like, or even how our parents met, fell in love and decided to come to America. We really didn’t care too much about the subject of the story so much as just listening to them being told. It was our entertainment, we didn’t need a TV. Both Mama and Papa told us stories, but it was our Papa who was really good at it. Papa would use different voices and act out parts of his story; he’d make the story come alive for everyone who was listening. Oh goodness, how he could make us laugh!

My second book is a collection of stories about our family and friends. You’ll find out how Mama and Papa met, fell in love, were separated, finally married and came to America. You’ll learn some of the obstacles Papa and Mama had to overcome, what they had to do to make their way in their new country and how hard they worked to make a good life for their family. There are also a few stories about the adventures and challenges that came my way in life. Also included is a story about each of my sisters and brothers and some about our life growing up in Washington, Pennsylvania. In addition, you’ll learn about how I met, fell in love and married Jack, and came to Michigan. There are a couple of stories about our married life, plus a few stories about each of our four children, and possibly, a few that might just surprise you.

Now, this is something you have to keep in mind when reading my book. Stories are how we share events with each other. When someone tells a story, it’s from their point of view, what they remember, or how they saw or heard about what happened. Things told in the stories might not be exactly as everyone remembers they happened. These are the stories the way I recall them being told or, if I was there, the way I remember it happened.

Hopefully, you’ll enjoy my stories and learn a thing or two about our family. They say that everyone has at least one book in them. Well, it looks like I just proved that some

of us have at least two! You never know, though, do you? Two's a good number, but three, now that would be something to brag about!

With love,

Virginia Proia Rea



*A Taste of
Jack and Virginia*





Dedication

To my parents Rocco and Giovanna

My husband Jack and our dear daughter Mary

And to my children Tom, Jack and Ann

Who are always there for me even when I've told them they weren't needed

And who gave their younger sister Mary

Unwavering love, untiring devotion and unending care throughout her life

For that alone there is no amount of gratitude

Which will ever be adequate enough.

With love, Mother

Stories of Our Italian Family



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Enjoy our family's stories!

No Donkey? No Marriage!

Every story has a beginning and my family's story is no different. So for those who were not around when it began, and to tell you the truth that's every one of us, me included, let me explain it the way I heard it from Papa and Mama all those many years ago.



My parent's story begins about 1905 in the small hill town of Arpino, Italy. Who would think that such a mundane thing as a donkey could determine social status, stand in the way of true love, and jeopardize my family's very existence? Well it did, so let me continue.

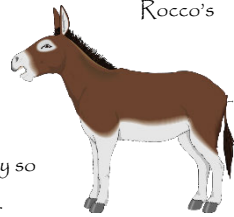
On a warm summer's evening, twenty-year old Rocco Proia strolled across the piazza in the center of Arpino. Within moments, Rocco noticed a beautiful and

captivating young woman who was out walking with her cousins. Immediately, Rocco was smitten with the diminutive, dark-haired beauty who he later learned was Giovanna DonFrancisco. Usually very confident and assertive, Rocco was so taken with the eighteen-year old he couldn't find the courage to speak or to even approach.

Each evening Rocco gazed at the lovely Giovanna laughing and talking with her cousins as she meandered through the piazza. As his admiration for her grew, so did his courage. Rocco eventually found a way to have his eyes meet Giovanna's. She was immediately enchanted with the handsome young man with the twinkling eyes and alluring smile.

Although both families were poor tenant farmers, Giovanna's family proudly owned a donkey to help on their farm. Because of owning that animal, the DonFranciscos were considered almost prosperous and privileged.

Rocco's family was so poor, they had to do all their farm work by hand. They could only dream of being rich enough to own a donkey someday. A romance blossomed, but because Rocco's family was so poor and Giovanna's family so proud, the romance was forbidden by the DonFranciscos.



Rocco's

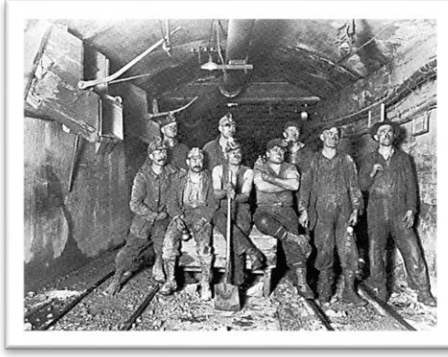
There was no way that Giovanna's family would ever allow their daughter to lower herself to marry a man who didn't have any money or even own a donkey. Today we would consider that line of thinking absolutely "ass"inine!

If Rocco was ever to be accepted, he would have to be able to provide Giovanna the life her family demanded of any suitor. Knowing the only way he could rise from the ashes of his meager existence, Rocco chose to go to America to seek his fortune.

One night on the piazza, Rocco whispered to Giovanna his plans to leave for America to begin a new life. He had but one request. Rocco needed to know if Giovanna would promise to marry no one else and wait for his return. Forlorn and heart-broken with the thought of her true love traveling thousands of miles away, Giovanna professed her love and vowed to wait for Rocco. He pledged to return sometime after her twenty-first birthday, when she would be of age and free to marry.

In 1905 Rocco left with one small suitcase that held all his worldly possessions. He was filled with the determination to seek his fortune in American and then return to marry his beloved. Although he neither spoke nor understood a word of English, he was able to get himself to Washington, Pennsylvania and find employment in the coal mines. Rocco often worked double shifts or volunteered for the dangerous job of entering the mines immediately after a new vein had been dynamited so he could earn

extra money. He led a very frugal life, living with his sister Lucia and her husband Raphaeli Don Francisco to save the money needed to return for Giovanna.



While Rocco was toiling in the coal mines, Giovanna was resolute in her determination to stay true and wait for his return. Even with intense pressure from her family to forget Rocco, she defied them by refusing to marry any of the more suitable young men who vied for her hand in marriage.

Although it was not easy, Giovanna ignored the demands of her parents, as well as the amorous advances of the eligible young bachelors of Arpino, to wait for her beloved Rocco.

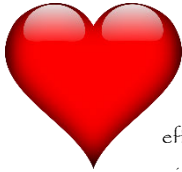
More than two long years passed before Rocco returned to Italy on September 24, 1907, the eve of Giovanna's twenty-second birthday. Boldly and without any hesitation, Rocco ran to Giovanna's home to ask her parents for their daughter's hand in marriage. Believing that he was still extremely poor and an entirely unacceptable suitor, Senor and Senora Don Francisco adamantly refused. However, Giovanna had already made up her mind to marry Rocco and had packed her bags. Her love for him won out.

Very shortly after her birthday, on October 10, she defiantly left her parents' home and ran into the arms of her true love. That day they were married at the small church in the middle of the piazza in Arpino, the very place where Rocco first set eyes on his Giovanna. Only a few members of Rocco's family attended. For a month, Rocco and Giovanna honeymooned in his family's home until he returned to America. Being estranged from her own family, Giovanna continued to live with her in-laws, the Proias, after Rocco left.



With Rocco's encouragement, Giovanna reconciled with her family prior to leaving Italy. Much to her delight, her family brought her a wedding gift of rounds of their best cheese and pieces of cured beef to take with her to America. Six months later, on April 21, 1908, Giovanna left Arpino for Naples to board a ship and begin her new life. Sadly, Giovanna knew that she might never see her family or her Italian homeland again. Arriving in New York, Giovanna was heartbroken that the rules of this new country would not allow her to bring her husband the gifts from her family; with a great deal of sorrow she was forced to leave them behind on Ellis Island before taking her first steps in America.

Throughout their almost forty years of marriage, Rocco took great delight in sharing with his adoring children how he pursued and eventually won the heart of his beloved



Giovanna. He was a wonderful storyteller who became very animated and emotional while recalling the obstacles that had to be overcome during their courtship; all of which were worth the effort because the prize was having Giovanna as his wife. He considered himself the luckiest man alive to have such a beautiful, intelligent, and resourceful woman by his side.

When expressing his love for Giovanna, Rocco also shared his fervent love for each of his children: Nancy, Virginia, Josephine, Anna, Albert, Teresa, Arthur, George and the short lived Michael. Giovanna would always glow as Rocco told the story of their romance for she knew that she had married a wonderful man who had filled her life with adventure, happiness, and love. Giovanna and Rocco thanked their lucky stars each day for the wonderful life they created together.

And now you know the story behind the two loving people who molded their children into individuals who also raised loving and caring children. My story has come to an end, but the legend of Rocco and Giovanna will continue to be told by their children, and on to their grandchildren, and on to their great grandchildren, and on to their great, great grandchildren, and so on, and so on, and so on. And now you, too, know their remarkable love story!

Long Distance Love

In any good story, there's always known and unknown elements. Now when my story begins, I'm not even in the picture; in fact, my family hasn't even gotten started. There aren't any Proia-DonFrancisco offspring...yet! My siblings and I are no more than a glint in our father's eye.

So let's go back more than 111 years and I'll remind you of some of the many obstacles my parents had to overcome before they could marry and I could arrive.



Arpino, Italy

It's 1905 and we're in the little central Italian hill town of Arpino. This is

where my father, Rocco

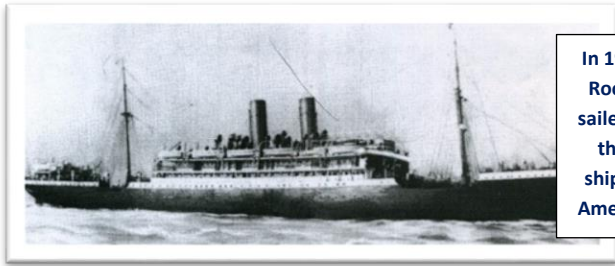
Giovanni Proia, would find the love of his life in the dark-haired beauty Giovanna DonFrancisco, who'd one day become my mother. Giovanna's parents, Angelo and Paola, forbade the budding romance between the two young sweethearts, as they knew Rocco did not have even a single lira to his name. Although both my parents came from poor families who were sharecroppers, Mama's parents owned a donkey. This put her family in a higher social position than Papa's family and Signore and Signora DonFrancisco would not allow their daughter to marry the son of a family that was in a different social class. While they tried and tried to convince Giovanna's parents that they loved each other, and that Rocco was a fine young man who would be a good husband, the DonFranciscos were adamant that the relationship between the two had to end.

Rocco was just as determined to marry his beloved Giovanna. He knew the only way that was going to be possible would be if he proved to the DonFranciscos that he could provide their daughter with at least the same life style to which she was

accustomed. Rocco didn't have any formal education or any other skills that would help get him the type of job that would earn him a substantial amount of money. After giving this problem much thought, Rocco decided he must go to America, the Land of Opportunity, to seek his fortune.

Giovanna was heartbroken when Rocco told her that he'd made the decision that he must leave Italy and journey to America to earn the money they'd need to marry. He promised his sweetheart that he would work very hard and save what he earned so when he came back to Arpino, they could wed. Giovanna knew that her parents would still oppose their marriage when Rocco returned. However, if he came back after her twenty-first birthday she would be of legal age and not need their permission.

She'd be able to marry whomever she wanted. For that reason,



**In 1905
Rocco
sailed in
this
ship to
America**

Rocco vowed he'd return to Arpino after Giovanna's twenty-first birthday and they would wed.

Now it's time to reveal what might be the unknown element in my parent's love story, so let's get right to it. It's a good one. Rocco and Giovanna devised a plan by which they would keep in touch across the more than 4,500 miles that separated them; every week they'd send letters back and forth to one another. Since Giovanna's parents were opposed to the romance, Rocco said that he'd mail his letters to her cousin's house. Giovanna's cousin would then sneak the letters to her. In this way, the two of them could stay in contact with each other without her parents knowing.

Sounds like a pretty good plan, right? There was only one small problem with that idea. Well, you could even say one VERY BIG problem with the plan. You see neither Mama nor Papa had any formal education, so neither of them could read or write! How was their plan ever going to work?!? My ever-resourceful father had a

solution for them. When he got to America, he'd hire a scribe to write the letters for him to send to Italy. Giovanna would have her cousin, who could read and write, read Rocco's letters to her. She'd then write the letters for Giovanna to send back to Rocco in America. When Rocco received the letter, he'd then take it to the scribe, who'd read it to him and then write the next letter to Giovanna. Although the plan was long and involved, it was the only way the two lovebirds could communicate with each other.

With heavy heart, Rocco left his beloved Giovanna and set off to the Land of Opportunity. Rocco's sister Lucia and brother-in-law Raphaeli (who just happened to be Giovanna's brother—now isn't that an interesting twist) had already moved to America and lived in Washington, Pennsylvania. When Rocco finally arrived in Washington, he lived with his sister and brother-in-law. Raphaeli had already gotten Rocco a job working in the coal mines. As Rocco had promised Giovanna, as soon as he got his first pay, he found a scribe to write her a letter. For a five-cent charge, the scribe wrote the letter for Rocco. In the letter he told Giovanna about his voyage to America, living with Lucia and Raphaeli, and his job in the coal mine. Of course, he also told Giovanna how much he missed her and that he couldn't wait to see her again. So that's the way Rocco and Giovanna did it; no cell phone calls, no text messages, no emails. They just had paper and pencil, a cousin and a scribe, plus a stamp and a five-cent fee. Now that's true love.



The plan worked as well as Rocco had hoped. The letters went back and forth from Washington to Arpino on a regular basis. As time went by, Rocco and Giovanna missed each other more and more. Their letters became longer as they each shared how lonely they were and professed their love for each other. The letters became less about their daily routines and much more about their yearning to be together again. Eventually, the sweetheart's letters were totally full of words of tenderness, affection, and adoration for one another.

Although Rocco wanted to express his love and devotion to his beloved Giovanna, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to tell the scribe the words of love he

wanted to write to his beloved. Rocco wondered of himself, “What kind of a man am I that I have to tell another man what to write to my sweetheart? Then the same man knows my beloved Giovanna’s words of love to me before I do! This is not the kind of man I want to be. I want to be able to read and write the words of love to my sweetheart myself.”



Now Rocco developed a new plan. He would continue to pay the scribe five cents to write the letters, but he would also pay the scribe an additional five cents to teach him how to write himself. Now the extra five cents was a lot of money to Rocco, so he decided to save some money and speed the process along by improvising. To the best of his ability, he tried to duplicate the formation of the letters and sounded out how to spell the words. Eventually, Rocco was proudly able to write his own letters to his sweetheart without the help of the scribe. Although the envelopes had to be difficult to read and certainly full of errors, somehow they made it all the way to his beloved Giovanna.

Finally, Rocco and Giovanna didn't have to write the letters anymore because Rocco returned to Italy. Just before her twenty-second birthday, Rocco went back to Arpino to marry his beloved Giovanna. Against her parents' wishes, the two married a few days after her birthday. Soon after, the newly wed Rocco returned to Pennsylvania and Giovanna joined him ten months later. The happily married couple spent many wonderful years together. Mama and Papa treasured the beautiful love letters that they wrote each other. Papa was always grateful for learning to read and write because it meant that no other man stood between him and the words of love that he wanted to share with his dearest Giovanna.

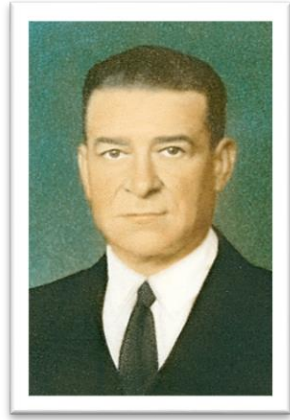
Years later, Papa would frequently tell us the story of how and why he learned to read and write. It was difficult for us to believe all that Papa and Mama had gone through so that they could communicate while they were apart. I will admit that we questioned just exactly how the letters got to Mama if Papa didn't really know how to write or spell properly. Papa would only laugh and say, “The people who were reading and

delivering the letters probably didn't know how to read and write any better than I did. Because of that, they could figure out what I had written!"

The truth of the matter is, Papa was absolutely right!!

Rocco Giovanni Proia

There's Always Room For One More



Let me begin this story by reminding you what it was like back in the days before your ancestors, my father and mother, made the decision to leave their homes and families and head out across the Atlantic Ocean.

Now, in case you didn't know, from 1900 through 1915 more than three million Italians left their homeland to come to America. Life was very harsh for the majority of Italy's population as they lived in absolute poverty. Known as peasants, these Italians neither owned the land they worked nor the homes in which they lived and raised their families.

Remember, these hard working peasants were sharecroppers who toiled in poor soil that yielded few crops, most of which had to be given as payment to the landowner. This left very little for their families to keep for themselves. More often than not these peasants were malnourished and plagued by any number of diseases. To make matters even worse, at this time violence was widespread throughout Italy. Many peasants, especially the young men, knew that leaving Italy for America was their only hope for a better life. Often times it was a great sacrifice for a family when a member, usually a son, left Italy to start a new life in America. While it meant there was one less mouth to feed, it also meant there was one less person who might help work the land or find some job that would bring home a few more liras.

Since these immigrants came from poor families, they usually didn't have any extra money. Most of the parents of those immigrating went into debt to have enough to pay for their passage to the Land of

Opportunity. Beyond paying for a ticket on the ship, all the parents could give their young sons was the name and

address of someone who'd already left for America. They hoped that the immigrant who was already there would help their child.



Immigrants coming to America

They had to leave their home and family and sail across a vast ocean to a place they'd never seen. The new immigrants were unable to speak the language, were without a job or a place to stay and knew they might never see their family or Italy ever again.

Unimaginable. How many of us would have had the strength to do this? These days if we have the chance to travel to Italy, we go by plane, arriving in just a matter of hours rather than days. Of course we complain about the long trip, the poor food on the plane, how uncomfortable we are packed in like sardines and the rude people we have to put up with. We forget that our ancestors didn't have the luxury of air travel but rather boarded a boat, and I don't mean a cruise ship with all its amenities. No, they didn't have a nice cabin with windows or a balcony, no soft bed to sleep in, or staff to wait on them. Rather they came the cheapest way possible, usually traveling in steerage. That meant they traveled as the lowest level passenger in the lowest level of the boat...the worst possible combination that stunk in more ways than one.

Now this is the place our ancestors come into my story. Soon after they married, Papa returned to America with Mama following about ten months later. They set up housekeeping in Washington, Pennsylvania. Soon theirs was the address given to all the sons of Arpino who came to America. When these young men arrived at the

Proia's doorstep, they were typically between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, rarely spoke any English, knew nothing about the customs of this new land, or had any skills to offer. Of course they were absolutely broke, but then it hadn't been very long since Mama and Papa had been in exactly the same situation. They knew all too well what the young men were going through. Papa and Mama immediately welcomed the boys into their home. They wanted to do all that they could to help the young men with their new life in America.

It was often difficult for Papa to immediately find a job for the new arrivals. While they were waiting to begin work, the boys couldn't pay rent, but they'd do what they could to help Mama. This was the time when it seemed like a new sister or brother arrived almost every year at our home, so Mama needed all the help around the house that she could get. The boys would go out in the fields and pick dandelion greens for Mama to cook, help sort the beans before they were soaked, hand crank the washing machine, knead the bread dough, and even help take care of us kids. Mama always appreciated any help the boys gave her with all the hard work that she had to do.



Three Proia girls and two of the family's many boarders

Papa and Mama opened their humble home to many immigrants. At one point, there were seventeen boarders staying at our home at the same time. Yes, seventeen! That's not a typo that's the truth. Although the accommodations were meager, everyone was grateful for the help that my parents gave them. The boarders all slept in one large upstairs bedroom that had two double beds. I remember the boys would

take turns sleeping in seven- or eight-hour shifts. Around the clock for all twenty-four hours of the day, there were at least two or three boys sleeping in each bed. Mama was only able to change the sheets once a week because there were always boys sleeping in the beds!

The boarders also ate their meals with our family. Funds were very limited and there were many mouths to feed. Mama knew that she had to serve foods that were simple and inexpensive to prepare. However, the meals had to be filling enough to satisfy everyone's hunger. The boarders often ate her delicious minestrone, pasta e fagioli, manesta, or homemade pasta. The young immigrants always thought that the meals Mama cooked were feasts compared to what they were accustomed to eating back home in Italy.

The immigrants were eager to start working so they could earn some money. Eventually, all the boarders found jobs. Some began working at the Hazel Atlas Glass Factory. There they would work long, difficult hours on the production line making various bottles, jars, glasses, and plates. Others found more dangerous employment in the coalmines, which was hard, backbreaking labor. The conditions in the mines were very brutal; the workers labored for long hours in dirty, treacherous surroundings. However, the boys weren't afraid of hard work; they knew it was the only way they'd be able to get ahead in life.



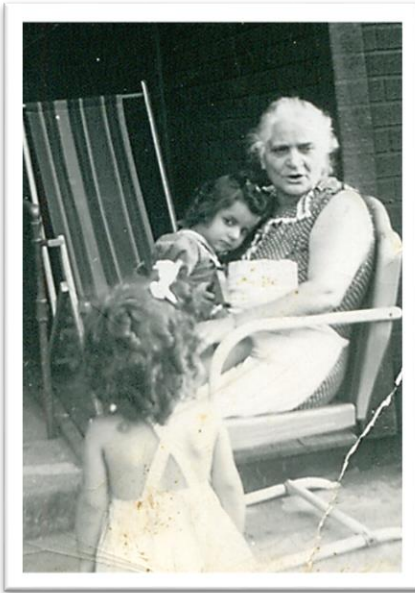
Italian immigrants landing in New York

After the young men got jobs and began earning money, they started to pay Mama a little rent. Our parents were aware that the boys wanted to send money home to their families in Italy, so they didn't charge them much money. It was important to Mama and Papa that the new arrivals were able to help their families who had sacrificed so much

to send them to America. After the young men were able to send money home, the next step was to save a little money for themselves. Usually, it didn't take long before the boys had enough so they could move out of our home. Their next step was to move to a boarding house in which they'd have a bed of their own to sleep; no longer would they have to share. This was a big step; it gave them, as well as our family, a sense of pride and accomplishment.

After the young men left our home, they often came back to visit on holidays or special occasions. Sometimes when the boarders returned, they'd bring a box of candy or a few pieces of fruit. They were very grateful and wanted to thank Papa and

Mama for all they'd done for them. Our parents were always very proud of the success that so many



Giovanna and grandchild

of their boarders were able to achieve. They were also glad to know that they'd been able to help their fellow Italians in their quest for a better life in America.

Now let me tell you about something that I will never forget. Many years after Papa and Mama no longer had boarders, a wonderful and totally unexpected reunion occurred. After Jack and I married, he had a job working at

the Ford Motor Company and we were living in the suburbs of Detroit. At work during his lunch break, Jack usually ate with his co-workers. One day a new worker said that he'd once lived in Washington, Pennsylvania. Jack was surprised to hear that and told the man that his wife was from Washington. The man told Jack that when he first came to America, he boarded with a wonderful family named Proia. Jack

really couldn't believe the coincidence. When he told the man that he had married Virginia, the second daughter in the Proia family, the man was shocked! He told Jack that he remembered Virginia when she was a baby!

Jack went on to tell the man that his mother-in-law, Giovanna Proia, was staying with us for a few weeks. Jack quickly extended an invitation for the man to come to our home so that he could visit with Giovanna. The man was absolutely thrilled and that weekend came to our house as planned. When he saw Mama, he ran and embraced her tightly. Tears were flowing down his cheeks as he kissed her again and again. When he regained his composure he told her, "You were like a mother to me when I first came to this country. I was just a young kid and you took such good care of me. You gave me food to eat, a bed to sleep in, washed my clothes, got me my first job, and encouraged me to work hard. Both you and your husband gave me the courage and strength to believe in myself. It is because of your help that I was able to succeed in my new life in America."

Mama told him, "Oh, Pasquale, I remember you, too. You were a very good boy who always helped me knead the dough when I was making bread and could always find the best dandelion greens for me to cook. We knew you would do well in this Land of Opportunity. With your drive and determination, we were positive that you would find many successes in life. It was a pleasure to be able to help you get a start in this country. I am so happy to see that another one of our boys has done so well!"

The man took Mama in his arms again and hugged her very tightly. Again and again he thanked her for all that she had done for him. They spent the afternoon reminiscing about old times and catching up on all the man had accomplished since he had left the Proia's so many years before. It was a wonderful, heart-warming experience for both of them.

Now I hope you feel that you know a little more about what it was like to be an immigrant to this county. There were many sacrifices that they had to make and numerous struggles that they had to overcome. I hope you also realize that your ancestors, Rocco and Giovanna Don Francisco Proia, were an extraordinary couple who sacrificed so much to give their children, their grandchildren, their great

grandchildren, their great, great grandchildren, and all those others who will follow an opportunity to grow up, thrive, and achieve in this incredible land.

Giovanna & Her Fabulous Outdoor Brick Oven

As the nineteenth century was coming to an end, life in Arpino, Italy continued to be a constant struggle for the DonFrancisco family. Senor DonFrancisco was a tenant farmer who toiled in the fields for many long, grueling hours every day. Angelo felt fortunate to own a donkey to help him with the backbreaking work of planting, tending, and harvesting the crops. Although Angelo labored tirelessly every day, it was almost impossible for him to have any additional money to save for “extras” for his family. To supplement her husband’s income, Senora DonFrancisco was a corset maker. Paola would make the fitted undergarments for the wealthier women who lived in Arpino and the surrounding towns. Both Angelo and Paola literally “worked their fingers to the bone” to provide for their two sons and three daughters. Even with all their hard work, the DonFranciscos could provide just the bare necessities with only a few rare luxuries for their children.

In an effort to start a new and better life, some of Angelo and Paola DonFrancisco’s children left Arpino for the United States. They hoped that in the “Land of Opportunity” they’d be able to have a life that was not quite as harsh and bleak as theirs was in Italy. The first child to leave for America was Raffaeli, their oldest, and his wife Lucia. They settled in Washington, Pennsylvania where Raffaeli became known as Ralph when he went to work in the coal mines. Next, the newlywed Giovanna, their oldest daughter, also ventured off to Washington to join her husband Rocco Proia. In their pursuit of the “American Dream,” the two couples worked hard for many years. Both families were very close as they raised their young children together. The third DonFrancisco child to go to the United States was their

daughter Lucia and her husband Onorio Rea. They settled in Detroit, Michigan where Onorio worked in the automotive factories for many years.



**Raffaeli (Ralph) with
his sister Giovanna
on his 75th birthday in
1948**

Giovanna and Rocco Proia lived the majority of their married life in their home located at 45 South Street in Washington, Pennsylvania. Compared to the humble homes they were raised in when they were children in Arpino, the house on South Street seemed like a mansion. In reality, it was a duplex that only had a living room, dining room, two bedrooms, and a large kitchen. They did not even have indoor plumbing until the mid-1920's! However, to the Proias their home was an absolute palace! In his later years Rocco became a very successful businessman and could well afford to buy a bigger and better home for his family. However, both he and Giovanna felt that the house on South Street was the best home for them. It was the home where most of their children were born, where an untold number of wonderful memories were made, and where their family had spent many happy years together. Most importantly, it was where Rocco and Giovanna felt most comfortable living. They felt the house had a great location, close to family, friends, schools, church, and stores. It was the only home they ever wanted to live in!

As Rocco's hard work and determination paid off, the Proia family was able to add some improvements to their home. First they added water that ran freely from the faucets. Prior to that, their only access to water was through a hand pump that was located in the kitchen sink. Any time the family needed water, someone had to go to the pump and push the hand lever up and down several times until the water began to flow. Next, they were able to get their home wired for electricity. No longer did they need to use gas lanterns and candles to light their home. Now with both running water

and electricity, Rocco and Giovanna knew life as it was in Arpino was far behind them. They were moving on up in the world!

Next came the most welcomed improvement for the Proia family...indoor plumbing. Up to that point, they had to use a backyard outhouse for their toilet. They also kept chamber pots (called "slop jars") in their bedrooms to use for a toilet during the night. Initially, they only had one first-floor bathroom for the entire family to use. Because there were eight children and two adults in the family, they were thrilled when they were finally able to add a second bathroom near the bedrooms on the second floor.

The addition of the indoor bathrooms meant that the family finally had a bathtub.

Prior to the installation of the second bathroom, Giovanna would heat a large washtub of hot water in the kitchen. The children would take turns taking their baths in the tub.

Because heating the water was such a difficult, time-consuming task for Giovanna, it was only done on Saturday

nights. And to top it off, the same bath water was used for all the children. As each child finished their bath, Giovanna would add a little more hot water to the washtub.

Then the next child would get in to take their bath. Wouldn't you always volunteer to be number one in the line to take a bath!?!?

Another improvement that added a great deal of convenience for Giovanna was a huge outdoor oven that Rocco built for her in their backyard. Rocco took great care and pride when he built the oven for his beloved Giovanna. He knew that his wife would get a great deal of use out of the oven so it was important to him that it was as perfect as possible for her. He also wanted it to be "user friendly" for his dear wife. Before he started the construction of the oven, Rocco asked Giovanna where she



wanted it placed, how she thought it should look, and what she thought was important that it have structurally. Next, he talked to a few friends who already had outdoor ovens to find out what suggestions they might have for his project. He then made a few rough drafts of the design of the oven. At last, after reviewing the designs with Giovanna, the two of them came up with the final plan for the oven and its placement in the backyard.

Rocco built the oven a short distance from the back door of the kitchen. That way, Giovanna would not have far to go to take her loaves of bread dough to put inside the oven to bake. The oven was raised about three feet off the ground and stood on a heavy steel foundation. In the lower area under the oven, Rocco would put tree branches to dry. There they'd be stored until used to heat the oven. The oven was built with special bricks that could withstand the intense heat produced in the oven. The oven was built up quite high and had a tall chimney. In the lower part of the chimney there was one brick that was loose; it was not mortared in place on purpose. The loose brick was the oven's "thermostat" which was used to regulate the temperature inside the oven. The brick would be taken out if the oven got too hot and put back in if the oven got too cold. At the front of the oven there was an iron door that was opened to put something in the oven to cook and then closed tightly during the cooking process. The brick oven also had an awning-like structure that provided protection so that Giovanna could use it all year round even if it rained or snowed.

On the day that Giovanna was going to bake bread, she would carefully prepare the dough in her large kitchen. It was a long, slow process that could not be rushed. She'd begin by mixing yeast with warm water. Next, she'd add the yeast mixture to flour and a little sugar to form the dough. There was no need for Giovanna to use measuring cups; she just knew by the "feel" of the dough if she needed to add more flour. Next, she'd knead the dough until it was well blended and smooth. The dough was allowed to "rest" and rise for at least an hour. After rising, Giovanna would "punch down" the dough and shape it into long loaves. Rocco had made her boards that were built specifically for the dough to rise on; they were long with sides so that the loaves wouldn't fall off when Giovanna carried them outside to bake. The last

step was to cover the shaped loaves of dough with her special white cement sacks that were perfect to protect them while they rose for another hour.

Giovanna DonFrancesco Proia



While the dough was rising, Giovanna had to get the oven ready. She'd begin the process by taking some of the dried branches stored in the oven's foundation and put them on top of the bricks inside the oven. Once she ignited them, Giovanna would let the branches burn down to ashes in order to heat the bricks on the bottom of the oven. Then she'd use a long rake to remove the ashes and small pieces of branches that remained on the bricks. Using a long, wet mop, she would then wash the bottom of the oven to remove any residue. Next, Giovanna would

throw corn meal on the floor of the oven. If the corn meal got dark brown too fast, Giovanna knew the oven was too hot. She'd then take the mop and wash the bricks again to cool them down a little more. She would usually have to repeat this process several times until the bricks were at the right temperature so that the corn meal wouldn't burn too quickly. When that happened, Giovanna knew the oven was at just the right temperature to start baking her bread.

Once the temperature was correct, Giovanna would place the loaves of bread dough directly on the cornmeal at the bottom of the oven. She'd use a long wooden paddle that Rocco had made for her to slide eight to ten loaves of bread into the oven. Using the paddle, Giovanna could place the loaves exactly where she wanted them. Then she'd carefully shut the heavy steel oven door. After the bread was in the oven for twenty to twenty-five minutes, Giovanna would check their color. She'd usually

have to rotate the loaves to make sure that the bread evenly browned. If necessary, Giovanna could use her “thermostat” brick to adjust the temperature of the oven while the bread continued to bake. After the first batch was done, Giovanna would then use the oven to bake several large pizzas for her family to enjoy.

Giovanna usually baked bread once a week. She'd make ten to twelve loaves each time she baked. Giovanna gave half of the loaves of bread to Anna Jannazzi who lived in the other half of their duplex. Anna would then bake bread a few days later in the week and give Giovanna half of the loaves that she made. In that way, both of the ladies had fresh bread to serve with their meals for the entire week. The system worked very well for the ladies and they continued the routine for more than thirty years!

The smell of Giovanna and Anna's freshly baking bread was wonderful as it gently floated in the air throughout Washington. Their reputation for making especially delicious bread was known around the entire town. Both Giovanna and Anna were very generous ladies and would often share a loaf with a neighbor who would “just happen” to stop by while they were baking.

On a lovely spring morning in early May, Giovanna was surprised with some totally unexpected visitors. Anna, the Proia's fourth daughter was ten and in the fifth grade. Since it was an especially beautiful day after a long, harsh winter, both fifth-grade teachers decided to take their students for a walk in the neighborhood around the school. While they were walking, one teacher said, “Someone must be baking bread. Doesn't it smell wonderful?”

Annie (as she was called at school) heard what her teacher said and proudly told her, “That's my mother! When I left for school this morning she was just starting to make the bread.”

The teacher doubted that the smell of Annie's mother's bread could travel for blocks from the Proia house all the way over to the school. She then questioned her student, “Your mother is baking bread and we can smell it all the way over here? Are you sure about that?”

Positive that her teacher did not realize that her mother was baking the bread outside in a brick oven rather than inside their kitchen, Annie proudly responded with, “Oh yes, I’m absolutely certain that’s my mother’s bread baking that we can smell. If we have time we can walk to my house. Then we can see how my mother is baking the bread.”

The two teachers were so enticed with the wonderful aroma filling the air they agreed that the classes could walk the few blocks to the Proia home. When they arrived in the backyard,



Giovanna had just taken the bread out of the oven. As she turned around to bring the bread back into the house, she was surprised and bewildered to see Annie along with her teachers and all her classmates in the backyard. Annie ran to her mother and explained why they were there. The always well-mannered and friendly Giovanna welcomed the teachers and students to her home. Since Giovanna was not fluent in English, she had Annie explain how she’d made the dough and used the oven to bake the bread. Everyone was fascinated with the entire process, especially the use of the outdoor oven. The teachers and students all received a well-taught lesson on the old-fashioned way to bake bread that day.

Before leaving, the ever generous and gracious hostess Giovanna gave everyone a slice of her freshly baked bread to enjoy on the walk back to school. Each of the teachers received a loaf of delicious homemade bread to take home with them for their dinner that night.

As everyone left the Proia’s backyard, they all agreed that Mrs. Proia made the most wonderful bread in the most fabulous brick oven.....and they were absolutely right!!

Papa's Very Unusual Excuses

Fortunately for our parents as well as ourselves, all eight of the Proia children were very healthy. Nancy and I, along with our younger siblings Josephine, Anna, Albert, Teresa, Arthur and George thrived in the loving care of our parents, Rocco and Giovanna. Throughout our childhood, none of us ever had any major illnesses to interfere with our growth and development. Like most children, though, we did have our share of childhood illnesses like chicken pox, mumps, and measles as well as the occasional case of the flu or a bad cold every now and then. As you might imagine with eight of us, there were many times when we generously shared those illnesses with each other. When these minor illnesses occurred, our parents would tenderly nurse us back to good health. Papa would walk the floors with the one who was ill, even rocking us back to sleep when we were sick during the night. Mama had the nursing responsibilities during the day while Papa was at work. It certainly helped that Mama was a fabulous cook who knew the restorative powers of food. When anyone was ill, we knew that Mama would soon be preparing vast quantities of chicken soup to help restore us to good health.



Because the education of their children was of the utmost importance to our parents, they always had us back into our regular routine of attending school as soon as possible. Knowing that our teacher would need to know why we had been absent, or sometimes why several of us had been out of school if we'd "shared" our illness, Papa would carefully write out a note for each of his absent children to give to their teacher. The night before we returned to school, he would sit at our large kitchen table and painstakingly write the very polite and proper notes in his very best penmanship. He'd go to great lengths to inform the teachers of all the details of our illness and that we were finally feeling well enough to return to school. Each note would also ask the teacher for all the homework that we'd missed and assure them that it would be carefully completed and turned in as soon as possible.

There was only one teeny, tiny, ever-so-slight problem with the notes that Papa wrote to the teachers. You see, they were written in Italian!

We knew that our teachers didn't speak Italian and certainly wouldn't be able to read the notes that Papa had written in his native language. Foolishly, we told Papa that we couldn't take the notes to school because our teachers wouldn't understand what



he had written. Papa quickly dismissed our fears and told us that it was very important that we bring the notes to our teachers so that they'd know why we had missed school. It didn't matter how much any of us begged, pleaded and tried to explain our fears to him, he was adamant that we absolutely must take the notes to the teachers as he'd instructed. Our father assured us that there was no reason to worry as the teachers

would be able to read the notes even though they were written in Italian.

As we were always obedient children (and I'm sticking with that story) and ever so anxious to go back to class, we'd run off to school the next morning with the notes carefully tucked in our pockets. When we'd get to our classrooms, even though we were embarrassed with the notes written in Italian, we'd do exactly as Papa had told us and dutifully hand the notes to our teachers.

Of course, the teachers had absolutely no idea of what was written in the notes. However, because there were a number of children of immigrants who didn't speak English in their classrooms, the teachers were accustomed to receiving notes written in foreign languages. Not wanting to humiliate the children by letting them know that they had no idea what the notes said, the teachers always took the time to pretend they were actually reading the notes. They would nod their heads and use their finger to follow the words as they took their time scanning the note. After an appropriate length of time, the teacher would smile and look at the children.

Still holding the notes in their hands, the teachers would then ask the children, "Are you feeling better now?" or "How are you feeling today?" By the questions their teacher asked, the children thought that they really did understand what was written in

the note. We were absolutely amazed that our teacher could actually read Italian, and that our father was right! Naturally, we Proia children always respectfully replied to our teacher's question with, "Much better, thank you."

When we returned home from our first day back at school, Papa would ask us if we'd given the notes to our teachers. Of course, we all said that we had. Papa would then want to know what the teachers said when they received the notes. When he found out that our teachers had asked us somewhat relevant questions, he would proudly



exclaim, "See I told you that they would understand! I told your teachers everything that they needed to know about your absence." After a few seconds he would then proudly add, "Ha! You thought that your teacher wouldn't be able to understand the notes because they were written in Italian but I wrote out everything so clearly that they understood! See your Papa, he knows what he is doing!"

Being ever so respectful to our father, and knowing that he always did what he thought was most beneficial for his family, we could only look at Papa with love and pride. We certainly realized that, as always, our father, Rocco Proia, did indeed know what he was doing! Not only that, he always did everything to the very best of his ability!

You No Foola Me!

No one can ever deny that our mother was a remarkable woman. Giovanna DonFrancisco Proia was born and raised in the very small hillside town of Arpino, Italy. She came from a poor family and did not have the opportunity to receive any formal education. Mama was almost totally illiterate, never learning how to read or write more than a few simple words in Italian. Life became even more challenging for her when she married Rocco Proia. Several months after the wedding, Mama left Italy to join Papa in America where they would begin a new life together in this "Land of Opportunity." To complicate matters even further, Mama not only didn't know how

to read and write in Italian, she also didn't know how to speak a word of English, let alone how to read or write any!!

As newlyweds, Rocco and Giovanna settled in Washington, Pennsylvania where our father worked in the coalmines. Mama soon gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Anunciata, who was called Nancy after she started going to school. Fourteen months later, I came into the picture, followed by my sister Josephine who was the next of the five Proia Princesses to arrive. Surely our father must have thought after his third daughter came on the scene, that he was probably going to have to endure an all-female household.

One day Papa came home and told Mama that he'd heard there were great opportunities in New Mexico, close to the Colorado border, so he and Mama decided to move their young family to the southwest. Papa went on ahead; single-handedly our very pregnant mother traveled with her three extremely young daughters on the agonizingly long three-day train trip. Now that in itself shows that Giovanna DonFrancisco Proia was a very remarkable woman. Because she was strong and determined, Mama made the challenging trip steadfast in her belief in Papa's abilities. While living in the southwest, a fourth daughter, Anna, was born. Things didn't work out as well as our parents had hoped, so before too long our family headed back to Pennsylvania. When we traveled back on the train, Mama was pregnant again; however, this time Papa was there to help her with their four young daughters.

Once back in Washington Mama gave birth to their first son Albert, followed by another daughter Teresa, a son Michael (who passed away shortly after he was born), one more son named Arthur, and finally their last child, another son George.

With eight children, Mama's days were filled with cooking, washing, cleaning, and taking care of us. On top of what would have driven most women crazy, our mother took care of up to seventeen borders at the same time. There was absolutely no free time for her to learn how to read or write. Most of her shopping was done at the small corner grocery store that was owned by an Italian. There she was able to tell the proprietor what she needed in her native tongue. When she did have to go to a larger department store, she learned to do her shopping by recognizing trademarks and key

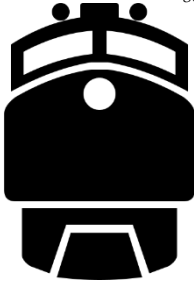
words as well as with the occasional help of others. As we children started school, we'd often take care of the reading and writing of anything that was important. If she had to sign her name, Mama would put an "X;" it was all she knew how to write.

Mama was very bright; she just never had the opportunity or the time to learn. The one area in which she had particular difficulty was working with numbers. Because the numbers on a clock were very confusing to Mama, she couldn't tell time. During most of her life, she knew approximately what time it was by the amount of light outside. In the morning when the sun rose, Mama knew it was time to get up and out of bed. When the sun went down in the evening, it was getting close to the time most people went to bed. Of course, she had many challenges with this system. For example, if it was dark and cloudy because of rain, she had difficulty figuring out the time of day.



Based on her surroundings, our ever-resourceful mother was able to figure out another way to tell the time. Our family home on South Street in Washington, Pennsylvania was located very close to the train station. The trains arrived and departed on the same specific schedule every day. Since they were passing through a town, before stopping at the train station the train conductor blew the warning whistle every time they entered or left the station. Every morning at precisely 5:46 when the train left for Pittsburgh, Mama knew it was time to get out of bed and start her day. When the afternoon train from Cleveland arrived in the station at 3:10, she

knew her children would soon be coming home from school. The 6:30 train's arrival from Philadelphia meant that it was time for dinner. Mama memorized the train



schedule and could tell you precisely what time each of the many trains came and left from the station; the comings and goings of the trains let her know precisely what time it was. Now, that was pretty darn clever of her if I do say so myself.

Our family tried to get her to understand that since she knew what time it was based on the train whistle, she could learn to read a clock. She didn't buy our logic a bit. Mama felt she couldn't master reading a clock, and because of that was never able to tell the time by looking at one. Mama felt very confident that as long as she was in her own home, she'd always know what time it was. And you know what? She was absolutely correct!

Anna, Giovanna and her sister Lucia, Virginia

The one area related to numbers that our mother had absolutely no difficulty handling was money. Mama clearly understood the difference between a one-dollar bill and a ten-dollar bill. She knew that if something cost seventeen



dollars, she'd need a ten-dollar bill, a five-dollar bill, and two one-dollar bills. There was never any confusion there. She also was very well aware that if something cost three dollars and fifty-three cents, and she gave the cashier a five-dollar bill, she would get one-dollar and forty-seven cents back in change. Her husband had worked too hard for their money for Mama to not keep track of every penny.

One day she asked me to double check the amount of money that she had. I counted it and then said to her, "Now you count the money."

Mama had sorted the money by denomination so that it would be easier for her to count. As she went through all the bills she counted the money in her head. When she was done she told me, "There's one hundred twenty-three dollars."

Knowing that my mother was correct but wanting to challenge her, I said, "No, you are wrong. This time count the money again and tell me out loud how much each bill is worth."

I could see that Mama was disappointed in herself because she had been so careful counting the money. She did as I asked and started counting the money out loud. When she came to the section of ten-dollar bills, she added ten dollars to the total out loud. Then I interrupted her and said, "No, Mama that is not a ten-dollar bill it's a five."

Mama looked at the bill and then defiantly looked at me as she confidently said, "You no foola me! This is a ten-dollar bill and not a five!" Without any hesitation she continued counting. When she was finished, she came up with exactly one hundred and twenty-three dollars again. She looked very sternly at me and said with her glaring eyes, "You think you can trick me but I know my money."



There was no way I could stop myself from laughing at what had just happened. Then I said to her, "If you know the difference between a five and a ten when it's on money, how come you don't know the difference on the clock?"

By this point my mother was more than just a little fed up with her second child. She just waved her hand at me in disgust, picked up her money, and left the table. That was the end of that discussion. Mama knew her money but could care less about learning how to tell time on a clock. As far as she was concerned, she had mastered

the most important thing; she had learned how to count money. That old adage of “father knows best” may be true, but our mother was no slouch either.



What's Said Isn't Always What's Meant

You often hear that our English language is very difficult to master. It contains an unlimited number of words, many slang expressions which often change meanings between ages and areas as well as many colloquialisms that differ between groups and nationalities. Additionally, English has many rules of grammar and almost as many exceptions to those same rules. Then to further complicate learning the language, there are words with multiple meanings that can be easily misunderstood as well as words that sound the same but have different meanings. With America being such a melting pot of ethnicities, you can imagine how confusing this can be to immigrants. Throughout his life, Papa worked very hard to master his new language, but he encountered many challenges that were always very puzzling to him.

Challenge One: Challenges with Words

Papa often asked his children questions about the pronunciation and usage of words. The area of greatest difficulty for him was homophones, words that are spelled differently but sound the same. I remember when he would ask us how to pronounce “F-O-R,” and to explain what the word meant as well as how to use it correctly in a sentence. Then he went on to ask the same questions but for the letters “F-O-U-R.” Finally, the questions were repeated for the letters “F-O-R-E.” We answered all of his questions for each of the three words. It was apparent to us, with the puzzled look on Papa’s face, that he was completely confused. Next we heard Papa ask, “How could they mean something different when they sound exactly the same? How is a person supposed to know which spelling and meaning of a word is correct when

they're all pronounced exactly the same way?! How can anyone ever learn this crazy English language that Americans speak?"

Rocco working on his farm land



The same scenario would be repeated again and again with other groups of words, such as “to, too, and two” and “hole and whole” and “weight and wait” as well as many others. With each set of words that challenged him, Papa’s bewilderment continued. He was steadfast in his belief the English language didn’t have any rules that were consistently followed.

To add further confusion, Papa could not understand homographs; words that are spelled exactly the same but have different pronunciations and meanings. These were absolutely beyond any logic to him. He wondered why

W-I-N-D could be pronounced one way and mean the movement of air outside, but the exact same letters could be pronounced another way and refer to what he had to do to his pocket watch each morning! The list of similar words, such as bank, foot and park, was far too long for him to learn how to use correctly. Again and again he would point out, “No one could ever learn all the rules in this crazy English language!”

Papa also had difficulty with the pronunciation of certain letter combinations. No matter how hard he tried and how long he practiced, he could not pronounce certain letters properly. For example, it was extremely difficult for him to pronounce the sound that the letters TH make when placed together in a word. He couldn't understand that although there are two separate letters, when combined they made only one sound. When Papa pronounced a word that had the letters TH together in it, he would pronounce the sound of the T and the sound of the H separately rather than as it should be as one combined sound. The word "thought" would be pronounced with T-H as two separated sounds with emphasis placed on the T. The word would sound like "taught" when Papa said it.

Knowing Papa wanted to use perfect English, I would tell him that he wasn't pronouncing the TH letters correctly. He'd tell me, "Say the word again, only louder."

I'd pronounce "thought" again, this time exaggerating the "th" sound at the beginning of the words. Then I'd try to explain, as well as show him, that he needed to place his tongue in a different position for the "th" sound from when he made the "t" sound. He'd try over and over again, but as determined as he was, he could never get it correct. It was one of very few things that our father didn't master in his new country. If you ask me, that sure says a great deal about him! I can't imagine how I'd sound trying to speak Russian or Chinese.

You have to remember the important thing is that Papa's quest to master the English language never diminished. He would continually strive to understand the proper usage and pronunciation of the many words in the language. As his children's role model, Papa was always striving to learn more, and it had a profound effect on his children's own education as well as our outlooks on challenges we faced in our lives. We'd always remember our Papa's ability to face all his challenges with strength and determination when confronted with obstacles in our own lives. That attitude and strength of mind sure got us through some difficult times that we were able to survive (and even triumph over)!

Challenge Two: Reading Out Loud

Papa and Mama wanted each of their children to have a strong command of the Italian language. The first language all of us ever heard and became fluent in was Italian.

For years it was the only language ever spoken at home. When Nancy, Jo and I



began to attend school, we had to learn the new “foreign” language...English! In school we learned to speak and write in English, but at home we were only allowed to speak Italian.

Both our parents told us, “In this house, you will speak only Italian!” Gradually as more of us went off to school, we children spoke English more frequently at home. Slowly, Papa started

to speak English also but Mama rarely spoke anything but Italian.

However to be sure that his children continued to understand Italian, each night Papa would read the Italian newspaper out loud to us. He’d read the articles, whether they were of interest to us or not...and, truthfully, most of the time we weren’t the least bit interested. Papa often read articles on current events or on issues that were occurring in Italy on subjects such as government problems, Mussolini or the Pope.

We thought that the articles he read were far too long and much too boring.

However, that didn’t affect his decision to continue to read the Italian paper to us every night.

As Papa read the newspaper, he’d often pause to explain the meaning of a word he thought we might not understand. Sometimes he’d stop and paraphrase what he’d just read to add emphasis to something he felt was important. Additionally, after he finished an article, he’d ask us if we understood what he’d read. He even “tested” our understanding of the articles by asking us questions. He expected us to give thorough, complete answers. If we couldn’t, he’d either reread or review the article again with us. The Proia kids soon learned we needed to pay close attention to what our father read because none of us wanted to fail one of his “Pop” quizzes.

Although we didn't realize it, we'd actually learned a great deal while Papa read to us. To begin with, the newspaper was written in "proper" Italian and not in the dialect that was spoken in our home every day. Through these readings, our father gave us the opportunity to become familiar with the correct usage of the Italian language. Also, the readings gave us an awareness of world events, especially those occurring in Italy. We learned about the world outside of Washington, Pennsylvania and the United States. Most importantly, it was through the nightly readings that we all became aware that our parents valued reading. Papa modeled for each of us to always seek out all the new learning that could be gained through reading.

Challenge Three: Rocco Reads in English

Prior to World War I, Mama and Papa had planned to return to Italy with their family once they'd been able to save a significant amount of money. Our hard-working father pursued every opportunity available to earn money in an effort to reach their goal. However, after World War I ended, a friend of the family wrote a letter to inform them

that things were
not good in
Italy; in fact,
things were
"very bad"



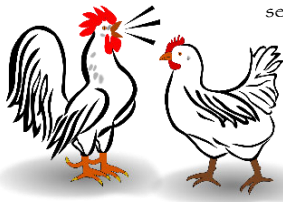
there. After the war the economic conditions in the country went from bad to worse, violent protests against the government were occurring and Mussolini's Fascist Party was gaining power. Because of this, our father decided that we should stay in the United States permanently. Once the decision was made, the "Americanization" of the Proia family quickly moved forward.

One of the first areas of this "Americanization" process that was addressed was Papa's command of the English language. His children were all young, attending school, and learning English. Papa wanted to encourage all of us to do well in school so he reviewed our homework with us every evening after dinner. He soon realized that in the process of helping us, he too was learning the language. As we practiced

our English skills, he too gained a better command of the language as he went over our lessons with us. So you would be right in saying that our father and his children learned the language together.

Each night we all sat around the large table in the dining room to do our homework. When we were done, Papa would say, "Bring your books here. I want to see what you learned in school today." With each of us he'd check our reading, writing, and arithmetic lessons. He was particularly interested in our reading homework. He'd have us get our reader and along with us, he'd read the story out loud. As we read, he would help us sound out and pronounce words we had difficulty with. The trouble was, as he read, he pronounced the words in broken English.

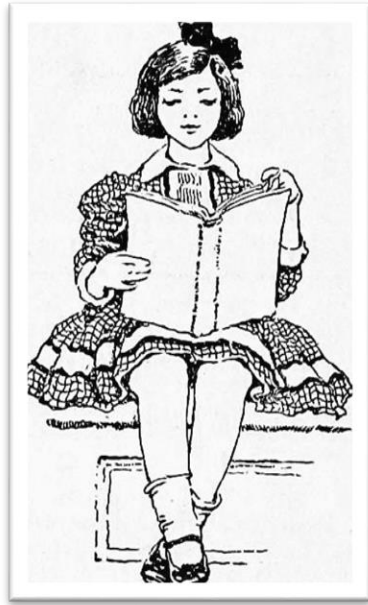
One evening, Papa was helping me with a story that we'd been working on in my second-grade class. I told my father that the story was about two chickens named Mr. and Mrs. Leghorn and that I needed to practice reading the story out loud. Papa wanted to help me so he started to read the story out loud.



However, he pronounced the title in his broken English as "Miester and Messes Legahorn." He continued to read and pronounce all the words in the story in his thick, heavy Italian accent, after which he had me read it back to him. Of course I read the story exactly as he had. Papa was very pleased and proud that he was able to help me learn to read the story so quickly.

The next day I went to school so confident that I'd done a good job on my homework. When my teacher called on me to read I pronounced the words in the story exactly the same way my father had the night before...in broken English. All the other children in the classroom started to laugh. Soon my teacher was laughing at me too. At first I didn't understand why everyone was so amused. However, when I heard the other children read out loud, I realized that I'd pronounced the words incorrectly. Just as my father had the night before when we reviewed my lessons together, I pronounced the words in broken English. Understandably, I was very embarrassed and humiliated.

That night when I went home and told my father that the teacher did not pronounce the words the same way that he had the night before he asked, "Well, how do you pronounce it?" I then pronounced the words the way the teacher had. Papa replied with, "Why would the teacher pronounce the title that way? It is as clear as day that it should be pronounced as Miester and Messes Legahorn." I insisted that wasn't the way my teacher had pronounced it. There was no winning with my father. Papa, thinking that he was correct, continued to review the reading lessons with us. Of course, when we read back to him, we also used broken English.



When I returned to school I remembered how very embarrassed I was when the others in the classroom laughed at my broken English. After that first time, when the teacher called on me I would refuse to read. Whenever my teacher asked me to read I'd just look down, shake my head no, and say I wasn't ready. In my mind, it was far better to suffer the consequences of not being prepared than have the other children laugh at me because I mispronounced the words.

It wasn't long before I began to attend special speech correction classes that helped me slowly, but surely, improve my command of the English language. What began as a very hurtful episode in my young life, turned into a blessing in disguise. The painful experience led me to work very hard until the time when I was able to speak and read the English language better than anyone else in my classes. Not only was I happy with what I'd accomplished, but also my parents were equally proud of their daughter. Once again, hard work and determination paid off for a Proia.

The Flapper vs. The Mama

Giovanna and Rocco were the proud parents of eight children. Although there was



certainly not
a great deal

**Dresses
made
from
flour
sacks**

of extra
money in this
hard-working
Italian

immigrant family, it was always overflowing with love, happiness, and good-times! There was always an abundance of good food served at their family meals, which often included vegetables grown in their own garden. Giovanna rarely bought clothing from the store for her children. Rather, she saved the sacks that she got her flour in and put them together to make dresses, shirts, and pants for the children to wear. When she was lucky, she was able to trade her flour sacks with her friends so that she would have several sacks in the same fabric design. That way, her children would have coordinating outfits!!

As time passed and Rocco became more prosperous in his business ventures, Giovanna was able to purchase a few things at the store. Even though finances had gotten better for the Proia family, Giovanna and Rocco continued to be very conservative with their spending and were frugal with their money. Some of the first items that were purchased on a regular basis were clothing for their children. Even then, Rocco and Giovanna conserved money as much as they could. When possible, Rocco would bring home large boxes of children's shoes in various sizes. He wasn't the least bit concerned with what shoes were in what size but rather that he was able to get a wide range of sizes of quality shoes at a bargain price. The box was placed

on the floor in the middle of the room, and the children picked out the shoes that fit them the best. Size was the most important factor and style was not even a consideration. Because of this, a girl could end up with the correct size shoe but it might be in the style that was appropriate for a boy. The opposite was also true: as long as the shoes fit, a boy could end up wearing a pair of girl's shoes.

Additionally, all the children wore hand-me-downs. Clothes were never purchased for the use of only one child. An item was usually bought in a size that was too large for the first child who wore it. After that child had grown so much that it no longer fit, the item would be handed down to the next child. Again, no attention or regard was given to style; the only important consideration was that the article of clothing fit, or at least almost fit, a child. Giovanna spent many hours mending and altering the clothes so that they could be passed down from child to child.



Nancy was the oldest child in the family; and as so was the only one who was assured of always getting new clothing. She never had to worry about receiving hand-me-downs. Every item in her wardrobe was either made or purchased too large for her with the intent that when she grew out of that item, it would be passed on to her fourteen-month younger sister, Virginia. When Virginia grew out of the item, it would go on to her younger sister Josephine and then finally be worn by Anna. Although the Proia princesses always had clothes to wear, they were rarely new. The Proia children certainly got a great deal of wear out of each item.

Virginia had a great deal of difficulty being the second child in the family. Because she was number two, she always had to wear Nancy's hand-me-downs. Nancy was tall, slim, and strikingly beautiful with lovely wavy hair. Virginia was short, not so slim, and lovely but not as beautiful, with straight, limp hair. How unfair!! To make matters worse, Giovanna bought the clothes that were appropriate for Nancy's tall thin body and not Virginia's shorter and fuller one. Things that looked stunning on Nancy looked absolutely horrible on Virginia!! At a very young age, the ever fashion-conscience Virginia was quick to point out the injustices she had to face every time she wore one of Nancy's hand-me-downs. Virginia would loudly and repeatedly lament to her mother how unreasonable it was that she should always have to wear old



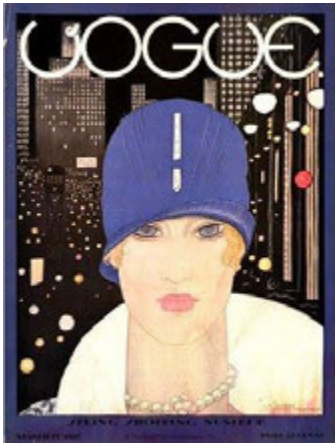
clothes that didn't ever look good on her! Poor Virginia felt that it was obvious that since Nancy was so beautiful, she didn't need all the new clothes. However, because she didn't have all the natural beauty that Nancy did, she should get the new clothes to compensate and help make her look better. Of course, Giovanna turned a deaf ear to Virginia's pleas.

Day after day, year after year, Virginia continued to nag her parents, especially her mother, about the inequities she had to endure her entire

life. By the time Virginia was fifteen, she'd perfected her fervent appeal for new clothes to her parents. Winter was approaching and Virginia felt that she should be able to get a brand new coat of her own. She shouldn't be forced to wear another one of Nancy's ill-fitting hand-me-downs. Because she was so determined to get her own new coat, Virginia expressed her feelings to her parents on the matter very loudly, passionately and frequently.

Giovanna and Rocco had finally had enough; they could not bear to hear Virginia carry on any more. Out of utter and complete exasperation, Rocco finally told Giovanna to take Virginia shopping in downtown Washington the very next day for a new coat. To appease their daughter, Rocco informed Giovanna that they were to purchase the coat that Virginia wanted. They absolutely were not to come home until Virginia had a new coat of her own.

Virginia couldn't believe what she was hearing. At last, after fifteen long-suffering years of wearing Nancy's hand-me-downs, she was finally going to get the coat of her dreams! Since she had been perusing the latest fashion magazines for years, she knew exactly what luxurious coat would transform her into a real, thoroughly-modern



flapper!! That night she couldn't sleep out of anticipation of the momentous event that was going to happen the very next day; Virginia was going to get the first article of clothing that was purchased specifically for her. It was absolutely sure to be a red-letter day in her life....in fact, the day was going to be so perfect that all the letters were going to be CAPITALS!!!

At the crack of dawn, Virginia was up and ready to hit all the stores in Washington.

As she and Giovanna set off on their

exciting adventure, Rocco reminded them that they were not to come home without a new coat for Virginia. That was music to Virginia's ears!

Giovanna took her daughter to every store in Washington that sold women's coats. Virginia tried on many, many coats; each time she would pose in front of a full-length mirror. After gazing at her image, Virginia would twirl and swirl so that she could see how glamorous she looked from every angle. Sometimes she'd look over her shoulder to see how wonderful the coat looked on her from the back. Although she tried on coat after coat, Virginia couldn't find one glamorous and exciting enough for her.

Undaunted, she continued to drag her tired mother from store to store. Virginia was absolutely sure that the perfect coat was out there for her; she just had to find it. She was about to give up when a beautiful long, bright blue, velvet coat caught her eye. As she reached for the coat, she was dazzled by the long, white-haired fur trim on the coat. The fur trim circled the neck, went down the front, as well as the bottom edge of the sleeves. This was exactly the coat that Virginia was looking for. When she tried it on, Virginia was even more thrilled to find out that the long hairs of the white fur trim seemed to "float in the air" as she walked. The hairs swayed with her every movement! What a fabulous touch to an already absolutely marvelous coat! She could just imagine all the admiring eyes that would be on her as she walked down the streets of Washington when she wore this magnificent, bright blue, velvet coat.



As she was twirling in front of the mirror, some of the long white hairs of the trim spun off the coat into the air and floated to the ground...how wonderful!! Oh my, Virginia realized that things were getting better and better. During one of her spins, she happened to glance at her mother, Giovanna. Virginia stopped and posed as she waited for Giovanna to jump up from her chair and clap her hands in approval. That was going to be a long wait; a real long wait!

From the look on Giovanna's face, it was very obvious that she did not approve of the coat.

She thought that the color was all wrong, the velvet fabric was totally impractical, and the long white fur was not only messy but cheap looking! What was her mother talking

about?!? Couldn't her mother see what a fashion statement the coat was and how totally stunning her daughter looked?!? This could not be happening! She had finally found the coat of her dreams; however, her mother wasn't up-to-date enough on fashion to realize how glamorous she looked!

Giovanna was adamant in her dislike of the coat. Not only did she think that it was awful, she insisted that Virginia take it off immediately. No daughter of hers would ever wear a coat like that!

Virginia's dream come true was now turning into a real nightmare!!

To make matters even worse, Giovanna had spotted another coat that she thought was a much more appropriate choice for Virginia. It was a very plain, dark blue, wool coat with a small brown mink collar and trim at the bottom of the sleeves. The coat was much too conservative for the thoroughly-modern fashion maven Virginia. However, to appease her mother, Virginia put the coat on. Although the coat fit Virginia very well, it was much, much too plain and unspectacular for the want-to-be budding fashion plate. She told her mother that she hated the coat and didn't want it.

Giovanna informed her that this coat was a much better coat than the bright blue velvet one. The fabric was finer, the fur was of a better quality, and the color and lines of the coat were classic. She'd be able to wear the coat for years. Virginia didn't care to hear about any of those aspects of the coat. It was just plain ugly and she didn't want it.

Just then Virginia noticed the price tag that was on the wool coat. It was thirty dollars; that was a great deal of money to pay for a coat. Previously, she had noticed that the velvet coat was only twenty-five dollars. There was a whopping five dollar difference in the prices of the two coats. That much would be enough to sway her ever-money conscious mother. Thinking that the difference in price would be enough to get her mother to change her mind about the velvet coat, Virginia pointed out that the wool coat cost five dollars more.

Giovanna was not swayed. She was absolutely steadfast in her decision that Virginia was not going to get the bright blue velvet coat. She was totally resolute that it was

going to be the dark blue wool coat for Virginia or nothing. Huh?! Didn't Papa say that she could have the coat that she wanted? Mama had to be playing games with her. Calling what she thought was her mother's bluff, Virginia said that if the blue wool coat was her only option, she would take nothing.

Without any hesitation, Giovanna got out of her chair and marched out of the store. Virginia couldn't believe what was going on! Mama was being absolutely impossible because she just didn't understand fashion! Her mother just didn't appreciate the beauty and glamour of the velvet coat and Virginia was going to lose out on it. Now it looked like she was not going to get a new coat after all!



As they walked home, neither Giovanna nor her daughter said a word. Giovanna was worn out from spending the entire day shopping and too tired to discuss the matter with her obstinate daughter. Virginia was in a state of shock from the sudden turn of events that had just occurred. She was undeniably heartbroken and dumbstruck.

When they finally arrived home, Rocco was waiting for them. As soon as they walked in the house he could tell from the expressions on their faces that things had not gone well. When he asked where the new coat was, Giovanna went on to tell him what had happened. She described in great detail the two coats that were the focus of the disagreement. She was quick to point out all the faults with the gorgeous blue velvet coat. She indicated that it was not only of poor quality and would not wear well though many years of use but also that the style was very radical and contemporary. The dark blue wool coat was of far superior quality in materials and style, had very nice mink trim and would certainly stand up to the test of time.

Virginia knew that she dared not say a word until her mother had finished. Then she had her chance. Through her tears she pointed out to her father that the blue velvet coat was the one that she absolutely loved and after fifteen years of never getting anything new to wear she should certainly be able to get the coat of her dreams. Additionally, Papa had told Mama that Virginia should get the coat that she wanted. When she sensed that she wasn't gaining any ground with that approach, she quickly added that the dark blue wool coat cost a full five dollars more than the bright blue

velvet one. Virginia said that she was looking at the financial savings for the family; they would be able to put the five dollars to good use for something that the entire family could use.

Rocco sat quietly listening to both sides of the story. He didn't say a word until he had heard everything that was said. He could sense that both mother and daughter felt very strongly about their opinions on the matter. However, as soon as he had heard the last of the coat crisis, he made a decision without any hesitation. Without raising his voice, Rocco asked his daughter if she still refused the dark blue wool coat that her mother wanted her to have and would only accept the bright blue velvet coat that she wanted. Virginia emphatically answered, "Yes!"

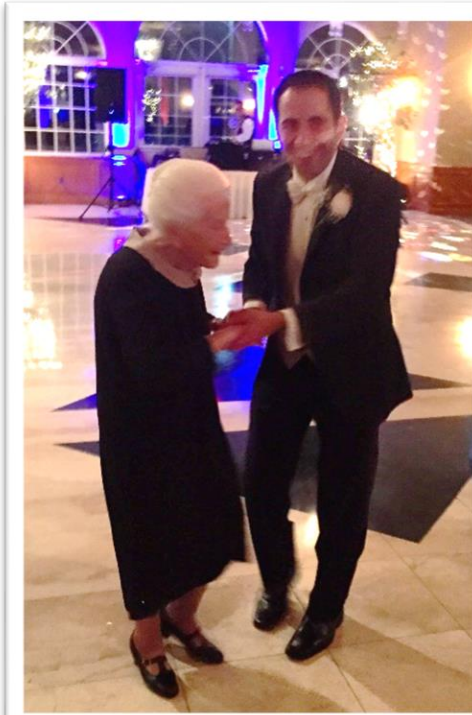
That was all Rocco had to hear. He then looked at Giovanna and said, "If Virginia does not want the coat that you think is best for her, then she will not be getting a new coat this year after all. Since Virginia does not want the new coat, tomorrow you can take one of the other, more appreciative, children downtown and get them a new coat. Now that I think of it, take Nancy downtown tomorrow so that she can get a new winter coat."

He then told Virginia, "If you do not want the coat your mother wants you to have, you will be wearing Nancy's hand-me-down coat again this year. The choice is yours."

It did not take Virginia long to make her decision on the matter. Wearing Nancy's hand-me-down coat for yet another year while she got a new one was just too much for her to bear. She quickly agreed to go back downtown the next day and get the coat that her mother wanted her to have.

When Giovanna and Virginia returned home with the coat the next day, Virginia proudly modeled it for her father. Rocco enthusiastically approved of the coat and thought that Giovanna had made an excellent choice for their daughter. He then told Virginia, "This is the first and the last coat that I am ever going to buy for you. The next coat your husband will buy for you!" Little did Rocco know how wrong he was! As the years passed, he was very pleased and honored to buy Virginia several more coats before she married.

Virginia grew to love the dark blue wool coat very much. She realized that her mother



knew more about fashion than she ever thought that she did. (How shocking???) The classic lines of the coat made it one that Virginia was able to proudly wear for many years. Additionally, the high quality of both the fabric in the coat and the mink in the trim wore very well through the years. Virginia understood that the blue velvet coat would have been a very poor choice. The example set by her dear mother Giovanna had a profound effect on her. Throughout her entire

life, Virginia always used the practice of selecting clothes that had classic style and were made from high-quality fabric.

Virginia dancing the tarantella with her great, great nephew Marcello Castelvete at his Aug, 2015 wedding

This was a lesson Virginia learned from her dear mother, an uneducated Italian immigrant who turned out to be one of the smartest women she would ever know!

Rocco & That Crazy English Language

During the middle of the night Rocco awoke with a severe pain in his stomach. The pain was so bad and lasted for so long that he thought he was going to die. His wife Giovanna was also not feeling well and so was sleeping in another bedroom. Rocco wanted to call out for his wife and children to come to his bedside so that he could see them all just one last time before he died. However, he decided he should let them all sleep. He knew that his life was coming to an end much sooner than he ever expected it would. Before dawn, it would be over for him. Getting ready to take what he thought were his last breaths, Rocco thanked God for the wonderful life and family he'd been given. He said his final prayers to the Lord and prepared to die.

Outside he could hear the twelve o'clock train whistle and knew it would be the last



sound he ever heard. However, at just that point, the extreme pain he was experiencing all at once left his body. He'd known that he was at death's door—then all of a sudden he felt better. It was a miracle; he'd been saved and allowed to live! The thankful Rocco said, “God,

I am not going to forget you for saving me.”

In the morning, he called his daughter Virginia to come into his bedroom. He told her that something miraculous had happened to him. It was only through the grace of God that he was still alive. He told her that he would be forever grateful to God for taking away the extreme pain and allowing him to live.

Because the pain had been so severe, Rocco decided to go to see Dr. Clarence McCullough, their trusted family doctor of many years, about the painful episode. After examining Rocco, Dr. McCullough recommended that he go to Pittsburgh to see a specialist. Dr. McCullough was kind enough to make the appointment for Rocco with the finest gastroenterologist in Pittsburgh. Once again the doctor had taken special care of his favorite patient. Rocco was very grateful for the thorough care that Dr. McCullough always gave him and his family.

While he knew how to drive and he knew his way around Washington, he had only been to the big, bustling downtown portion of the city of Pittsburgh a few times (always with others who knew the ways of the big city). Although he was still weak from last night's pain, Rocco was undaunted in his quest to completely address his medical needs and so he decided to travel by bus to downtown Pittsburgh. As only a proper Italian gentleman of the early 1900's would do, Rocco donned his finest (and only) suit, cleanest white shirt, best tie, newly polished shoes, and snappy hat (and of course his cleanest, newest underwear!) to go to the specialist (after all he did not want to embarrass Dr. McCullough or the entire Proia family). With the address of the specialist written on the paper and safely tucked into the pocket of his suit jacket, Rocco began his adventure by boarding the bus from Washington to Pittsburgh. Throughout the one-hour ride, Rocco was steadfast in his determination to make his way to the new doctor who would enable him to feel better again.

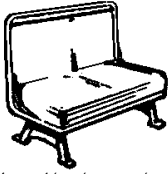
The first leg of his journey went extremely well, just as Rocco knew it would. After departing the first



bus, Rocco knew that he would have to get on a second bus that would take him to the doctor's office. Rocco took out the piece of paper with the doctor's address written on it, to verify the address. It hadn't changed; it was still 5418 Twenty-Two Street.

As the bus station was located in an area with which Rocco was unfamiliar, he asked the driver what bus he should get on to reach Twenty-Two Street. After he was pointed in the right direction, Rocco boarded that bus. Because Rocco was just a tad bit unsure of himself and was being ever so careful, he took out the piece of paper with the address on it, showed it to the bus driver, and asked if the bus went to Twenty-Two Street. The bus driver grunted, "Yes" with some irritation with

Rocco's question. Next Rocco asked the driver if he would tell him when they got to Twenty-Two Street. The bus driver mumbled some sort of reply back to Rocco that he really didn't understand but then nodded his head to indicate yes.



Confident that he was in very good hands and wanting to be sure that he was readily available for the bus driver's indication that they were at Twenty-Two Street, Rocco took the first seat right in back of the driver. Being ever so proper, he placed his hat on his lap, sat erect, and looked straight ahead while he waited. The driver made many stops. With each stop the driver loudly announced the name of the street. Names like Market, Fifth, Grant, and Penn Place were shouted out as Rocco waited patiently in his seat. As they rode along on that hot, sunny summer day, the bus grew increasingly hotter and more uncomfortable. Rocco, accustomed to conditions much worse while working in the coal mines, continued to sit very erect and proud.

As the bus trudged along on its route, the driver continued to bellow out the names of the streets. Now the bus driver was calling out names like Eighteenth Street, Nineteenth Street, Twentieth Street, and Twenty-First Street. People continued to get on and off the bus as Rocco continued to sit and wait patiently for Twenty-



Two Street. At the next stop, the bus driver barked out, "Twenty-Second Street!" Rocco just sat there not moving. Again the bus driver squawked, "Twenty-Second Street!" only this time a little louder while Rocco continued to wait patiently for his stop of Twenty-Two Street. Once again the driver screeched, "Twenty-Second Street" but this time with a great deal of irritation in his voice, which Rocco certainly did not understand, so he continued to remain in his seat.

Now what happened next was absolutely beyond anything Rocco expected or understood. The bus driver got out of his seat, placed his hands on his hips, and stood right in front of Rocco. What was going on?! Why was this happening?!? Rocco didn't understand what was taking place. Now the bus driver was actually screaming when he said with venom in his voice, "Hey Buddy, did you hear me?? I said

“Twenty-Second Street!” Rocco was thoroughly confused about why the bus driver was being so rude to him. In his attempt to add clarity to the situation, Rocco quickly took the piece of paper with the address out of his pocket. He looked at the paper to verify the address and then he really couldn’t understand why the bus driver was acting the way he was.

In an effort to eliminate any further confusion from the situation, Rocco then showed the paper to the driver. As he did, he defiantly pointed and said, “I need to go to Twenty-Two Street not Twenty-Second Street.”

Now the bus driver had had it. He bellowed back, “Hey mister, what’s wrong with you? Don’t you know that Twenty-Second Street is Twenty-Two Street!?” as he spit on the floor.

Embarrassed and humiliated, Rocco quietly walked off the bus. He looked up at the sign and it said Twenty-Two Street so what was the bus driver talking about Twenty-Second Street? Rocco couldn’t comprehend the confusion nor understand why the bus driver had spoken to him as rudely as he did.



However, Rocco was on a mission to get to the gastroenterologist’s office and didn’t have time to think about the bus driver. Soon he found the doctor’s office and was relieved to learn that the situation with his stomach was not as serious as it could have been. The specialist reassured Rocco that it could be easily corrected with minor surgery (Who knew?).

When Rocco got home that night he told his family about the situation that occurred on the bus. He told them that he was absolutely bewildered and confused with the “crazy, inconsistent English language that these Americans use!! The paper clearly said Twenty-Two Street!! What was this Twenty-Second Street business that the bus driver shouted and became so upset when Rocco did not understand what he was saying? After all the paper clearly said Twenty-Two Street and not Twenty-Second Street!”

Although Rocco never got over the embarrassment and confusion of that ride on the bus in Pittsburg, the family has had many years of laughter and enjoyment in retelling the story! However, they all agreed with their father that the English language has many rules and many more inconsistencies....all of which make the language very difficult to master!

Coulda, Shoulda, Chose Not To

The four years that I spent at Washington High School was a time of sheer enjoyment for me. I thoroughly loved going to school and flourished in all aspects of my education. Learning about new and interesting subjects was something I absolutely adored. All of a sudden my eyes were opened to horizons I'd never seen and unknown worlds that I wanted to explore. My parents, Giovanna and Rocco Proia, always encouraged me and my siblings Nancy, Jo, Anna, Albert, Arthur, Teresa, and George to do well in school. Both wanted their children to absorb all the knowledge we could. The two of them realized the key to our success would be through the information and skills we gained in school.

While I liked all of my classes, there were some I enjoyed more than the others. My favorites were English and Domestic Science. In my English class, I loved reading the wide variety of literature and discussing them with my teachers and classmates. Reading seemed to open doors to faraway places, distant times, and exciting adventures for me. *Anne of Green Gables* was one of the books that I particularly enjoyed, so much so that I read it several times.



It was in my Domestic Science class that I developed my love of baking. It wasn't long before I became the "official baker" in the Proia household. Mama encouraged me to prepare the recipes that I had learned in class for the family. Everyone enjoyed my cakes and cookies but my specialty was my cream puffs. In fact, I'm proud to let you know that I became known far and wide as "Virginia, the Cream Puff Queen."

That was also the class where I developed my love for needlework. For me it began on the very first day I entered the Domestic Science class. My teacher, Miss Irene Murphy, gave each of the students a needle and some thread and told us to thread them. She said that when we sewed it was necessary to make a knot at the end of the thread to hold the thread in place. The teacher asked each of us to place a knot in our thread. As we were doing so, Miss Murphy walked around the room to observe how each of us accomplished what she asked. I'd watched my mother do a lot of mending and saw how she knotted the thread, so I did it exactly as she did.

When everyone was finished, the teacher asked the class, "How many of you used four fingers to make your knot?" Approximately half the girls in the class raised their hands. She then went on to ask, "How many students used two fingers to make your knot?" Again, almost half the class members raised their hands. Finally, Miss Murphy asked the class, "Did anyone use three fingers to make their knot?" Now I'd used three fingers to tie my knot but the vast majority of the class had used either two or four fingers. Very hesitantly, I raised my hand. When I looked around I was so embarrassed because I was the only one with my hand raised.



Then Miss Murphy told me to come to the front of the classroom. As a shy child in school this was very hard for me to do, but I also knew that I must do as my teacher asked. I stood next to her and faced the class. I was shocked when Miss Murphy said that I was the only one who'd tied their knot correctly using three fingers. I couldn't believe my ears!! I was the only one in the entire class who had done it right?!? How could that be? Next, Miss Murphy told me to demonstrate to the class how I'd made my knot. While apprehensive, I again did as told and showed the class the technique

I'd used to tie my knot. The teacher told the students that they were to watch me carefully so that they would be able to make knots exactly as I did....the correct way.

From that day forward, Miss Murphy and I had a very special relationship. She was able to help me develop my sewing skills to a degree I hadn't known I could reach.

Miss Murphy said I was a "natural" at sewing. With her guidance, I soon became an outstanding seamstress and every year was Miss Murphy's star student. I learned to make aprons, nightgowns, and skirts in the class and am proud to say that my completed sewing projects were often put on display so others could see my fine workmanship.



Miss Murphy spent a great deal of time with me and encouraged me to stay after school to get individualized instruction to perfect my sewing skills. I thrived with all the additional attention she gave me. Miss Murphy always said she loved watching her favorite student flourish. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every child had a teacher like Miss Murphy in their life?

There was one project that I spent a great deal of time on in order to complete it exactly the way I wanted. It was a long white nightgown with which I'd taken great care and done my best work. While I was extremely pleased, I wanted to make it extra special so I decided to add a little bit of white and pink embroidery to the yoke of the nightgown. Unfortunately, I didn't realize how long it would take to complete the intricate embroidery. After school I asked Miss Murphy if it would be possible for me to take the nightgown home to finish the embroidery before I turned it in the next day. Without hesitation, she told me that I could.

The next day I was so pleased when I turned in my nightgown; the lovely, delicate embroidery on the yoke had added just the perfect special touch. That day after school, my teacher said she wanted to talk to me about my project. Miss Murphy said that I had done exceptional work on the nightgown. However, she questioned if I had done the finishing touches on the gown myself. She looked directly into my eyes and said very sternly, "I want you to tell me the truth Virginia. Did your mother do the embroidery on the yoke of this nightgown for you?"

I was crushed. How could Miss Murphy ever think that I'd do anything as deceitful and dishonest as that! Quickly I responded with, "Oh, no Miss Murphy! My mother doesn't even know how to do embroidery. She only knows how to patch clothes!"

Miss Murphy told me, "Virginia, I believe you. The reason I questioned you is because the quality of workmanship in this embroidery is exceptional. I have never seen a girl of your age who was able to do embroidery so well. You have done an outstanding job on this nightgown. I am going to give you a grade of 99 on your project; that's the highest grade I have ever given any student in my entire teaching career. Although your gown is wonderful, it is not perfect. I believe there is always room for improvement so that's why you didn't get a 100."



Through the years, Miss Murphy and I continued to have a very close relationship. We'd talk about many things each time I went to the Domestic Science room after school. In the spring of 1929 as the end of my senior year approached, Miss Murphy asked me what I planned on doing after graduation. Over the years of being asked this question, I'd learned how to give her vague, non-committal responses. This time she told me that she was impressed with my skills and capabilities and, because of that, I should consider going on to college.

As Miss Murphy spoke, she pointed out to me that I should be very proud of the fine quality of work that I always produced. She then went on to discuss the exemplary academic record that I had achieved while a student at Washington High School.

She said that I had done an exceptional job in all of my classes and had shown that I



was a very intelligent and capable young lady. It was for these reasons she felt very strongly that my education should not end with my high school graduation. In order to reach my full potential, I needed to go on to college. With the additional education, I'd be able to achieve many successes in life.

Miss Murphy knew that I was the second oldest of eight children and that it would be a struggle for my family to send me to college. However, if at all possible, she felt that I should have the opportunity to further my education. She knew that the closest college open to me at that time was thirty miles away in Pittsburgh. I'd have to either live on campus or commute there every day. These would be big obstacles for my family and me to overcome.

To help convince my parents that I should go to college, Miss Murphy said that she'd go to my home and talk to them. She felt that if my parents knew what potential their daughter had, they'd do all that they could to make it possible for me to go to college. She told me, "I would be happy to go to your home to discuss your future with your parents. I think that it would be helpful if I spoke to your father and mother about you going to college. If they knew how much you would benefit from continuing your education, they'd probably let you go on to college."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Not only had Miss Murphy offered to go to my home to talk to my parents but she wanted to say things about me that were totally beyond my comprehension. Never in my wildest dreams had I ever even imagined that I'd ever go on to college. After all, in 1929 it was a rarity that women went, especially in Washington, Pennsylvania. To make matters even worse, my father would probably say that they would make it possible for me to go to college! How could this be happening!?! I had to concentrate very hard to keep my composure though this nightmare!

This had to be stopped before it went any further. Immediately I blurted out to her, "Oh no! Miss Murphy, you cannot go to my house to talk to my parents about me going to college." I went on to explain, "How can I go to college when our family has a limited amount of money available and there are six children younger than me? If my parents spend the money to send me to college, I'd be taking food out of my sisters and brothers mouths! I can't and I absolutely won't do that!"

In the weeks that followed, I remained steadfast in my decision that Miss Murphy not be allowed to go to my home to talk to my parents about attending college. Although my teacher tried several more times, she couldn't convince me to change my mind. I told her that I absolutely refused to further my education at the expense of my family.

Although I didn't go on to college, I did achieve many successes in my life. All of the credit for that should go to my parents, Rocco and Giovanna Proia...the two greatest teachers that I had!! Though sometimes I think about all the things I could have studied in college and what I would have been able to accomplish with my college degree. But you know what, I think that I did pretty darn well in my life even without one!!

The Proia Princesses Get Plastered

It might be very interesting to know how many of the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc., etc., etc. of my siblings know the details of this story. It's a real doozy! Let me tell you the way I remember it; after all I was there!

Holiday celebrations at our home on South Street were always filled with love, laughter and happiness. Our parents brought with them many customs and traditions that were true to their Italian heritage. Every holiday always included sharing the many delicious home-cooked Italian foods with not only our family but also the many friends who were always invited to share in the festivities. The holidays at the Proia house were always events to remember.

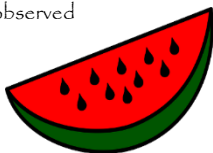


Our celebrations began each January when we rang in the New Year. Our family always looked forward to the coming year; we all hoped it would be filled with continued happiness and the promise of a bright future. Mama always proudly served the family the roasted chicken and potatoes she'd prepared in her much-loved outdoor oven. Sweetness in the form of dried figs and dates were served with honey to signify the many sweet things we hoped would be ahead for us in the coming year. Usually, another family would come over to share the fun of the day with us. Everyone would gather around the huge kitchen table to laugh, listen to Papa's humorous stories, and play games like lotto; and no I don't mean we played the lottery! Do you really think a Proia would have been so foolish as to waste the money buying lottery tickets?

Next came Pasqua, the Italian word for Easter. It was a joyous celebration that followed the solemn forty days of Lent. During Lent, our devoutly Catholic clan frequently fasted and abstained from eating meat so the family always particularly enjoyed the foods served at Easter. The traditional food our parents prepared for Pasqua included a frittata made with asparagus and bacon that was served in the morning along with fresh fruit. At dinner everyone feasted on the whole lamb that Papa had purchased from a local farmer. The lamb was roasted with potatoes and carrots in our backyard brick oven. Mama would also bake panettone, a special sweet Easter bread, for the family to enjoy.



Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day were all "American" national holidays observed



during the summer months. Like the other "Americans," the Proia family usually cooked outside on these occasions. Rather than the traditional hamburgers and hotdogs, Mama would make and serve chicken and pizza that

she prepared in the backyard oven. Watermelon and cantaloupe were often served after the meal was completed.

Thanksgiving was another national holiday that we observed but with our own little twist. In

place of the traditional turkey and mashed potatoes that most Americans enjoyed, our

family always ate steaming-hot homemade pasta that Mama had made especially for the holiday. In addition, she would prepare her famous and oh, so delicious garlic chicken with roasted potatoes. Completing the meal would be fresh fruit, cheese, and nuts for dessert.



Now Christmas was always a two-day celebration at the Proia's. On Christmas Eve we had to abstain from eating any meat; absolutely no meat would be served. Rather we enjoyed a "Feast of the Seven Fishes" in which seven kinds of fish would be



served. Since we were not wealthy, the more economical fishes were prepared in dishes such as salted, dried cod (baccalà) with tomatoes; fried smelts; or linguine with olive oil, garlic, and anchovies. Treats such as dried figs and dates, roasted chestnuts, and an abundance of fresh fruit would be the finishing touches for our meal.

Natale, Italian for Christmas, was a day of endless eating and merriment. Of course, it was our favorite holiday. Our family would gather around the kitchen table eating, laughing, and telling stories for most of the day. Mama would be busy preparing her mouth-watering homemade pasta with delicious meat sauce, her famous garlic chicken with roasted potatoes, and pizza. Since it was Christmas, there would be sweet treats such as torrone (Italian nougat candy), pizzelles (Italian waffle cookies), and biscotti (crisp Italian cookies) served along with the traditional fruit and roasted nuts.



On one particular Christmas Eve in the late 1920's, the Proia family gathered around the kitchen table listening to Papa tell some of his humorous stories while we

nibbled on the wide array of cookies, candy, fruit and nuts that were on the table. As usual, in addition to all the delicious food, there was an abundance of wine available to sip on. In our house, it wasn't unusual for the men to drink a small glass of wine with their dinner, and since it was Christmas Eve, the wine flowed. Nancy, Josephine, Anna and I were all teenagers. Although it was highly unusual for a Proia girl to drink wine, that Christmas Eve Papa allowed the four of us to sip some of the delicious wine that was on the table.



As the evening progressed, the wine began to taste better and better to my sisters and me. We sipped away as Papa continued to tell one funny, animated story after another. The more we drank, the funnier the stories became.

(Imagine that!!) Since Papa had a vast repertoire of stories that he could tell, the evening was full of many great tales filled with animation, gestures, voice changes, and lots of laughter. The family just loved when Papa told his stories and we always encouraged him to tell every single one of our favorites.

While the stories were being told, we Proia Princesses continued to sip away at the wine. Slowly, but surely, several generous glasses of wine were enjoyed by each of us. Mama noticed the amount we drank and the negative effect it was having on us. Much to her dismay, her precious daughters were all getting dizzy, laughing much too loud, being extremely silly, and becoming quite obnoxious. She told our father to stop us from drinking. She emphatically pointed out to him, "Rocco they are all getting drunk!"

Papa just laughed and said to Mama, "What better place for them to get drunk for the first time than in their own home? Tomorrow when they experience the results of tonight's drinking, they'll learn a very valuable lesson! It will be a lesson they'll remember for the rest of their lives!" Then he added, "Don't stop them; let them continue to drink as much as they want!"

When Mama heard what Papa said, she was horrified! How could her husband, the father of her daughters, ever permit such a totally unacceptable thing to happen! A

refined and proper Italian young lady would never do such an outlandish thing; certainly not any of her beloved daughters. But what could she do? Since Rocco was the head of their family and he said it fine with him, then there was nothing she could do about it. She had to just sit and watch the whole appalling scene play out before her outraged eyes.

As the evening went on, Papa continued to tell a multitude of hilarious stories about family and friends. With each story, his eyes seemed to twinkle as he knew his family loved the tales almost as much as he enjoyed telling them. He also noticed that Nancy, Jo, Anna and I were continuing to sip away at the wine. With each story, the sips became a little bigger and a lot closer together. Yes, his beloved Proia Princesses were tipsy and well on their way to becoming totally and completely rip-roaring drunk! Now if he told a few more stories, his goal of his daughters getting fully schnockered would be achieved.



By midnight, it was "mission accomplished" for Papa; Phase I of his plan was now complete. All four of us were unsteady on our feet; so much so that it was necessary for both Mama and Papa to help each one of their drunken daughters to bed. We were later to learn that once the four of us were in our beds, Mama had a very forceful talk with her husband. Once again, she expressed her complete displeasure with Papa's plan to teach their daughters a lesson by letting them get drunk. Papa laughed as he promptly assured her that he had made absolutely the right decision on the matter. (Of course!)

The next morning, all four of us slept well beyond our normal time to get up. However, as soon as we started to stumble out of bed, the effects of our drinking were apparent to each of us. Our heads were throbbing, our stomachs churning, and our ears ringing. Before long we were running downstairs to the bathroom. We were all extremely nauseous and ever so hopeful that we'd make it into the bathroom before

one of our sisters did. Over and over, the four of us beat a path to the bathroom, very sick and repeatedly vomiting. To say we were miserable would be an understatement. For what seemed like an eternity, one of us would be moaning, another crying, a third in the bathroom and the fourth banging on the bathroom door trying to get in. Much to his delight, Phase II of Papa's plan was working just as he knew it would.



At that time, we only had the first-floor bathroom and our bedroom was on the second floor so you can imagine what kind of mess we made. The long trek to the bathroom often proved to be much too far in our time of desperate need and there were many accidents along the way. Since we were so sick, Mama was left to clean up the messes from all our many accidents. Needless to say, Mama pointed out to Papa in some choice Italian words that if this was the intended outcome of his plan, then why was she the one who was stuck doing all the work of cleaning up after their girls and not him! Once again, Papa just laughed as his eyes twinkled.

As the day progressed, the four of us became weaker and more emotional. All day long we continued to wail and sob. However, the one that cried the longest and loudest was Josephine. My sister Jo was sure that her drunkenness had disappointed our father beyond repair. Each time she saw him she would wail louder than all the rest of us and say repeatedly, "Oh, Papa! Oh, Papa!"

Papa reassured us that we'd eventually feel better. True to his predictions, as the day progressed, all of us became stronger and our hangover symptoms lessened. However, Josephine was still extremely upset. Even after she felt better physically, emotionally she was an absolute wreck. When Papa tried to console her, Jo would just continue to sob loudly. Finally, she couldn't hold back any longer. She blurted out, "Papa, I have disappointed you so much. I know that you aren't going to love me anymore!"

Papa laughed as he threw his arms around her and hugged her tightly as he told her, "Oh no, my beloved Josephine, I will always love you. Today you learned a valuable

lesson and I love you even more because of that!" Then he added, "Jo, you are my favorite child and I love you most of all." (This was a line that Papa often used with each of his children. He loved all of us equally and never tried to show favorites.



This photo of the five Proia Princesses, standing in birth order, was taken a "few" years after the first four: Nancy, Virginia, Josephine, and Anna participated in their Papa's little experiment. Teresa missed the excitement.

However, as the situation arose, he would just change the name of the child he was talking to at the time to tell them that they were his favorite!)

As far as Mama was concerned, Christmas had been ruined at the Proia house that year. Only the younger children that hadn't gotten drunk the night before had eaten any of the special leftovers from the Christmas meal she had spent hours and hours preparing for her family. In addition, she had to make chicken soup for her four drunken daughters because they couldn't eat any of the other delicious food she'd prepared. To make matters worse for our mother, she had spent her Christmas cleaning up the messes her daughters had made while recovering from their hangovers. Throughout the day she told Papa, "See, you ruined my Christmas!! You ruined my Christmas!!"

However our father felt totally different about the day. In his opinion, the day had been spent teaching his beloved daughters a valuable lesson on drinking. It would be a long, long time, if ever, before his Proia Princesses would drink to excess again. His plan had profound, long-term effects on each of us. Although we would all enjoy a glass of wine or an occasional drink, none of us ever got drunk again. As he knew it would, Phase III of Papa's plan had been successfully completed to his utmost



satisfaction!

Once again our Papa had proven that another of his life lessons for his children would, as he had intended, last a lifetime! Our Papa was indeed a very wise man and our Mama practiced extreme patience with her husband!

Giovanna's Secret To Making Rocco's Dreams Come True

After a long day at work, Rocco looked forward to going home to his beloved family. As he entered the house, he immediately enjoyed the mouthwatering aroma of the dinner that his dear wife Giovanna was preparing for the family. Rocco knew that he'd soon be sitting at the head of the dining table savoring every morsel of the delicious food his wife had lovingly made. Their eight children would fill the table with much excitement and words of how their day had been spent as they all ate dinner together.

As always happened when he walked into the kitchen of their home, Giovanna asked her husband how his day had gone. Rocco told his wife that he'd had a busy day in which he'd been able

to accomplish quite a few tasks. He then went to tell her the highlight of his day, "Today I saw the most beautiful used truck for sale."

Rocco was quiet for a minute or two before he went on to add, "[f] had that truck I could do so much!"

FOR SALE!

Giovanna's interest was piqued as she asked, "Tell me what you think you could do if you had that truck."

Rocco quickly answered with, "I could make a lot of money with this truck. It's bigger than the truck I already have. I could use it to haul big loads of produce from our garden to sell in Pittsburgh. Then I'd be able to transport large sacks of flour and sugar as well as oil and pasta back from Pittsburgh to sell to the storeowners in Washington. That's just the beginning of what I could do. Once I start transporting goods back and forth to Pittsburgh, many more doors will open for me."

"Hmmm, it sounds like the truck would be a great buy," Giovanna pensively responded.

However, Rocco's enthusiasm quickly changed. He then curtly added, "There is no use in talking about that truck. It is very expensive and we could never afford to buy it."



Giovanna wanted to know more about the truck. She wondered what he thought was expensive, so she asked, "Rocco, how much does this truck cost?"

Discouraged and not wanting to talk about a truck he could never have, Rocco answered disheartedly with, "What difference does it make how much it cost? It doesn't matter. The truck is so expensive that it is totally beyond our means."

With her curiosity getting even stronger, she pressed her husband for more information. "Rocco, I don't get out into the business world as much as you do and really don't know anything about the price of trucks. Just so I would have a better understanding of how much trucks cost, tell me how much money it would take to buy the truck."

Still discouraged, Rocco answered with, "I already told you it costs a lot of money. In fact, it costs a thousand dollars. It might as well cost a million dollars because we could never afford it."

When Giovanna heard the huge amount, she didn't push the subject any further. Rocco was right, a thousand dollars was a great deal of money. The subject of the truck was totally dropped. They would waste no more time discussing the matter.

That night at dinner, the Proia children shared the events of the day with their parents. Every day both Giovanna and Rocco were always eager to hear what the children had studied at school. Throughout dinner both parents encouraged each child to tell the family something new they learned that day. The children were all eager to share with the family, especially their parents.

After dinner, the children went into the dining room to do their homework. All of them would bring their books, paper, and pencils as they gathered around the large table to do their homework. They all worked together to get their assignments done. Rocco and Giovanna would encourage their children to do a good job on their homework. Often, they reviewed each of the assignments the children completed.



As the children were completing their lessons, Giovanna went into the basement. There she filled her apron with fruit that Rocco had bought at the produce stand in Pittsburgh. She also gathered some of the nuts that were stored in the basement. She then went upstairs and sat at a little bench between the dining room and the kitchen to shell the nuts and cut up the fruit for the children. Each child was given a half a glass of nuts and a bowl of fruit to eat while doing their homework. In the winter, she also made cafe au lait, which she made with much more milk than coffee, for the children to enjoy.

On this particular evening Rocco sat in a chair at the kitchen table reading the Italian newspaper. Every night he enjoyed finding out what was happening in Italy. He'd carefully read every word of every article. Rocco wanted to know everything possible about the events and happenings in his homeland. He even enjoyed reading the advertisements; they gave him further insight into what was current in Italy.

After the children had been given their snacks, Giovanna sat down at the kitchen table. She told her husband, "Rocco, come here."

Absorbed in an article in the paper Rocco answered with, "I am here, what do you want?"

An insistent Giovanna repeated, "Rocco come here."

Still absorbed in his reading, Rocco absentmindedly replied, "But I am here."

The determined Giovanna told him again, this time with more strength and force, "Rocco, come here and sit right next to me at the table."

Reluctantly Rocco put down the paper and sat down next to his wife. Giovanna brought up the subject of the truck again. She asked him, "Rocco do you still want to buy that used truck?"

Without any hesitation, Rocco answered, "Oh, yes I would but we could never afford it. I told you it was very expensive."

Not saying another word, Giovanna reached into the pocket of her apron and put a ten-dollar bill on the table. Rocco just looked at the bill. Slowly, Giovanna reached in her pocket again and put another bill on the table, this time it was a twenty-dollar bill. Rocco's eyes opened very wide. Giovanna continued to put bill after bill on the table; some were one's, some five's, some ten's, some twenty's, some fifty's and even some one hundred's. Rocco's eyes kept getting bigger and bigger; he was in total shock. He finally asked her, "Giovanna what are you doing?"

Without saying a word, Giovanna kept removing the bills, one by one, from her pocket. Finally when there was a thousand dollars on the table, Giovanna told Rocco, "Here is the money you need to buy that truck you saw today."



Rocco was so overwhelmed that he burst into tears. He cried and cried so hard that he couldn't hold his head up. He put his head in his hands as he sobbed over what he



had just seen. After quite some time he was able to regain his composure. Finally, he asked his wife, "Giovanna, where did

you get all this money?"

Taken back by the question, Giovanna answered with, "It is not as if I stole it! I got it by saving a penny here, a quarter there, as well as a dollar every once in a while. I saved the money from the vegetables that the children sold as well as from the money that you earned and brought home to me."

Still in utter disbelief, Rocco continued to cry as he thought of how careful and wise with money his wife was to be able to save that vast amount of money. He also realized how long it had to have taken to save one thousand dollars.

Giovanna then told him, "Tomorrow morning you get up very early so that you can go and buy the truck before someone else does." The next morning, Rocco did exactly as his wife had told him. Without wasting a minute, he went, purchased the truck, and that afternoon he came back home with it. However, the driveway between the houses was very narrow and Rocco had a very difficult time getting the truck into the

backyard. It took six men to guide him through the tight squeeze between the houses. There were two men in front, one on each side, and two in the back to guide him. Inch by inch, Rocco finally



A delivery truck from 1927

drove the

truck into the backyard. When he finally made it in, he put his head on the steering wheel and cried from sheer exhaustion.

Giovanna brought a tray full of glasses of wine for the men to congratulate Rocco on his great accomplishments. First, he was the only Italian who knew how to drive. Then, he had been able to pay cash for this huge truck. Finally, he was able to get the truck into the backyard without damaging either the house or the truck. These were wonderful accomplishments for this hard-working, determined immigrant from Italy.

As Rocco was basking in the glory of what they'd achieved, he smiled at his beloved Giovanna. He knew that it was because of his loving wife that he'd been able to achieve all his successes. Rocco loved and cherished Giovanna; she was a treasure whom he adored and was the woman who'd made his dreams come true.



Fireworks Begin On South Street

It was early in the summer of 1937 and Jack Rea was living in Detroit with his Zio Onorio and his wife Lucia. The very handsome Italian Stallion, who was approaching twenty-nine, was spending his weekends carousing around town in his snappy new black 1937 Ford sedan. Donning his stylish new suit, dress shirt, tie and shoes, Jack would spend his free time looking for love in all the wrong places...at the homes of friends of Lucia who had young eligible daughters (as well as at a few other unnamed places!). Although Lucia and Jack visited several of her friends and their daughters, he didn't think that any were the woman of his dreams.

While back in Italy, Jack's mother had hoped that he would soon return to marry Rosa, the woman she had picked out for him. However, Jack knew that was never going to happen. No, Jack was indeed looking for a very special woman to marry and

spend the rest of his life with. Of course, only a woman of 100% Italian heritage (a thoroughbred) would do for this Italian Stallion.



Lucia, his uncle's wife, had a brother named Raffaeli DonFrancisco and a sister named Giovanna Proia who lived in Washington, Pennsylvania. Raffaeli had four daughters; two were married and one had a boyfriend. However, his youngest daughter, Rosie, would be a fine match for Jack. In fact, Lucia thought that Rosie would be absolutely perfect for Jack. The matchmaker in Lucia assured Jack that a trip to Washington over the upcoming Fourth of

July weekend would be well worth the long drive. Jack was eager to have the opportunity to meet the lovely DonFrancisco princess and quickly agreed to the adventure.

On the long nine hour drive from Detroit to Washington, Lucia told Jack all about her young niece Rosie, who he was about to meet. He heard all about the virtues of Rosie; she was lovely, charming, hardworking, and bright. Lucia was sure to put a special emphasis on the merits of Rosie, as she was sure that her niece would be the best match for Jack. By the time they arrived at her brother Raphaeli and sister-in-law Lucia's home, Jack felt like he knew all about the young lady he was about to meet. After all the wonderful details his Aunt Lucia had told him about Rosie, Jack was looking forward to meeting the young lady in person.



However, things did not turn out exactly as planned that first Friday night. When they arrived at the DonFrancisco home, Raffaeli and his wife welcomed his sister Lucia and Jack into their home. A fine dinner was served and everyone enjoyed themselves. However, Jack soon realized Rosie wasn't the woman of his dreams.

Although Rosie was indeed a very nice, lovely young lady, Jack was just not interested in pursuing a long-term relationship with her. When he privately told Lucia his feelings, she was very disappointed. As far as she was concerned, the trip to Washington was wasted.

Later in the evening, Jack and Lucia went to visit the Proia family. Lucia's sister Giovanna was married to Rocco Proia and they had five daughters. Two of their daughters, Nancy and Josephine, were not at the Proia home as they both lived in Washington, DC. Their second daughter, Virginia, had gone to the movies with her younger sister Anna. The new Errol Flynn movie, "The Prince and the Pauper" had just started playing in town and the young ladies didn't want to miss it. Additionally, they were not fond of their Zia Lucia and they did want to miss her! Teresa, their youngest daughter, was married and not visiting at her parent's home when her Aunt Lucia arrived with Jack. Lucia and Jack ended up spending the evening chatting only with Giovanna and Rocco. The elder Proias had a chance to get to know Jack and they certainly liked what they saw!

The next morning, Lucia brought Jack to Tri-State Wholesale to show him her brother-in-law's business. While there, Lucia introduced Jack to Rocco and Giovanna's daughter Virginia, who managed the business. Although everything Virginia heard from her parents about Jack was very positive, the Proia Princess' opinion about him was tainted by her dislike for her aunt....anyone associated with Zia Lucia had three strikes against them from the very start! However, true to her proper upbringing, Virginia was very polite and cordial to both Jack and Zia Lucia. The two of them stayed a little while chatting and talking with Virginia before leaving to visit Lucia's other friends in Washington.

Around noon, Jack came back to Tri-State Wholesale alone. Virginia was very surprised to see him. She was even more surprised when Jack said that he had come to take her to lunch. Virginia told him that she didn't leave the business to eat lunch; her mother always packed her a lunch and she ate at work. Jack then asked what time she went home at the end of the day. She told him 5:30. At precisely 5:30 Jack was back again to take her home for dinner. Although invited, Jack did not eat with the

family. However, he did stay in the kitchen and talked with the Proias for most of the evening.

The next day was Sunday, the Fourth of July. In the true American tradition, the Proias planned a barbeque to be held in their huge backyard. Giovanna planned a

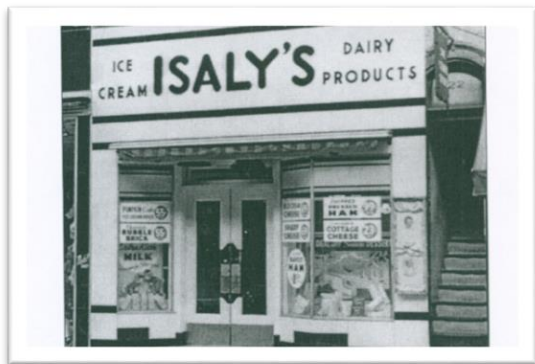


meal that consisted of roasted chicken, potatoes, carrots, and pizza; all of which she could cook in the large outdoor oven that Rocco had built for her. Rocco and

Giovanna were delighted that their daughters Nancy and Josephine would be driving from Washington, DC to spend the holiday with the family. Rocco and Giovanna had also invited lots of relatives and friends to their annual Fourth of July gathering. Everyone would have a grand time eating the delicious food, playing many games of bocce, and sharing lots of fun stories on the perfect, warm, sunny day.

Virginia and Anna planned to spend the morning helping their mother prepare the food for the festivities. However, Jack arrived well before the indicated time that dinner would be served. He asked Virginia if she would go with him for a ride to show him the sights of Washington. Virginia thought he was a handsome, polite, and very nice young man so she agreed to take him around town.

She gave him the grand tour of Washington showing him the new hospital, Immaculate Conception Church, City Hall, the Courthouse, as



well as a few of the big stores. Jack then took her to Islay's for ice cream; however, Virginia didn't order any ice cream because she didn't want to lead Jack on or be

“obligated” to him in any way. After spending the morning with Virginia, Jack was very interested in getting to know her better.

Even though none of the Proia Princesses had any great interest in any of the guests that they were going to have for dinner, one of the guests certainly made things much more interesting than they ever expected. The young ladies soon learned that Jack, the Italian Stallion, was indeed a very handsome, debonair, and charming young man. With his delightful smile and quick wit, he quickly won over all the young ladies....especially Virginia. The Proia Princess was very impressed with the stylish and gallant gentleman from Detroit. Although Virginia was demure and reserved, she found Jack very easy to talk to. In fact, all of the Proia girls had a great deal of fun with the dashing Jack.

It was at the Proia gathering that Jack took the time to get to know Virginia better. She had caught his eye and peaked his interest the day before. During their ride through Washington that morning, he became certain that Virginia was a very special lady. Jack made sure that he spent the majority of the day with Virginia. As the day progressed, Jack became more and more smitten with her. He was very taken with her beauty, intellect, poise, refinement, and charm. The fact that she was from a very fine Italian family was another important factor in his attraction to her. The more he got to know Virginia, the more he was thoroughly impressed with her.

Virginia was equally taken with Jack. He certainly was everything a woman would want in a suitor; he was intelligent, handsome, polite, polished, respectful, and well bred. In addition, it was obvious that he was successful because he drove a shiny new car and wore very dapper clothes! To top it off, Jack had a beautiful smile and such a good sense of humor that he charmed everyone at the gathering....especially her!!

It seemed everywhere Virginia went that day, Jack would soon find his way there also. If Virginia went into the kitchen to help her mother, it wouldn't be long before Jack would find an excuse to appear in the kitchen as well. When Virginia went out to the backyard to join in the games or to talk to the guests, Jack would suddenly have a reason to go out to the backyard also. This went on the entire day. Jack didn't want

to let Virginia get out of his sight for even a second....he liked what he saw far too much to let that happen!

Jack's obvious interest in Virginia soon became apparent to everyone who was there. Virginia's sister Josephine decided to say something to her about what was going on



with Jack. When they were alone in the living room, Josephine said to Virginia, "I think that fella is stuck on you!"

Virginia quickly responded with, "I think so, too!" Then she added, "Isn't he handsome?"

Josephine answered without any hesitation, "Oh yes, he is very handsome!"

As the day progressed, Virginia and Jack became more and more enchanted with each other. By the time the fireworks went off in the

sky that night, they were also going off in the hearts of the Proia Princess and the Italian Stallion!! The sparks that flew between Virginia and Jack on that Fourth of July weekend ignited a romance that would last for almost half a century!!

Hitting The Highway For His Honey



Virginia Proia, an intelligent and beautiful Proia Princess, met Jack Rea, the handsome and charming Italian Stallion, on the first weekend of July in 1937. Jack had driven his uncle's wife Lucia to Washington, Pennsylvania from Detroit, Michigan for a weekend visit to her relatives. The plan was to "fix-up" Jack with her brother Raffaeli's daughter Rosie. Although the young lady was very nice, Jack wasn't interested in pursuing anything beyond a cordial friendship with Rosie. (She just wasn't the girl for him.) Later that weekend, he met Virginia, who was the daughter of Lucia's sister Giovanna. Jack very much liked what he saw in Virginia.

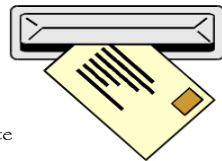
Immediately smitten with the second Proia Princess, Jack wasted absolutely no time in trying to get to know the young lady better. On the first day they met, Jack offered to take Virginia to both lunch and dinner. The next day, the Fourth of July, her parents invited him to their home for an afternoon cookout. However, Jack arrived at their home in his shiny new black 1937 Ford sedan in the morning. Soon after, he asked Virginia if she would take him on a tour of the town. What he really wanted was a chance to get to know her better while visiting the sights of Washington. That afternoon at the barbecue, Jack spent as much time as possible with Virginia. The more he got to know her, the more interested he became. Later that day, he left

Washington for the long nine-hour drive back to Detroit. While driving through Ohio, Jack stopped to purchase a postcard and sent it to Virginia. He wasn't taking the chance she'd forget him.

Two weeks later, Jack unexpectedly showed up at the family's business, Tri-State Wholesale, which Virginia managed. Surprised to see him, she coyly asked, "What are you doing here?" He explained that he'd been invited to a friend's wedding in a nearby town. Since he was in the area, he thought that he'd just stop by to say "Hello." He then offered to take her to lunch; however, she explained that her mother had packed her lunch and she ate at work. Before he left, Jack asked her what time she got off work. At the exact time Virginia indicated, Jack returned and graciously offered to give her a ride home. Her mother had already prepared dinner so Jack was invited to enjoy dinner with the family. Although he declined the dinner invitation, Jack jumped at the opportunity to spend more time just sitting next Virginia at the table. After, dinner they all continued to sit around the kitchen table and spend the evening chatting.

Since they knew Jack from his visit a few weeks before, Rocco and Giovanna invited Jack to stay at their home. He accepted their kind invitation and slept in their bedroom. That weekend Jack spent as much time as possible with Virginia. He asked for a second tour of the town. She agreed and showed him a few of the sights that they'd missed on his first tour. He took her to Islay's for ice cream. Neither of them had any ice cream; they just sat down at a table and talked for a long time. It was the perfect opportunity to get to know each other better.

As the weekend progressed, Jack never went to the wedding he was "supposedly" in the area to attend. Rather, he stayed in Washington the entire weekend so that he could spend as much time as possible with Virginia. He was definitely very interested in the Proia Princess. Before leaving to go back to Detroit late Sunday afternoon, he asked Virginia if he could write to her. She was happy to hear that he was interested enough in her to want to correspond. It didn't take her long to demurely answer with, "Oh, yes. I look forward to receiving letters from you."



That was all it took. In no time at all, Virginia started receiving two letters a day. At that time the mail was delivered twice a day, once in the morning and again in the afternoon. Jack made absolutely sure that each time the mailman went to the Proia house, there was a letter for Virginia from him. On Sundays, there wasn't any regular mail delivery service, but Jack would pay extra postage so that Virginia would receive a special delivery letter every Sunday. Rocco and Giovanna couldn't help but notice all the letters their daughter was receiving from the Italian Stallion.

One day Rocco brought three letters to his daughter at work that had been delivered to their home. He asked her, "Why does this young man write you all these letters? What does your lover have to tell you in all these letters?"

She answered with, "He tells me that he is crazy about me!"

Rocco responded with, "You don't believe him, do you? That is what all the young men say." He waited a few seconds and then chuckled as he added, "Well, he really must be just plain crazy if he is writing you three letters a day!"

Rocco then went on to tell his daughter that if they were living in Italy, Jack Rea would never marry Virginia Proia. When Virginia asked, "Why?" Rocco explained that the Rea family was considered to be "high class." Jack's mother was from a prestigious family; they were once royalty. Additionally, his parents owned a very large farm that was located on a great deal of land. They were considered to be one of the most prosperous and affluent families in Arpino, Italy. On the other hand, the Proia's were poor sharecroppers. In fact, they were so poor that they were always hungry because they never had enough food to eat. Her father further explained that in Italy, there was a caste system in place. People rarely, if ever, married out of their social level within the caste system. The Rea family was wealthy and the Proia family was poor; they were at vastly different levels within the caste system. For these reasons, Jack would never even consider marrying Virginia if they lived in Italy.

Before long, Jack made several more visits to Washington. Now he made it perfectly clear that he was there to see Virginia. Because of this, Rocco and Giovanna didn't think that it was proper that he stayed at their home. Rather, he would stay at Giovanna's brother Raffaeli's home. During one of his early visits, Jack took Virginia

on another ride in his car. While stopping to talk, Jack told Virginia that he was “looking for a girlfriend.” He wanted to know if Virginia knew nice girls who she could introduce him to.

Now Virginia knew a good catch when she saw one, so she responded very quickly but ever so sweetly with, “What’s the matter with me?!?”

The suave Jack answered her with, “Oh, I thought you already had a boyfriend.”

The relationship between the two of them was now established. Virginia and Jack had finally declared that they were indeed very interested in each other.



Because the trip was so long, Jack couldn’t drive every weekend to Washington. On the Sundays that he didn’t drive to see Virginia, Jack would call her on the telephone. At that time, a long-distance phone call was a rarity that required the assistance of an operator. Emergencies were usually the only reason that a long distance phone call was ever made. When Jack first started to make the phone calls, Giovanna would get very concerned that something terrible had happened. She would stand in back of Virginia and ask, “Why did Jack call? What happened? What’s wrong?” Virginia would try to explain that everything was fine and that he just called to talk to her. Giovanna would not tolerate that nonsense! She continued to stand in back of Virginia, but this time she told her something entirely different. She reminded her daughter, “A long distance phone call costs a lot of money. Get off the phone.” Virginia would try to ignore her mother but she would continue even louder and more empathically with, “Did you hear me? That phone call is costing a lot of money. Stop your foolish talking and get off the phone now.” Long before she wanted the conversation with her beloved Jack to end, Virginia would have to give in to her mother’s demands to hang up.

By Labor Day, things had gotten very serious between the two lovebirds. Jack had professed his profound and undying love for Virginia and asked for her hand in marriage. Virginia was equally taken with her suitor and immediately accepted. With her parents’ blessing, a wedding date in June of 1938 was set. The young couple

would get married at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. Then they'd leave for Detroit to begin their married life together. As the fall went by, Jack continued his routine of driving nine hours each way between Detroit and Washington to visit his beloved. When the weather started to get colder, Ciiovanna began to worry about Jack making the long drive in the upcoming severe winter weather. She made a suggestion to the young couple, "If you are really serious about getting married, don't wait until June. The weather is going to start getting bad soon. Jack will be going back and forth between Detroit and Washington. The driving will be getting dangerous and something bad might happen on the road." She went on to suggest that they should consider getting married before the severe winter started. In



that way Jack could avoid the long drive through the bad weather. Of course, that was music to the young lovers' ears. They quickly moved their wedding date up



to the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The

lovebirds were happily married on Saturday, November 27, 1937.

The whirlwind courtship that had begun on the Fourth of July was to continue for almost fifty years. Through the good times, and there were many, and the difficult times, which were few, they continued to love, support, and treasure one another. From the very first time they met, the young lovebirds' romance seemed destined to bloom into something very special.

Both Virginia and Jack knew that when that Italian Stallion came a courtin', he'd be the one she would eventually ride off with into the sunset.

What Jack Didn't See, Didn't Hurt

As a blushing newlywed, I wanted to always be perfectly lovely for my handsome, new husband Jack. Every day I would make certain that I looked my very best for him. My clothes were always pristine and ironed, the seams in my hose straight, and my shoes polished. In addition, I made sure that my lips were lightly painted, cheeks rosy, and my hair perfectly coiffed with finger waves exactly in the right place. Only my picture perfect best was good enough for my Italian Stallion!

Now my beauty routine was not only for the daytime; it went on as long as Jack was awake. Each night when Jack and I went to bed, I'd make sure that I was as lovely as I was during the day. My hair was perfectly in place and all of my make-up was on. Now you need to understand that "all of my make-up" consisted only of lipstick that I used to lightly color my lips as well as dab on my cheeks as rouge...that way they coordinated! More importantly, by using the lipstick as rouge, I was saving our hard-earned money by not having to buy a second cosmetic.

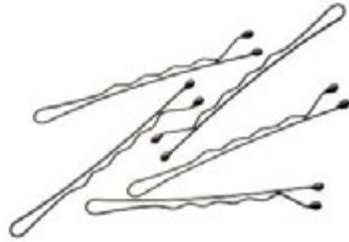


Clever woman if I do say so myself. No one can every say Virginia Proia Rea wasted money. After all, a penny saved is well worth the effort!

Let me explain how things went according to my very clever plan. I did not allow myself to doze off to dreamland until I was sure that Jack was in a deep sleep. Once I heard his loud snoring, I'd quietly sneak out of bed and tiptoe into the bathroom. There I'd wash off "all of my make-up," brush out my hair, and then use bobby pins to put into the tight little pin curls that I made all over my head. Then I'd quietly tiptoe back into bed for the night.

Although I slept in the bed through the night, I would always be very sure that I woke up at least a half an hour before Jack. Once again, I'd slip out of bed as quietly as possible so as not to disturb him.

Carefully, I'd tiptoe back to the bathroom to beautify myself once again. First the pin curls came out, and then I carefully combed my hair being sure that all the finger waves were perfectly in place. Then I'd meticulously apply "all of my make-up,"



being very attentive to using exactly the right amount of the rouge and lipstick. Once again, I'd quietly and ever so cautiously, as to not to make any unnecessary noise, creep across the bedroom to slip back into the bed with Jack.

Once I was back in bed, I'd pose myself on the pillow so that I looked absolutely perfect as I "slept" when Jack got up to go to work. Then as he was getting out of bed, I'd pretend to just be waking up also...only I'd be ever so beautiful with every hair in place and all of my make-up on! Oh, the things I went through for my man.

This routine continued for as long as I could possibly keep up the façade. After the arrival of our first child Tommy, I was more concerned with taking care of the middle of the night feedings for my beloved little prince than I was with trying to impress my husband. I think that I made the right choice; Jack always thought I was beautiful, but especially when taking care of our children!!

Virginia Puts Her Foot Down

When Jack and I were first married, we rented a bedroom in the house where my Aunt Lucia lived in Detroit. Truthfully, I was not fond of my aunt nor was I happy about living with her. At the time, it was all that Jack and I could afford and still put some money aside. Although it wasn't soon enough for me, after a year or so we finally had enough saved that we could move out.

Next, we went on to rent two rooms above a grocery store in Dearborn. In spite of the fact that we only had a parlor, bedroom, and half bath, Jack and I were very happy



to be living in a place of our own. Our plan was to eventually purchase a home in the area. However, times were tough, and it was very difficult for a young couple to save enough money to purchase a house.

On one of our trips to Washington, Pennsylvania to visit my parents, my father asked me when we were going to buy our own house. I couldn't lie to my father, so I had to tell him that we didn't have enough money. Papa told me that he would lend Jack and me the money to buy a house. Papa's advice to me was, "Find a nice house to buy in a good neighborhood.

Don't get an old, run-down house just because it's cheap. If you do, you'll always be putting money in the house to fix it up. You'll be much further ahead paying a little more money so that you get a better house that needs less work." I listened very carefully to what my father advised.

When Jack and I were back at home, I told my husband what my father had offered to do. Jack was too proud to accept the loan from his father-in-law. Rather, he told me that he'd work even harder and we'd cut our spending so that we could save more

money. Jack thought with his plan in place, we'd be able to have enough money to purchase a house before too long. Although I wasn't happy that we'd have to wait even longer to get a home of our own, I went along with Jack's plan.

A few years passed and in 1940 we had our first baby; however, we still hadn't been able to save enough money to buy a home. Then we thought that we'd found a way to finally buy a house. We were going to purchase a two-family house with my Aunt Lucia. Yes, you heard me, the very same aunt that I wasn't fond of. However, at the last minute, my aunt and her husband decided that they weren't interested in buying the house. Again, our hopes of purchasing our own home were shattered.

Almost a year after our son was born, my dear father unexpectedly passed away. On a trip back to Pennsylvania to visit my mother after my father's death, she asked me about our plans to purchase a house. She reminded me that I already had one child and would probably soon be having more. It was past time to buy a house for our growing family. It was embarrassing to tell my mother that hard as we'd tried, we still hadn't saved enough. Mama then told me to look for a house to buy and she'd send the money for it to me. Once again, my mother gave me the same advice that father had years before. This time, I let her know that I was very interested in buying a home and would definitely take her up on her offer. Mama told me that my decision had made her very happy.

When we returned to Michigan, I told Jack about my mother's latest offer to lend us the money to buy a house. Once again, he told me that he didn't want to borrow the money from my mother. He'd much rather wait until we'd saved it on our own. It was Jack's pride that wouldn't allow him to take the money from my family.

This time around, I was determined that things would be different. No longer were we going to pay any rent. With great strength in my voice, I emphatically told Jack, "I am going to take the money from my mother and buy a house. If you don't want to borrow the money, it's fine with me. However, I am still going to purchase a home for this family. Since it will be only me who is borrowing the money from my mother, the house will be in my name only. I will be the owner and landlady of the house; you'll have to pay me rent. However, if you want to borrow the money too, your name will also be on the

deed to the house. I know what I'm going to do. Now you need to decide what you are going to do." Jack was well aware that I meant business and that I was determined to have a home of our own. Of course, he reluctantly agreed to borrow the money from my mother.

After discussing the matter at great length, Jack and I decided that we would purchase a two-family flat in Dearborn. I was particularly interested in living in that area because their schools had an excellent reputation. Also, it would be a short drive for Jack to go to work each day. Our plan was that we'd live in the lower flat and rent out the



upper one. The rent we collected would give us some additional income to help with our mortgage payments. When we were looking at houses, I remembered the advice that Papa and Mama had given me. We finally purchased a very nice two-family flat on Theisen in Dearborn that was in good condition. At last, we had our own home.

Just as I knew would happen, Jack loved our first home. Once we moved, Jack was a very proud homeowner. He took great pride in keeping our home, as well as the front and backyards, in immaculate condition. Since he was very handy, he was able to do all the repair work and painting that our house needed. Jack was also an excellent landlord to our upstairs tenants. He always treated them with respect and was attentive to their needs.



As the years passed and our family grew, Jack and I would go on to purchase other houses for our growing family. However, I still frequently say the first house we bought was my favorite. The other homes were larger and in even nicer neighborhoods, but I liked that first house the best. It was in that home that most of our children were born. All four were small when we lived there, and it's where our family spent many of our happiest times together.

Let me add that I am not the least bit shy about saying that it was me who got the ball rolling that enabled us to purchase our first home. Our children learned from my example that if you want something, go after it with determination, stand up for what you know to be right, and always believe in yourself. Now, I hope my grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great, great grandchildren and all that will follow will also learn this lesson. Believe me, I'll be watching, so you better not disappoint me!

"Fur" Instance, There Could Be A Problem

As a young married couple, Jack and I rented a two-room flat from a kindly Italian couple named Mr. and Mrs. Sambrone. The flat was located above a small corner grocery store in Dearborn, Michigan. While living in the small flat, Jack and I became very friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Sambrone and their young adult children. Our two families formed a great friendship and spent a lot of time together. We often shared Sunday dinners and evenings having a great time talking and laughing.

One day Mrs. Sambrone came upstairs to tell me that there was a group of men traveling through the neighborhood selling fur coats. The coats were extremely nice and were very reasonably priced. Mrs. Sambrone was so impressed with the quality of the coats that she bought one for each of her daughters. She went on to suggest that I should purchase one of the coats for myself. Well, I told Mrs. Sambrone that Jack and I were on a very tight budget and there wasn't any extra money for me to buy a fur coat. Mrs. Sambrone insisted that the coats were such a good buy that I really needed to get one for myself. Again, I said no. Mrs. Sambrone then told me that she'd loan me the money to buy the coat. She was sure that Jack wouldn't mind. Finally, I gave in and agreed to at least try on a coat. When I did and saw the quality and style, I too was very impressed. So I took Mrs. Sambrone up on her offer to loan

me the money so that I could purchase the coat. That night when Jack came home from work, I showed him the coat; he was pleased with my purchase.

A few weeks later, my mother, Giovanna Proia, came from Pennsylvania to visit. For quite a while Mama had not been feeling well, and my father had asked me to pamper her while she stayed with Jack and me for a few months. With gentle care, Mama slowly started to feel better. After she had been with us for a few weeks, she told me



that she wanted to go to Windsor to see what a city in Canada was like. Then, when she returned to Pennsylvania, she'd be able to tell her friends that she'd been to a foreign country. I was happy that she was feeling much better, so I told her that the next day we would take the bus to Canada.

In the morning it was rather cold outside so I decided to wear my new fur coat for our trip. While we were there, we walked around the streets of downtown Windsor. We did a lot of window shopping and even went in a few of the stores to look at the various things they were selling. Mama decided to purchase a lovely blue sweater that caught her eye. Now she would not only be able to tell her friends that she'd visited a foreign country, but she even had a sweater to show them what she'd bought for herself while she was there!

After spending the day in Windsor, Mama and I were tired and decided it was time to take the bus to return home. When our bus reached the Canadian border, a customs officer came on the bus to check everyone's identification. When he got to me, he asked that I follow him off of the bus. I explained to him that my mother did not speak English and could not be left alone on the bus and would need to accompany me. The customs officer nodded that mother could also go. He then walked the two of us into the Border Patrol Offices. Once inside a room, the customs officer asked me to take off my coat. It was a puzzling request but I did not question him, I just did as he asked.

The officer took the coat and examined both the inside and outside of it very thoroughly. He then took a pair of scissors and carefully cut the bottom of the coat's lining. As he continued to inspect the coat, he found a mark stamped on the inside of the fur. The mark indicated what kind of fur it was and where it had originated. The officer rubbed his thumb nail across the seal several times to see if it was authentic. After studying the coat a little longer, the customs agent laid it across his desk. Then he turned and gave his undivided attention to me.



Speaking in a very calm but extremely firm voice, the customs agent began to ask me a series of questions. He started with, "Mrs. Rea, could you tell me how you got this coat?"

Slightly shaken but trying to keep my composure, I answered with, "My landlady bought it for me from some men who were selling them in the neighborhood."

The agent questioned me further, "Did your landlady know these people? How did they happen to go to your landlady's house?"

Remaining strong and steadfast in my responses, I answered, "No, she did not know them. They were just going through the neighborhood, going up and down the streets, stopping at houses to try to sell the coats."

"Are you sure about that, Mrs. Rea?" asked the agent, sounding like he doubted my answer.

I was just as positive and rapidly replied, "Absolutely, without any doubt she did not know the men."

After a few more questions, the customs officer handed me the coat back and told me that I could put it back on. Confused by all that had just happened, I asked the agent if I could now ask him a question. He nodded yes. So I proceeded to ask him, "Why did you take my mother and me off the bus? Also, why did you examine the coat so carefully and ask me so many questions about how I got it?"

After a short silence, the officer shocked me with his answers. He told me, "Mrs. Rea, the coats the men were selling were all stolen. Someone had robbed a large fur storage facility in Canada and taken the coats to the United States to sell. The coats were first quality furs and very valuable. The coats that you and your landlady purchased are very expensive coats and you all got them at a real bargain price. In fact, you got 'a real steal' when you bought the coat!"

Startled I explained to the customs officer that I had no idea that the coat was stolen merchandise. Had I known, I never would have bought it. The agent told me that he believed me and that is why he let me keep the coat.

Mama and I were then told that we could take the next bus back to the United States. As you can imagine, on the ride home, my mother had a lot of questions for me. I tried to explain everything as carefully as possible. Once we were home from our



Canadian adventure, my mother told me that she was very worried when the customs agent made us get off the bus. It got even more stressful for her when the agent thoroughly examined my coat. Then when I was being questioned, she was very nervous that we were in a bad

situation and that we weren't going to be able to straighten it out. I tried to soothe her fears and reminded her that everything turned out just fine.

After Mama thought about all that had transpired that day, she had a different view of things. She told me, "The one time I go to Canada and trouble starts." She was quiet for a little while when she added, "Now when I tell everyone that I went to Canada, I will be able to tell them everything that happened!"

It certainly was not how she thought the day would go but it certainly made for an even greater family story! And what an adventure Mama had to share with her friends when she returned home! Though now that I think about it, Mama never asked me to take her back to Canada again. Possibly our one adventure there was more than enough for Mama!



A Pair Of Slacks & A Rivet Gun

During World War II, millions of American men and women joined the armed forces, headed to training, and then off to help defend our country. On the home front, hundreds of thousands of women, including many mothers, entered the industrial workforce during the war to work in plants and perform jobs that had previously been done only by men. Manufacturers retooled their factories into “defense plants” to produce war goods. Throughout the country, women became electricians, welders, and riveters in those plants. Women were called to work to help build warships, tanks, airplanes, and weapons that our soldiers needed to defend our country. In Michigan, there were a few defense plants located in metropolitan Detroit. There women built airplanes which were used by the Army Air Force.

A woman who worked in the defense plants became known as “Rosie the Riveter.” The term became a popular name used to refer to the patriotic women who did their part to help in the country’s war effort. It was tough, grimy work done in huge factories. The women worked long, grueling eight-hour shifts that went on for five or six days a week; this type of schedule was often repeated week after week. To give credit to the hard work the women were doing, as well as to encourage others to join the movement, the term Rosie the Riveter was popularized in a hit song of the same



name. Hollywood also often used a Rosie the Riveter character in films that promoted the country's involvement in the war.

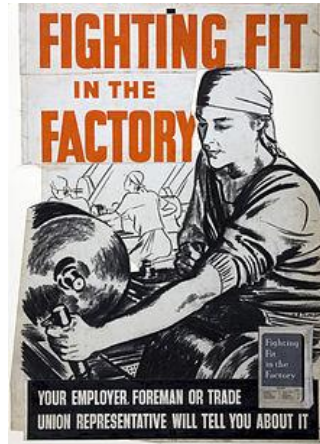
During this very difficult time for our country, it was my feeling that it was my patriotic duty to do all that I could to support our troops.

So, I considered looking into working in one of the defense plants in the Detroit area.

Since a woman working in the plants was doing a man's work, she earned a man's wage.

The knowledge that I would be earning some extra money my family could use was a factor in my decision to think about taking a job

working in a plant. I'd never worked in a factory before and was a little apprehensive about it. When I discussed the matter with my husband Jack, we decided that I should at least apply for the job. If I got hired and didn't like the job, then I could always quit.



In early 1944, I'd heard that the DeSoto Plant, located near Dearborn where we lived, had been converted to a defense plant. The production lines for passenger vehicles at the factory had been halted; they were turned into lines that were used for building airplanes. It was at the plant that one of the largest bomber planes, the Boeing B-29, used during the war, as well as bomber planes used by the Navy, were built. It was in the newspaper that they were hiring so I went there to apply for a job. After filling out an application form and having a very brief interview, I was immediately hired to start work. I was informed that my starting wages would be a dollar and seven cents an hour; that was a great deal of money for a woman to earn in those days!

My job consisted of working on the production line carefully installing the rivets into the wings of planes. Because my new position in the factory required me to do a great deal of bending, stretching, and moving into awkward positions, I would need to wear pants. At that time only men wore pants. For a woman to wear slacks was very strange and, as far as I was concerned, was totally inappropriate for a lady. However,

I soon realized that wearing slacks was not only necessary but also mandatory in the defense plant. So off I went to buy my first pair of slacks.

At first I found the work at the plant very difficult. My job of putting rivets in the wings of the airplanes was vitally important for it to function properly. I needed to be certain that every single rivet was perfectly installed; it had to be inserted absolutely straight and tightened firmly into place. Much to my delight, I quickly got the knack of installing the rivets in a smooth determined movement. After working at the defense plant for only a short period of time, I was a “pro” at doing an excellent job



of getting those rivets in straight and tight. I wanted the first “Rosie the Riveter” to be proud of the work I did.

Within a few weeks of starting at the defense plant, the “big boss” came to talk to me. He told me that I was doing an excellent job and it was

obvious that I had very high standards for myself and for the quality of my work. In fact, I was doing so well that he wanted to pull me from the production line. The big boss told me that starting the next day he wanted me to become an inspector. It would be my job to go over all the other women’s work to make sure that all the rivets, bolts, and screws were properly installed. It was a huge challenge but, on the other hand, because of the added responsibilities, I’d be getting a raise. As an inspector I would earn ten cents more an hour....now I would be paid one dollar and seventeen cents an hour!

Really, I couldn’t believe my ears! I’d just mastered the riveting and now the big boss wanted me to inspect the work of others, how could that be? Although the thought of the pay raise was quite enticing, the thought of the added responsibility was too daunting for me. Almost immediately, I told the big boss, “The job is not for me.”

He must have known I'd be apprehensive because he came prepared with a proposal about the new job that he thought would influence me to change my mind. He said,



“Virginia, I have confidence in you and your ability to handle the job. I want you to try it for only two weeks.

During that time I will give you all the training, support, and help that you need until you are comfortable with the job. However, if after two weeks you still don't want the position, you can go back to working on the line.”

Hearing that I'd get two weeks training and support while learning what I was expected to do as an inspector made the job seem less intimidating. So I asked the big boss exactly what the

job entailed and what were the responsibilities of an inspector. The big boss answered all of my questions and assured me again that I was more than capable of doing the job. Always ready to take on a challenge and learn new things, I accepted the position for the trial period. The big boss then handed me an inspector's stamp with the number fifty-six on it. He told me I was never to let the stamp out of my sight because I'd be responsible for using it every time I felt an airplane passed inspection.

True to his word, the big boss did give me all the training and support I needed to learn the responsibilities of an inspector. With his help and guidance, I was able to become very comfortable with my new job by the end of the two weeks. The only difficulty was that I had to always stay at the defense plant until the jobs I was responsible for had passed my inspection.

That meant that I frequently had to work overtime; long past midnight when the busses stopped running. Sometimes my husband Jack would drive the car to pick me up. However, that meant he had to wake our two sleeping little boys to make the trip



and I didn't really approve of that. Most of the time, the only way that I could get



home was to walk the three miles from the plant to our house. I was very uneasy about walking home alone so late into the night; so what I'd do is walk in the middle of the road. Since it was during the war and gas was rationed, there were very few cars on the road, which made the walk home much easier. Sometimes you just have to face your fears if you want to overcome them... and I certainly did!

When the war ended, the defense plants converted back to the production of cars and

trucks for the general public. Also, the soldiers returned home and got back to their jobs at the plants. All the women who had helped the country during the war by becoming Rosie the Riveters were no longer needed to make vehicles for the war. We were laid off by seniority. One day the big boss came by to talk to me again. This time he had the difficult task of telling me that he was very sad to inform me that I was being laid off. He also added, "Virginia, you are an outstanding employee that cannot be replaced. If I had it my way, you would be the last one to be laid off."

I thanked the big boss for giving me the opportunity to help our country's war effort by working in the defense plant. I told him how much I'd appreciated his belief in my ability to do the inspector's job. I let him know how grateful I was, but it was time for me to go home to my family. With a feeling of pride, I went home to once again be a full time mother to our two young boys.



The Teeth + The Tots = Trouble

Growing up, Virginia always had the most beautiful teeth; they were perfectly shaped, absolutely straight, and without a cavity or filling. There was only one slight imperfection, a very small chip on her lower front tooth. It was such a tiny, insignificant chip almost no one ever noticed.

Things changed for Virginia when she was pregnant with her fourth child. She developed a severe case of the gum disease pyorrhea. Because of the pregnancy, the dentist didn't feel it was safe to treat the condition. By the time the baby was born, the disease had advanced to such a severe stage that Virginia had to have all her teeth removed. On the day that her teeth were extracted, she was immediately fitted with dentures. Virginia was always very self-conscious and seldom allowed anyone to see her without them. She wore the dentures day and night, only removing them for cleaning. Even her husband, Jack, never saw her without her dentures. However, there were a couple of rare occasions when she was caught without them....the results were memorable!

Incident One: Freddy Is Dazzled

One day quite soon after Virginia got her dentures, her good friend, Helen, asked her to babysit for her young son, Freddy, while she went shopping. Virginia readily agreed to watch the delightful little boy. During the day, the two of them sat on the living room floor to play a game of jacks. Because her gums had not fully healed, her dentures were very uncomfortable to have in her mouth; in fact, it was extremely painful. Carefully, so that Freddy wouldn't notice, she removed the upper plate and slipped it into the pocket of her dress. After a few minutes, Virginia discretely took the plate from her pocket and quickly slid it back into her mouth.



However Freddy had seen Virginia put something into her mouth. He looked at her and said, "Zia, please give me a piece of candy, too!"

Virginia didn't realize Freddy had seen her put something in her mouth and had no idea what he was talking about. She looked at him and said, "I don't have any candy to give you."

Freddy was positive he'd seen his aunt sneak something in her mouth, and he just knew



it had to be a piece of candy! Emphatically he told her, "Yes, you do! I just saw you put some in your mouth!"

Still confused by what he had said, Virginia told him, "No, I didn't." Virginia could see that Freddy didn't believe her so she opened her mouth really wide and said, "Look inside my mouth Freddy. See, I don't have anything in there."

Freddy was absolutely sure he'd seen her put a piece of candy in her mouth so he persisted with, "Oh yes, you do Zia. I saw you take candy out of your pocket and put it in your mouth!"

Suddenly, Virginia realized that Freddy had seen her put her dentures back in her mouth. Wow! How was she going to solve this problem?? Then Virginia decided that she had no other choice. She'd just have to show Freddy it was her dentures she'd put in her mouth and not a piece of candy. She carefully removed her upper plate and held it out for Freddy to see!!

Freddy's eyes got huge! He could not believe what he was seeing! Zia Virginia had just removed all the teeth from her mouth right before his eyes! How was that possible? He just sat there and stared at his aunt and the dentures in utter amazement.

After a few seconds, Virginia put the dentures back into her mouth. However, Freddy was so shocked that he couldn't believe what he had just seen. Not only had his aunt been able to yank all of her teeth out of her mouth at once, she also was able to put them right back in again! He quickly said, "Zia, do it again! Do it again!" Once again Virginia took out her dentures and then put them back in her mouth. Freddy

couldn't get over the shock of what he'd just seen, so he asked Virginia to do it two or three more times.

Knowing this routine could go forever, Virginia decided to turn the tables on the little boy. She said to him, "Now Freddy, it's your turn to do it! You take out your teeth!" Of course, as hard as Freddy tried, he couldn't take out his teeth. Virginia wanted to keep the focus on Freddy and not on her so she told him, "Freddy, you are going to have to try harder! If you do, you'll be able to take out your teeth, too."

Little Freddy became more and more frustrated because as hard as he tried he just couldn't take out his teeth. To soothe him, Virginia tried to explain the situation. When she finished her explanation she told him, "Freddy you're lucky that you have all your own teeth and that they won't come out of your mouth....that's a good thing."

Freddy didn't think so. He'd been so totally impressed with his Zia Virginia's ability to remove her teeth that he wanted to be able to do the same thing. Then he'd be able to impress his family and friends with the same trick Zia Virginia could do! He knew that would be great fun!!

Incident Two: Mary Is Startled

One morning after the three older children were off to school and Jack was at work, Mary and Virginia had the house to themselves. After eating lunch, Virginia went into the bathroom to brush her teeth. Since she had dentures, she took the plates out of

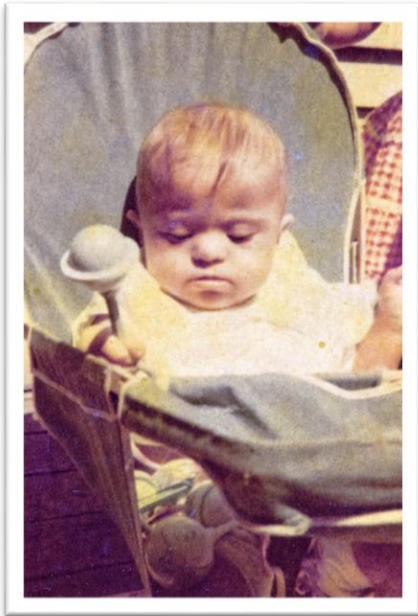


her mouth to clean them. While the dentures were out, Mary walked into the bathroom to ask her mother something. As soon as Mary looked at her mother, she started to scream. Virginia thought that something was seriously wrong so she went closer to her daughter to find out what the

problem was. However, the closer Virginia got to Mary, the louder she'd scream.

Before Virginia could reach her daughter, Mary started to run away from her. As Virginia continued to approach Mary, she became even more hysterical. Trying to get as far away from her mother as possible, Mary bolted out the front door and

started running down the street. Just as Virginia was about to run outside after her daughter, she realized that she didn't have her dentures in her mouth. Now she knew what had frightened Mary and caused her to scream and run away from her. Mary had never seen her mother without her dentures and was startled when she saw her



without them on. Virginia quickly went back to the bathroom and popped her dentures back in before running outside.

When Virginia did get outside, Mary was already on the sidewalk and running toward Ford Road, a very busy street. Virginia became alarmed because she knew that her daughter wouldn't know to stop when she got to Ford Road. Virginia called out, "Mary, Mary!" but her frightened daughter just kept running. Once in a while, Mary would stop and turn around to look back at who was calling her name.

However, Virginia was so far behind that Mary couldn't see her face. She didn't realize that it was her mother and that she'd put her dentures back in her mouth. Desperate, Virginia ran with all of her might; she knew she absolutely had to reach Mary before she got to Ford Road. Virginia kept saying, "Oh Dear Lord, please let me get to my daughter before she gets to Ford Road. I have to stop her from running into that busy street!"

Faster and faster Virginia ran. The drive to reach her precious daughter spurred her to sprint forward at speeds she didn't know she was capable of reaching. Although she was gaining on her daughter, Mary was getting closer and closer to Ford Road. Miraculously, just when Mary reached Ford Road, she stopped and turned around

one last time. At that very moment, Virginia finally caught up to her. She grabbed her daughter in her arms and held her tight for a long time. After thanking the Lord for saving her daughter, and with tears running down her cheeks, Virginia told her precious daughter over and over, "See Mary, it's your Mommy! It's your Mommy."

Once Mary realized it was her mother, she calmed down. Virginia and Mary then turned around to start the long walk back to their home. Along the way, they passed a number of neighbors on their porches who'd seen Virginia running after Mary. Some of them wanted to know what was going on with Mary. Virginia cleverly responded with, "Oh, Mary and I were running a little race down the street. I guess I won this time."

After that dreadful experience, Virginia was extremely careful never to let Mary see her without her dentures again. Virginia didn't know who had been more upset the first time that it happened...but she was absolutely positive that it would never, ever happen again!

Wanted It Sold? Call Virginia

Virginia was raised in a home in which hard work and determination were expected from each of the family members. Rocco, her father, was a poor young Italian immigrant who rose from working in the coal mines of Pennsylvania to being a well-respected and prosperous businessman. Along the way he ventured into digging for gold, selling vegetables that he grew in his garden, operating a food stand at carnivals, and being the landlord of several rental properties. Her mother, Giovanna, labored long and hard taking care of her eight children. She cooked, scrubbed, and washed clothes while raising them. There were also periods of time when Giovanna was responsible for cooking and washing for as many as seventeen borders who lived in their home at one time. Rocco and Giovanna's days were filled with many hours of laboring away at hard, difficult tasks. It was their drive to succeed and provide for their family that drove them to achieve all that they did in their lifetimes.

It was because of the wonderful role models their parents were for Virginia and her siblings that all of the Proia children became industrious, hard-working adults.

Throughout her life, Virginia in particular, had a wide array of interesting jobs. From selling vegetables on the streets of Washington to working in a Defense Plant in Detroit to becoming a landlady in Dearborn; all were areas in which she excelled.

One type of employment that Virginia engaged in more than once, and to which she was exceptionally skilled, was sales. Each of the sales positions allowed her to further develop her retailing skills.

Virginia's parents started her sales career when she was a child growing up in Washington, Pennsylvania. Back then there weren't many child labor laws or unions to protect her as a young child working to earn money. Additionally, Virginia wasn't concerned with any minimum wage laws because she knew she was earning the absolute minimum wage...nothing at all! Rocco clearly let Virginia know that her "pay" was the roof over her head, the food on her table, the clothes on her back, and, above all, the loving care of her parents. Virginia soon realized that she was indeed very well paid after all.

Rocco had a few acres of land not far from the house where he raised vegetables like corn, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, potatoes, and onions. He also raised cantaloupe and watermelon. Rocco was very attentive to his plants and took great care of the land so that it remained very fertile. Each year he was able to harvest more vegetables and fruit than his family could ever use. Rocco knew that with his abundant supply of crops, he had a great opportunity to supplement the family's income by selling his excess produce to other people in town.

At the tender age of eleven, Virginia began her career as a vegetable sales person. She and her younger sister Anna would take baskets of produce to homes in East Washington... where the "rich people" lived. These were the individuals who could afford to pay the "top dollar prices" for the premium quality fruit and vegetables that the little Proia girls had for sale. Giovanna would wash, sort, and then arrange the fruit and vegetables in the baskets so that they looked picture perfect. The girls were told that they were not to return home until everything was sold from their baskets. If

there were still unsold items at the end of the day, they had the authority and responsibility to lower the prices until all their produce was gone.

Only the finest, absolutely perfect fruit and vegetables would be sold to their customers. Because of the high quality level of their products, the word quickly spread throughout East Washington of the Proia girls' exceptional produce. As both the girls' selling techniques improved and the reputation of their produce grew, they were able to handle larger orders.

Rocco had to then build his daughters a pushcart to use when they sold and delivered their produce. When the orders were too heavy for the cart, like when there were lots of potatoes or corn, Rocco would personally deliver the order in an old truck that he had.



The selling of fine, high-quality fruit and vegetables for her parents laid the foundation for a variety of sales jobs that Virginia would have later in her life.

When Virginia grew a little older, she got a job from the Greenbergs who were the Proia's next-door neighbors. Mr. Greenberg ran the family-owned grocery store that was located close to their home. Every day Virginia would walk to the store where she'd stock the shelves and take phone orders from customers. Mr. Greenberg took great pride in his store and always wanted Virginia to neatly arrange all the items on shelves so that his customers would be able to see the wide variety of items that were available for purchase. Also, Mr. Greenberg introduced Virginia to the sales technique of "upselling." He taught her to encourage the customers to buy additional items to go with their purchase. For example, if someone called to place an order for a roast, Mr. Greenberg suggested that Virginia tell the customer that they had just gotten in some beautiful fresh potatoes and carrots that would go very well with their roast. Virginia quickly learned to always use this sales technique with the customers. Of course, the customers appreciated the suggestions and Mr. Greenberg enjoyed the increase in sales!

Virginia's godmother, Mrs. Josephine Cario, also owned a grocery store in Washington. When Mrs. Cario realized what a great salesperson Virginia had



become, she hired her for ten dollars a week. The Friday after her first week of working was payday. At the

**Virginia
between two
friends**

end of the day, Mrs. Cario handed

Virginia her pay envelope. When Virginia opened the envelope she realized that there was twelve dollars in the envelope; she thought that Mrs. Cario must have made a mistake. Virginia handed the envelope back to Mrs. Cario and told her that she had put too much money in the envelope. Mrs. Cario just smiled at Virginia and said, "I did not make a mistake, dear. In just your first week you worked very hard and increased my sales a great deal with your ability to encourage customers to purchase additional items. You absolutely deserve more than what I originally said that I would pay you!" Virginia was overwhelmed by what her godmother had told her. However, knowing that her good work was appreciated so much, Virginia worked even harder every week thereafter.

Over time, Rocco and Giovanna decided to venture into the business world as well. However, they did not want to become involved in the retail aspect of the business. Rather, they decided to further develop the trucking business that Rocco had started to build up. They opened Tri State Wholesale, which distributed large quantities of food products throughout the area. They sold the owners of stores and small businesses items such as pasta, olive oil, vegetable oil, cheese, flour, and sugar for them to resell. Rocco and Giovanna asked Virginia to organize and manage the business; that was a huge responsibility for her. Although Virginia always did her best no matter where she worked, this job had special meaning to her. She knew that

her parents had worked very hard for their family to be able to open their own business. Virginia wanted to make certain that she did everything possible to make their new business venture very successful. In short order, Virginia was able to get the business up and running; it became a flourishing, profitable company for her parents.

Later in life, after her children were just about grown, Virginia took yet another job in sales. Without even applying, Virginia was offered a sales position at Winkelman's, which was a ladies' clothing chain in the Detroit area. Very unexpectedly, Virginia accepted the job! She started out selling what was called "small goods" which consisted of accessories and lingerie. Within a short period of time, she was promoted to selling dresses, coats, and even a fur every now and then. Virginia's approach to selling clothes was much the same as what she'd applied in other sales positions throughout her life. She worked hard to do her best, sold only quality products, and encouraged her customers to purchase everything needed to "complete their outfits."

Using these sales strategies, Virginia was very often named "Top Salesperson of the Week" and received numerous awards for her high levels of achievement.



For yet another time, Virginia was able to put the selling techniques that she learned as a very young child to good use. Her parents' philosophy of selling only the finest quality items and presenting them well; Mr. Goldberg's "upselling" techniques; and, most importantly, the Proia tradition of honest, hard work continued to be successfully used by Virginia all these years later! Virginia was a super salesperson once again!!

The Prez, The Farmer & The Jar Of Jam

Rocco and Giovanna Proia were thrilled with the arrival of their first child. A beautiful baby girl, who they named Anunciata, was born on May 25, 1910. The bundle of joy was an absolute delight to her parents. They were overjoyed with her every move and spent as much time as possible kissing her while they held her in their arms. Anunciata was a delightful child who had a charming personality, a winning smile, and a sweet disposition. Rocco and Giovanna felt fortunate indeed to have such a perfect baby. As she began to grow and develop, not only her beauty but also how quickly she learned new things, amazed them.



After she started going to school, Anunciata became known as Nancy to her family and friends. She grew to be a tall, thin beauty with a charming personality. In addition, she had lovely brown, naturally-curly hair that always easily fell into soft waves that surrounded her face. Nancy's eyes twinkled and she readily smiled when she spoke. However, it was her intellect and cleverness that attracted people to her. Nancy was always popular and had many friends who admired her. She was a very generous and giving person who enjoyed helping others in any way she could. Nancy was a marvelous daughter who was a wonderful role model for her younger sisters and brothers. All of her siblings looked up to Nancy and thought that she was the perfect "big sister!"

At a young age, it became apparent that Nancy had a natural talent for styling hair. She loved making everyone's hair in the family look wonderful. Before long, Nancy's friends and neighbors were having her work her magic on their hair as well. When she was in her early twenties, she took classes at the Elizabeth Arden Beauty Studio in Pittsburgh. Soon she became an expert in the latest hairstyles of the day. While she was taking classes in hair styling, she thoroughly impressed the instructors. They encouraged Nancy to also take classes in the new Elizabeth Arden specialties services. Nancy became one of the first women to learn how to give manicures, facials, and massages in the Pittsburgh area. The Elizabeth Arden Company then offered Nancy a position in their Washington, D.C. salon. Making the daring move, Nancy bravely relocated from Washington, Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C. Although she did an outstanding job working at the Elizabeth Arden Spa, Nancy decided to open her own beauty shop in DC. Because of her talent and skills, the shop soon became a major success.

While living in Washington, D.C., Nancy met and married the handsome, charming and intelligent Robert Davis. Within a few years, Bob and Nancy's loving family grew to include three daughters and two sons. Even though they had a large family, because she enjoyed her career so much, the ambitious Nancy continued to work in her salon. However, after a few years Nancy experienced some health issues. She and Bob decided to move the family to Florida where the climate would be better for her.

In the mid-1950's when her health improved, Nancy and Bob decided they wanted to move back up to the northeastern part of the country to be closer to their families. After much thought and deliberation, they purchased a one-hundred-thirty acre farm on Tract Road in Fairfield, Pennsylvania, which is located near Gettysburg. They decided to buy a farm because Bob had grown up on a farm and had an excellent knowledge of farming. Also, both Nancy and Bob felt that a farm would be a quiet, peaceful place to raise their children. The large farm included an expansive orchard where they grew the most delicious peaches and luscious sweet cherries. They also

grew a few other crops such as corn, oats, sweet peas, and hay. In addition, there were a few horses and chickens on the farm.

Nancy's home on their 130 acre farm in Fairfield, PA



While living on the farm, the hard-working Nancy soon found ways to supplement the family's income. Nancy decided to find a way to put her natural talent of styling hair to use.

Not long after getting settled, Bob converted an old summer kitchen that was on the farm into a small beauty salon for her. With the salon in place, Nancy knew that she could do a wonderful job of styling the hair of many of the ladies who lived near their farm. Nancy always said, "Just give me one customer and then I can build my business from there." Of course, she was right. Once she had "that first happy, satisfied client," she was able to build a prosperous business. As she knew would happen, it was through word of mouth that the ladies in the area quickly spread the news of Nancy's marvelous talents. In no time at all, once again Nancy had an extensive list of ladies who were thrilled to have their hair expertly styled by her.

In addition to running a very successful beauty salon for the ladies of Fairfield, Nancy put her outstanding people skills and selling talents into practice. With items from the farm, she ran a roadside stand. At her open-air structure, she sold eggs, peaches, cherries, as well as homemade jams and jellies, to the residents of the surrounding area. Just as her parents had done many years earlier, Nancy always sold only the most select items at the roadside stand. She also took the time to make sure that she displayed everything as attractively as possible. Nancy knew that it was important to present all of her prize products in the most attractive way possible in order to attract and keep loyal customers.

Very near to the Davis' farm, President Dwight Eisenhower also had a farm. Although Nancy was aware that the President frequently visited his farm, she had never actually seen him in the area. One day when Nancy was working at her stand, a large motorcade of cars slowly came down the road. Much to her surprise, the caravan came



to a halt right in front of her roadside stand. Nancy could not figure out why all the large, black cars were in the area, let alone why they had all stopped directly in front of her stand. Needless to say, she was absolutely shocked when Dwight D. Eisenhower, the President of the United States, came out of one of the cars that was right in the middle of the procession. To her utter and complete disbelief, President Eisenhower casually walked right up to the stand to see what products Nancy had for sale.

The President was very friendly as he chatted with Nancy about the eggs, peaches, and jam that were attractively displayed. She was in such a state of shock that the President actually talked to her, at first Nancy could hardly form any words to speak to him. With a calmness that even shocked her, Nancy was pleased to be able to tell the President that the peaches were freshly picked from their orchard that very morning. She also told him that the crop was especially delicious that year; the peaches were very sweet and juicy. Nancy then went on to tell the President that she and her mother had made the jam just a few days earlier. It is not



surprising that in just a few minutes President Eisenhower thought very highly of Nancy. He was also impressed with the quality and attractiveness of the products

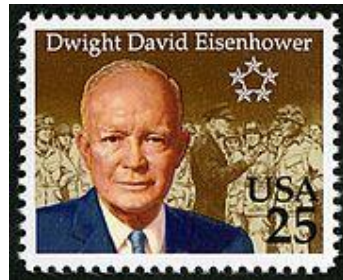


Nancy, Jo and Virginia

that she had for sale at her farm stand. Her charm and grace had made an impact on even the President of the United States!!

After a few minutes, the President decided to purchase both a bushel of the peaches and a couple of jars of the peach jam. He suddenly became very embarrassed because he remembered that he didn't carry a wallet with him. He realized that he didn't have any money to pay for the things that he wanted to purchase. The ever-gracious Nancy told the President that it was unnecessary for him to pay for the peaches and jam. Rather, it would be her pleasure to give him the items. President Eisenhower said that he wouldn't hear of it.

From what seemed like out of nowhere, a Secret Service Agent instantly appeared and handed Nancy the money that was needed for the President's purchases. Again, Nancy told the President that he did not need to pay



for the items he had selected, as it would be an honor for her to be able to give him the items from their farm. The President then insisted that Nancy take the payment for the peaches and jam. As Nancy finally accepted the money, she told the President how thrilled she was that he'd stopped by her stand. President Eisenhower assured

her that the pleasure was all his and that he hoped to stop by again in the very near future. Nancy informed him that she would look forward to it.

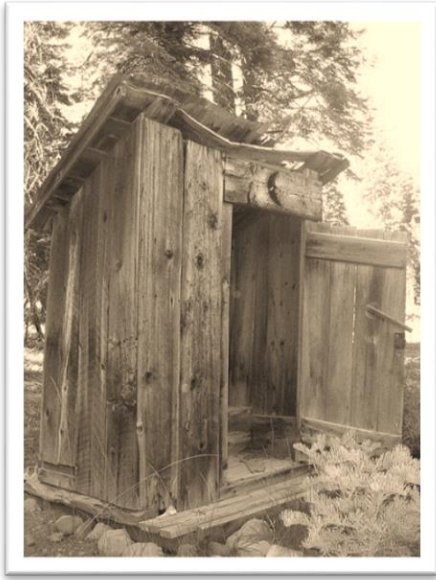
As he drove off, Nancy could not believe that she had actually met the President of the United States! Not only that, she had met him when he had just casually stopped at their farm and purchased items from her roadside stand. Who could have imagined that the daughter of two Italian immigrants would someday have a conversation with the president of the most powerful nation in the world? Certainly not their humble daughter, Anunciata! How proud and honored Rocco and Giovanna would be to know that the President of the United States of America, their adopted homeland, had stopped at their daughter's home and visited with her. It could only happen in America!

Being The Butt Of A Family Legend *AKA The Girl In Fowl Trouble*

While growing up on South Street in Washington, Pennsylvania, indoor plumbing was a luxury that the Proia family didn't have until the mid-1920's. Prior to that our family, like all the others in the area at that time, had an outhouse in the backyard. This small wooden structure was separate from our actual home. It was close enough to allow easy access for the family but far enough away to minimize the effects of the odors. To give a bit more privacy for the user, the outhouse was built in a corner of the backyard.

Bathroom tissue was another luxury that wasn't an option available for us. Old newspapers and catalogs from retailers specializing in mail order purchases, such as Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck, were often used as our toilet paper. The catalogs served a dual purpose; not only were they used to clean our bottoms, but they also gave us something to read while using the outhouse.

When the opening holding the waste became full, the service of a “honeydipper” was required. The honeydipper would come during the night to literally dip the waste out of the hole in the outhouse with a long-handled dipper. On a regular basis, the holes



in the outhouses had to be cleaned and emptied. If they were not, problems with insects, rodents, and waste overflow would occur. Additionally, when the honeydipper was overdue, the less than fragrant aroma from the outhouse would quickly overtake the backyard.

With eight Proia kids, our backyard was always a very active place. Prominently placed was the large brick outdoor oven that Papa had built for Mama. Our mother spent a great deal of time

baking bread in the oven every week. On Sundays, Mama always prepared roasted chicken, pizza, or other delicious dishes using her backyard oven. At the far end of the yard was our garage where Papa parked his trucks as well as where all of the tools were stored. Additionally there were always a dozen or so chickens wandering around the yard. Mama raised chickens not only for their eggs but also to cook for Sunday dinner.

One perfect mid-summer afternoon a most unusual event happened to me in this normally busy but still peaceful backyard. The newest Montgomery Ward catalog had arrived a few days earlier and I had already started going through it page by page. I so enjoyed looking at the items on the pages, dreaming of someday having the lovely, stylish clothes that filled the catalog. When nature called that afternoon, I headed toward the outhouse knowing the catalog was the perfect reading material to bring

along. So I tucked it tightly under my arm and headed across the backyard to the outhouse to do my business.

When I got inside, I closed the door and sat down. As I sat there carefully going over each page, I was enjoying my time alone away from all my sisters and brothers. While I was perusing all the fashionable clothes in the catalog, I thought I felt a little tweak on my rear end but didn't think much of it. Then a second tweak quickly followed, but this time it was more like a little peck. Suddenly, the pecks got much stronger, more painful, and very numerous. I jumped up off of the seat to see what was happening.

When I looked into the hole under the opening for the seat I couldn't believe what I saw. There was a chicken in the hole! I was horrified when I realized that what had been pecking at my bottom was one of the chickens that roamed around our backyard. In the true spirit of a young teenage girl, I let out a blood-curdling scream, pushed open the door, and burst into the backyard. As I sprinted across the yard, I continued to shriek and yell as loud as I could.

Mama was in the kitchen when she heard my piercing screams. She immediately charged out of the house and into the backyard. My mother was sure that great bodily harm had been done to me and I was near death. Mama ran as fast as she could to rescue me from any and all harm. I fell into her arms, continuing to loudly screech and sob. Mama tried to calm me down so that she could find out why I was so upset. However, I was too emotional for her to get to the "bottom" of the problem.

Finally, Mama was able to calm me down. When I told her what had happened, she became upset. Her silly daughter was screaming and carrying on over a chicken in the outhouse? This was pure foolishness for my mother to have to deal with; she had many more important things to attend to than this. Mama would very quickly put an end to the utter nonsense that I was carrying on about.



With great determination and force, she stomped over to the outhouse. When she looked into the opening below the seat, she saw the chicken was still there. Because the opening was just about filled to the top, the chicken was situated right below the opening—a perfect location to peck away at my rear end.

The chicken had obviously been stuck there for quite some time because it was completely covered with waste matter. That did not bother Mama in the least. She quickly grabbed the chicken by the neck and forcibly pulled it out of the opening. She then stepped outside of the outhouse, held the chicken high in the air so that I could see it, and, with great force, rung the chicken's neck. In record time, Mama had solved the problem once and for all.

Of course, this set me into orbit. Now I once again began to scream and wail even louder than before (if that was possible). In no uncertain terms, Mama told me to stop carrying on; enough was enough already. She was absolutely fed up with my foolish nonsense. Mama carried the chicken into the house, washed it off and plucked its feathers. Later on, even though it wasn't Sunday, everyone in the Proia family enjoyed roasted chicken for dinner that night....everyone except me. I was still too upset to even think about eating, let alone chicken!



For years after that fateful incident, I continued to refuse to eat chicken. The incident also affected my use of the outhouse; from then on I was always more cautious before sitting down. You can be certain I always checked for chickens! To make matters worse, I became the "butt" of my family's jokes. They all took great delight in laughing at what happened to me on that fateful afternoon. But none with more delight and laughter than my dear daughter, Mary, who readily told anyone who asked that "The Chicken Story" was her favorite.

However, I admit that as the years passed, I also took great delight in retelling the story. Always laughing long and hard as I relived that fateful day in our backyard outhouse and my encounter with that chicken. It's always good to have something to "cluck" about!

Hair Today, Fabulous Tomorrow

Giovanna and Rocco Proia received a most precious Valentine's Day gift when their third child, a daughter they named Cusippina, was born on February 14, 1913 in the

upstairs bedroom of their home on South Street in Washington, Pennsylvania. The third Proia Princess was gorgeous, sweet, and precious. Rocco and Giovanna were thrilled with the newest, perfect addition to their loving family.

When she started school, the little Proia Princess became known as Josephine. Later, her friends shortened her name to Jo. As is typical of most preteen girls, Jo always wanted to look her best when she left her home. Coming from a large family of eight children, Jo knew her parents were on a limited budget with only few extra dollars to spend for the latest fashions. But the very clever Jo knew how to make the best of what she had. Each morning, Jo would spend a great deal of time making sure that every hair was in place, her clothes were impeccably pressed, and her shoes were polished before she walked out of the door to head off to school. Because she was a very beautiful young lady, Jo didn't have to work very long or hard to achieve the smashing look she wanted. Jo's natural beauty was only enhanced by anything she did to perfect her appearance.



While she was working on refining her look, Jo realized that she just might have a very special talent for making her hair look wonderful. With very little effort, she was able to arrange her hair into the latest styles and it didn't even cost a penny. When having finger waves in your hair was the latest rage and what everyone wanted, Jo was able to make them perfectly. She could make the finger waves cascade down her hair, encircling her beautiful face with style and grace. Jo's exquisitely coiffed hair was the perfect touch to accent her gorgeous face.

Jo soon realized that she truly enjoyed fixing her hair in different styles. One day she'd have the waves going one way and on another day she'd have the waves falling into place in a totally different way. This didn't escape the watchful eyes of her sisters. They'd taken notice of the glamorous ways Jo was wearing her hair. Being



their sister, they soon approached Jo to style their hair in the fresh, modern ways that she had done her own. The always generous and accommodating Jo couldn't say no and was soon doing the hair of each of her sisters. Now, all the Proia girls had their hair looking wonderfully stylish because of Jo's talents.

It didn't take long before others took notice too. Their cousins, as well as their friends and neighbors, noticed the fashionable hairstyles that all the Proia girls were wearing. When they realized that it was Jo who

was performing these works of art, they asked Jo to do their hair as well. In no time at all, Jo had quite a following of relatives, friends, and neighbors. Because she was such a kind, generous person, Jo did everyone's hair for free. She didn't think she should charge the ladies anything; after all, she was just a schoolgirl.

As time went by, more and more ladies admired Jo's talent and wanted her to work her magic on them as well. It soon became problematic for Jo because so many women were requesting her talents. Jo then made the difficult decision to begin charging her clients twenty-five cents to set and comb out their hair. Soon Jo had another problem to solve. With no hair dryer, doing someone's hair became a long, drawn out

process. First, it was necessary for Jo to go to someone's house to wash and set their hair. Then a few hours later when the hair had dried, she had to go back again to style their hair. This wasted a great deal of Jo's time, so she thought there had to be



a better way to handle her new hair styling business and she'd better come up with it fast.

Jo was a determined young woman; she knew there had to be a better way. After giving it a great deal of thought and doing some research, Jo decided that if her business was going to grow, she needed to have a hair dryer.

She wanted to discuss the

matter with her father. Rocco always encouraged his children to learn a trade so that they would be able to support themselves throughout their lives. Rocco told his daughters, "In America, women don't have to get married. You can work and provide for yourself." He was very impressed with Jo's talent as well as her business plan. Additionally, Rocco didn't want "anyone to put a price on her hands." He didn't want her working for someone else; rather he wanted Jo to be her own boss. Without any hesitation, he agreed to purchase all the equipment Jo needed to open her own beauty salon. Rocco had a great deal of confidence in Jo and was positive that she would be very successful in her business venture.

To accommodate her plans for her own beauty shop, Jo rented space on the second floor of a building on East Wheeling Street, close to downtown Washington. With the money her father gave her, Jo was able to purchase four electric hair dryers as well as all the equipment and supplies that would be needed to open the salon. Proud of being able to own her own beauty salon, she named the shop "Jo's." In no time at all, word of Jo's talents quickly spread throughout Washington. Through word of mouth, Jo established and maintained a very successful business. Her clients were thrilled with the fabulous work that Jo always did on their hair.

Several years after opening her business, Jo's older sister Nancy came home to visit from her home in Washington, D.C. Nancy also had a very successful career in the beauty salon that she worked in at the Woodward and Lothrop store in Washington, D.C. Since Nancy knew that Jo had a great deal of talent and was a very hard worker, she encouraged her sister to come to D.C. to work. Nancy told Jo that with her determination and skill, she would be able to make even more money by working in Washington, D.C.

Although this sounded very enticing to Jo, it was a big step for her to take. Her business in Washington was already very successful and she was making a fine living for herself. It would be difficult to leave the thriving business she'd built, as well as her family, to begin a new life in Washington, D.C. After giving it much thought and discussing the matter with her parents, Jo decided to make the move to D.C. Being a good businesswoman who



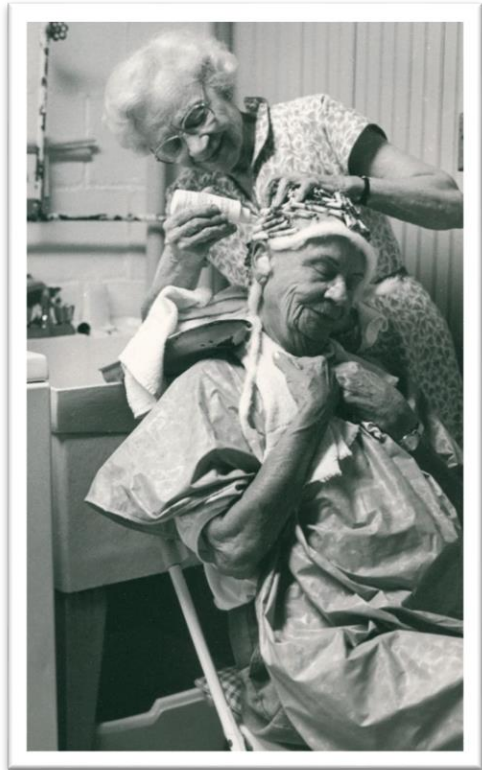
considered all her options, she asked her father to store all of her shop equipment and supplies in case she decided that life in D.C. was not for her. Rocco readily agreed to do all he could to help his daughter in her new venture.

In no time at all, Jo established herself in Washington, D.C. Her sister Nancy's suggestion of moving there was going extremely well. She soon had a terrific following of women who loved the wonderful styles Jo was able to create for them. After she was sure that she had established a large clientele in D.C., Jo wrote her father to ask him to sell the equipment from her original shop. Jo was very happy and successful with her new life in D.C.

While living in Washington DC, Jo met a wonderful young man who was handsome, bright, and charming. It wasn't long before she happily became Mrs. John F. Kenny. John was the love of Jo's life and soon they were thrilled to welcome three sons and a daughter into their family. Jo was so busy with the children that she no longer had the time to do ladies' hair.

Additionally, World War II was ongoing and it was increasingly difficult to get the supplies she needed for her business. Because of these factors, Jo decided that she would "take a break" from working in the beauty salon.

When the war ended, Jo thought that it was time to reevaluate things. There were two significant changes that had a huge impact on her decision. First, and most importantly, Jo's children had gotten a little older and had started to become independent. Also, the supplies she needed for a



salon had become more plentiful. After giving it considerable thought and discussing it with her husband, she decided that she would once again pursue a career outside the home and would open another salon. With her partner, Mae, she opened the Jo Mae Beauty Shop. Together Jo and Mae were able to establish an extensive list of very satisfied clients. However, after a number of years, Mae retired. Undaunted at the prospect of running the business alone, Jo continued on as the sole owner of the thriving salon.

For more than forty years, Jo owned and operated her highly successful salon in Washington, D.C. As her parents had always encouraged their children to do, she was able to use her skills and talents to keep her business running through the many challenges she had to face in life. Through her determination, hard work, and the lessons she'd learned from Giovanna and Rocco, Jo was able to rise above all the difficulties she encountered. Jo became a highly successful businesswoman who was able to persevere through both good times and bad as she provided a wonderful life for her family. What a marvelous inspiration Jo was for all who knew and loved her! And how very proud Rocco and Giovanna would be of their third Proia Princess.



America Gains Two New Citizens

During the summer of 1914, Rocco and Giovanna made the difficult decision to uproot their children and move from Washington, Pennsylvania to Raton, New Mexico in search of more opportunities for their growing family. Rocco went ahead to get a job in the coal mines and set up living arrangements for his family. The pregnant Giovanna soon followed with

their three daughters. A few months after arriving, Anna the fourth Proia Princess was born on November 11. Little Anna, like her older sisters, was a beautiful, delightful, and very bright little girl. From the time she was young, Anna was a compassionate child who always tried to help anyone who needed encouragement or support. Within a year of Anna's birth, the Proia family decided to return to Pennsylvania.

As she grew, Anna was always there to offer her assistance to others but she sprinkled it with a great deal of her witty charm. Her keen sense of humor always added a special touch to any situation. Read on for a little sample of our Anna in action!!

Mr. and Mrs. Jannazzi lived in the other half of the South Street duplex in which the Proia family resided. Dominick and Anna were a kind, caring and generous couple who didn't have any children. The Jannazzi's dearly loved all of the Proia kids and were thrilled to be considered part of the family.

Because funds were tight at the Proia household, anything other than the basic necessities in life was rare. However, Dominick and Anna were happy to provide treats like cookies and candy for the children as well as essential items such as a new pair of shoes every once in a while. Giovanna had five daughters who had long hair that needed to be braided each morning before leaving



for school. "Annie Next Door," as the Proia children called Anna Jannazzi, would often go to the house to help braid the Proia Princesses' hair. Sometimes she would even surprise them with a little piece of colorful ribbon to tie in a bow at the bottom of their braids!

Like Rocco and Giovanna, Dominick and Annie Next Door were immigrants to the United States from Italy. They were very grateful for the prosperous new life that they'd been able to start in America. They both worked very hard to achieve their successes in Washington. However, that was not enough for them. They wanted to become citizens of the United States, the country they'd grown to love and respect.

Becoming a citizen was not an easy task for Dominick and Annie Next Door. They knew that the naturalization process they'd have to go through to achieve citizenship was filled with challenges that would be difficult for them to overcome. To begin with, neither of them had a very good command of the English language. Also, they'd have to answer questions about the American government and judicial system, as well as the history of the United States, which would be very difficult for them. Further, the process would take place in a courtroom before a judge who'd ask them questions; a very daunting experience for both of them. As intimidating as the entire process was going to be, Dominick and Anna were committed to do all that they had to do to achieve the citizenship that they so desperately wanted.

Mrs. Iannazzi took night classes at Washington High School to help her learn the English language. Slowly, she began to learn how to speak, read, and write in English. As she became more fluent, her confidence began to grow. Next, she went on to take a class that specifically prepared her for the naturalization process. In the class, she got a book that was filled with information on the government, judicial system, and the history of the country. There were also some sample questions included that would be asked by the judge the day she applied for citizenship. Annie Next Door went over the book many, many times to be sure that she fully understood everything that would be asked of her. Additionally, Mrs. Iannazzi would "bribe" the Proia children to help her prepare for the test by giving them a chocolate candy bar each time they came to her home to review the information with her. Because the children truly loved Annie Next Door, as well as chocolate candy, they were always willing to help her prepare for her citizenship.



Dominick had a more difficult time preparing for the test. Because he worked long hours in the coalmine every day, he did not have the time nor the energy to take any night classes at the high school to help him prepare. His lessons in English were what he could gather from his interactions with other workers while in the

coalmines. Mrs. Jannazzi would carefully review her lessons with her husband in the evenings but he was often too tired to fully concentrate on what his wife was sharing.

Anna, the fourth Proia Princess, took a great deal of interest in getting the Jannazzis prepared for their citizenship. She was particularly concerned with Dominick because she could see that he was struggling very hard through the process. Almost every day after dinner, Anna would go to the Jannazzi's to review the citizenship information with them. Sometimes, she would read out loud from the book, stopping when she got to a point that was complicated or confusing to explain the information in her own words so that the Jannazzi's would be able to better understand. Other times, Anna would have them summarize what she'd read in their own words. On some days, Anna would ask the Jannazzi's potential questions that the judge might ask on the day they went for their citizenship papers. Over and over, the three of them reviewed the information.

Slowly, the Jannazzis began to master all they needed to know. As they held their daily study sessions, Anna would ask them potential questions on all the areas of the government, the judicial system, and history that might be asked by the judge. Mrs. Jannazzi was the stronger student of the two and rather quickly grasped all the knowledge that would be required of her to obtain her citizenship. However, she was not willing to go for her citizenship papers until Dominick was also fully prepared for the exam. To boost his knowledge, Annie Next Door would review the information each night when they ate dinner. Finally, Anna felt that both the Jannazzi's would be able to answer any questions that the judge might ask either of them with understanding and confidence.

Anna helped Mr. and Mrs. Jannazzi fill out all the necessary forms to apply for citizenship. Once they were turned in, the three of them had just a few more weeks to hone their knowledge of the constitution and government. Since they already knew the material, the Jannazzis' confidence continued to grow.

When the big day finally arrived, Dominick put on his best (and only) suit, dress shirt, tie, and shoes for the momentous occasion. Annie Next Door also wore her best outfit, plus she also dabbed a few drops of perfume behind each ear for good luck.

The three of them walked to the courthouse, confident that before the day ended, the United States would have two more proud citizens. Once they were inside the courtroom, they were a tad bit intimidated by the grandeur of the room, as well as the judge in his dark robe seated before them at his grand bench. However, Anna pinched both of them for good luck and told them that they were going to do a great job.



Annie Next Door and Giovanna

Annie Next Door was called up first. She walked with confidence as she approached the judge's bench. She stood up straight with a warm smile on her face and looked the judge directly in his eyes. She had

remembered all the things that Anna had told her to do. When the judge started to ask Annie Next Door questions, she answered each completely without any hesitation. Her knowledge of the constitution, the government, and history was very evident to the judge and he was impressed with Mrs. Iannazzi. Immediately after answering the last question, the judge informed Annie Next Door that she had done a wonderful job and she had fulfilled all the requirements to become a citizen. She was told to step into another room where she would soon take the Oath of Citizenship. Annie Next Door was very happy and proud, while Anna thought that she would burst with pride.

The next person who was called up was Dominick. Remembering everything Anna had told him about how he needed to act in the courtroom, Dominick walked up to the judge's bench with confidence, stood up straight and tall, and smiled when he looked directly at the judge. He was off to a great start. As soon as the judge asked the

first question; however, things did not go as planned. Dominick just stood there looking straight ahead; he did not answer the question. The judge went on to the second question but there was still no response from Dominick. This continued for two or three more questions. The judge had no other option but to deny Dominick his citizenship. Dominick just continued to stand there with his head hung in shame.

Anna could not believe what had happened! She was more than positive that Dominick knew the answer to every question that the judge had asked him. Anna absolutely could not let Dominick go down in defeat! Anna got out of her seat and asked the judge if she could approach the bench on behalf of Dominick. The request was very unusual and the judge was puzzled by it. Anna was not willing to back down so she told the judge that it was very important that she talk to him. The judge finally agreed and motioned for Anna to come forward.

When Anna approached the bench, she said to the judge, "Your Honor, Mr. Iannazzi knows all the answers to the questions. I have been reviewing the information with him for several

months, and I am positive that he knows the answer to every question that you asked of him."



Anna and her children with Giovanna

The judge was puzzled and asked Anna, "If he knew the information, then why didn't he answer any of the questions when I asked them?"

Quick thinking Anna responded with, “It is because he couldn’t hear you, he is deaf. He is accustomed to reading my lips but he couldn’t read yours. If you allow me to ask him the questions, you will see that he knows all the answers.”

Again the judge was a little taken back. This was a very unusual request. The judge considered that perhaps Anna was correct; Mr. Jannazzi was deaf and could not hear



Anna’s husband Cosmo sits with his family and Giovanna

the questions.

Deciding to give the man the benefit of the doubt, the judge handed Anna the sheet of paper on which the questions were written.

Slowly and

deliberately, Anna asked Dominick each of the questions. She purposely spoke loudly and clearly so that the judge would believe that Dominick was deaf. With each question, Dominick gave a complete answer that clearly demonstrated his knowledge to the judge. As Mr. Jannazzi answered each question correctly, the judge became convinced that he was in fact deaf. The judge also believed that the reason Dominick had not answered the questions when he asked them was that he could not hear him or read his lips. After the last question had been correctly answered, the judge nodded his head in approval. He told Anna to inform Mr. Jannazzi that he had passed the test and would also be eligible to take the oath for his citizenship.

When Anna heard the great news, she smiled at the judge and thanked him for the special consideration that he’d given Mr. Jannazzi due to his deafness. Anna then turned to Dominick and told him in a very loud, clear voice that he had passed the test



for his citizenship. Dominick was very happy; he smiled at the judge and said in his broken English, "Tanka you, Tanka you too much!"

Anna had to concentrate very hard not to burst out laughing. She just slowly walked with Mr. Iannazzi to join his wife in the room where they would later take the Oath of Citizenship. As they walked, Anna was very thrilled and proud that both of her students would soon be brand new citizens of the United States.

Once they joined Mrs. Iannazzi and told her the good news, the three of them rejoiced. However, Annie Next Door could not understand what took so long. She asked Anna, "What was going on? How come it took so long? Why were you talking to the judge?"

Anna answered, "I had to talk to the judge about Dominick and explain a few things to him."

Mrs. Iannazzi was confused, "Explain a few things? What did you have to tell him about Dominick?"

Anna quickly answered very softly, "I told the judge that Dominick was deaf!"

Now Mrs. Iannazzi was thoroughly confused and said quite loudly, "Deaf? What are you talking about? Dominick is not deaf!"

"Shhh!" said Anna, trying to get Annie Next Door to speak more softly. Then she went on to add, "Dominick was so intimidated by the judge that he didn't answer any of the questions; he just stood there."

Annie Next Door responded with, "What, he just stood there and didn't say anything? Why didn't he answer the questions? He knew all the answers. So, because he didn't answer, you told the judge he was deaf? Why? Why would you say he was deaf when he isn't? That is a terrible thing to say about him!"

Quickly Anna answered with, "Well, is it worse to be deaf or to be stupid?"

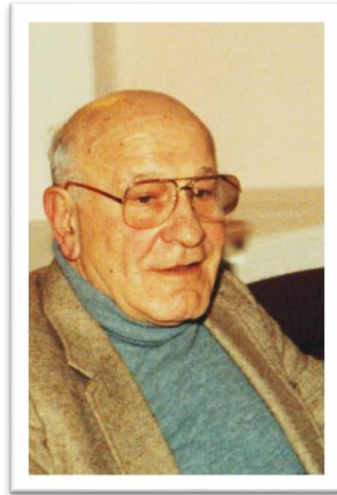
With that, Annie Next Door did not answer. She was grateful that Anna's quick thinking allowed both her and her husband to reach their goal of becoming citizens of

the United States on the same day! It was indeed a very proud day for the Jannazzi family....the two newest citizens of America.

Equally proud was Anna Proia, who was thrilled for Mr. and Mrs. Jannazzi. All the months of study the three of them had done, helped this wonderful couple, who were so important to her entire family, achieve their greatest dream. Anna and Dominick Jannazzi, who like her parents were immigrants to this country, were now proud Americans, and she had helped them achieve their long, sought-after dream. Also, Giovanna and Rocco were proud that their daughter had played such an integral role in making the dreams of their dear friends come true. They knew that their daughter Anna had learned the lesson of doing all you could to help others very well!!

The Boy, The Broom, The Bluff

Rocco and Giovanna dearly loved their young daughters. The four Proia Princesses filled their parents' days with much joy and love. Giovanna and Rocco marveled at their beauty, intelligence, and charm. However, they still longed to add a precious



little boy to their family. On March 13, 1916, their prayers were answered with the birth of their first son, Albert. They were overjoyed with the arrival of the first Proia Prince because they now had an intelligent, beautiful, and strong son to carry on the Proia name. Like his sisters, Albert would be a source of great pride for his parents. However, every once in a while, little Prince Albert let his parents know he could be just a tad bit mischievous.....read on to learn about one of his more legendary escapades!

It was a lovely fall day in 1925. Giovanna had spent a busy day doing laundry and cleaning the house for her large, growing family. Before beginning to prepare that evening's dinner, she decided to sort some dried Great Northern white beans. After sorting the beans, she'd soak them overnight



to use in the pasta e fagioli she was going to prepare for dinner the next day. She sat at the kitchen table and carefully went through the large, flat white beans being sure to take out any that weren't good. This was a slow, tedious process, but Giovanna enjoyed the opportunity to get off of her feet and sit while she did the task. Because she had so many beans to sort, and they were small and slippery, a few of them missed the bowl as she tossed them in. Some landed on the table and two or three of them even fell under the table. Giovanna was too busy and too tired to pick up the beans; she decided that she'd get them a little later when she swept the floor.

While she started to cook dinner for that evening, the children began to come home from school. Giovanna greeted each of them as they entered the house through the

kitchen door. After hearing about their day, she reminded the children to go up to their rooms and change clothes before doing their chores. Because they knew better than to disobey their mother, all of the children obediently did exactly as they were told...all that is except for one. Nine-year-old Albert quickly informed his mother that he just had to run down the street to his friend's house to bring him something. He promised it would only take a few minutes and he'd be right back. Knowing Albert would get waylaid at his friend's, Giovanna told him to change his clothes and do his chores first. She knew that Albert would end up staying at his friend's house longer than a few minutes because he would get involved with some foolishness. However, before the words were even out of her mouth, Albert dashed out of the door and went charging down the street to his friend's house.

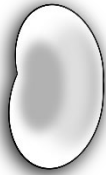
True to Giovanna's predictions, Albert's trip to his friend's took much longer than he'd anticipated. When Albert arrived, he found out there was a little ball game going on in his friend's backyard that he just couldn't resist joining. The game was so exciting and so much fun that when it finally ended, Albert wasn't aware of how much time had passed. He also hadn't realized that he'd gotten his good school clothes very dirty while playing the game. Albert thought that maybe his mother was right after all; he should have changed clothes before leaving the house. He knew that it was too late to think about that now. The damage was done. Albert dreaded going home because he knew he'd have a very upset mother to answer to when he got there. It was going to be difficult to explain to her how these few unexpected things happened.

Giovanna was strolled



more than just a little annoyed with Albert as he into the house. Not only had he disobeyed her by leaving when he was told not to, he'd been gone for over an hour. Since Albert hadn't changed his clothes before going to his friend's, his good school clothes had gotten tattered and dirty. He knew this would upset his mother a great deal. Not only was his mother angry with him but, to make matters worse, she also had a broom in her hand just as he came through the kitchen door. Giovanna was

getting ready to start sweeping the floor to get the beans she'd dropped under the table as he walked through the kitchen door. Albert's timing couldn't have been worse.



As soon as Albert entered the kitchen, the fireworks began. In a very loud and angry voice, Giovanna asked her oldest son why he had disobeyed her by going to his friend's house before changing his clothes and doing his chores. Who did he think he was to defy his mother by running over to his friend's house when he was specifically told not to? When she noticed his filthy clothes, which even had a few rips and tears, things escalated very quickly. Giovanna was so angry that she approached her son. Knowing that his mother was so annoyed that she was probably going to take a swipe at him, Albert took cover by quickly going under the table. Of course, this only angered Giovanna even more. Now she really went into action! In an attempt to get Albert from under the table, she took the broom and swatted at him. Again and again she swatted but Albert didn't leave the safety of the underside of the table. However, he knew he couldn't stay there forever.

Suddenly, he found his salvation!! On the floor he discovered one of the white beans that had fallen while his mother was sorting them earlier in the day. The bean was about the size and shape of a tooth and the quick-thinking Albert immediately went into action. As he grabbed the bean, he let out a blaring, blood-curdling scream. Then he held out the bean in the palm of his hand for his mother to see. In a loud shrieking, tear-filled voice Albert said, "Oh look Mama, you broke my tooth, you broke my tooth!" To add a little more dramatic effect, Albert grabbed his mouth as he fell flat on the floor.

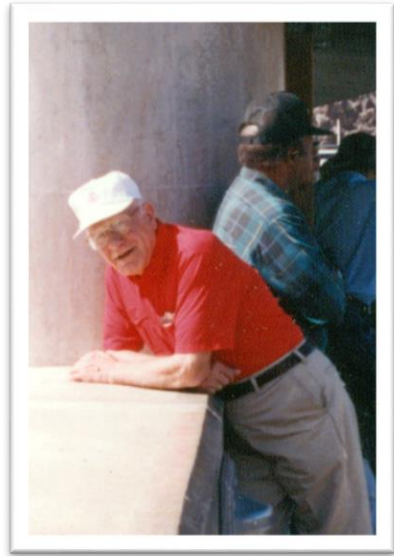
As soon as she heard Albert's words, Giovanna fell to her knees, sobbing uncontrollably. She couldn't believe she'd harmed her precious young child by breaking his tooth. Her beautiful, perfect son now had a broken tooth because she'd hit him with a broom! How could she have done this terrible thing?! She'd never be able to forgive herself. Giovanna quickly scooped Albert off the floor. She took her son in her arms, held him very tightly, and rocked him as she begged him for forgiveness over and over again. She wailed louder and louder as she held Albert tighter and

tighter in her arms. Giovanna knew that she had marred her son for life because of her anger with him over disobeying her.

She also knew that her husband Rocco and her other children would be very disappointed in her when they found out how it happened. What a terrible thing she'd done to the entire family. What a horrendous catastrophe she'd created!

Albert was shocked by his beloved mother's reaction. He knew he had to tell her the truth about it being a bean that he'd showed her and not his tooth. However, each time he tried to pry himself away from his mother's grasp, she only held him tighter. Her sobs got louder and louder as he tried in vain to explain what had really happened. The situation was totally out of control and Albert knew that he had to let his mother know the truth. Somehow, through the pandemonium of Giovanna's wailing and begging for forgiveness, Albert was finally able to get out of his mother's grip long enough to show her that it was in fact a bean and not his tooth that he had in his hand.

At first, Giovanna was unwilling to accept the truth from Albert because she was so upset. However, she slowly started to calm down when she realized that her precious son was fine. She had come to understand that she had not broken his tooth when she swatted him with the broom. She also became aware that Albert had tricked her into believing that what she'd thought was his tooth was actually a bean. Even though she was still very distraught with Albert for not only disobeying her but also for tricking her and getting her so upset, Giovanna took Albert in her arms once again. She was so happy that he was fine, she repeatedly kissed him over and over again as her tears continued to flow down her cheeks. Albert held his dear mother in his arms



for a long time as he tenderly kissed away each one of her tears. He gently soothed her broken heart as he promised to never do anything to disobey her again.



On that fall afternoon, young Albert repeatedly vowed to his mother he'd always be good and that he would never, ever even think of disobeying her again. However, there were a just few more times that he proved to be quite a challenge for her!! (Boys will be boys!!) Through it all, Giovanna always adored Albert, as well as all of her other children, with a very forgiving and loving heart.

Determination & A Five Mile Walk Pay Off

Giovanna and Rocco were thrilled to welcome their fifth daughter on March 16, 1919 when she was born in their Washington home. They decided to name the newest Proia Princess



Teresa. Like her older sisters, Teresa was a beautiful little girl filled with love and kindness for all. At a very early age, Teresa's warm, loving personality and lovely smile charmed all who knew her. As she grew, Teresa flourished into an accomplished young woman with many skills and talents. Rocco and Giovanna knew that Teresa would also make her mark in the world by achieving many great successes...and she never, ever disappointed them.

The vivacious and beautiful Teresa became the happy bride of handsome and intelligent Stanley Moore. The newlywed couple began their life together living in Washington. In 1942, Teresa, Stanley and their two sons, David and Dennis, left in their newly purchased trailer to relocate to California. Because they were pulling a trailer, they had to drive at the very slow speed of thirty-five miles an hour. It was a lengthy, grueling journey for the young family. On their long, slow trip, Teresa spent a great deal of time entertaining David, who was four, and Dennis, who was eight-months old. At last, after ten days on the road, they reached their destination of a trailer park in Lincoln Park, California.

The living arrangements in the trailer park were not acceptable to Teresa; the park was not clean and she didn't want her children playing in the area. After a week, Teresa and Stanley found a home that they were interested in purchasing in a new subdivision. They sold the trailer and used the money as the down payment on their little two-bedroom home. Since



they didn't have any furniture, David slept in a baby's bed, Dennis slept in a large buggy, while Teresa and Stanley slept on the floor. With no furniture, they improvised by using a big board as a table and wooden boxes for chairs. Slowly, piece-by-piece, they were able to purchase a second-hand stove, a wooden icebox refrigerator, a washing machine, and furniture for their home.

As soon as they got to California, Stanley quickly got a job as a mold-maker; he produced iron molds that were used to make a variety of items. Stanley was extremely skillful at his trade. With his hard work and determination, he soon became one of the best mold-makers in all of California. He was able to earn the money that the family needed to grow and prosper in their new home.

One day, Stanley came home from work and told Teresa that he wanted to start a business of his own. However, he needed to borrow money from the bank. When he had gone to a bank earlier that day to borrow the money, he was denied the loan. The banker told him that all he had was an old car and a home that he didn't have enough equity in to qualify for a business loan. Understandably, Stanley was very disappointed when he told Teresa that he wouldn't be able to begin his own business because the bank denied his application for a loan.



Teresa decided that the bank didn't fully appreciate Stanley's potential when they refused to loan him the money. The next morning she decided to take matters into her own hands. She got up very early, packed lunches for David and herself, as well as two bottles for Dennis, to prepare them for the journey they were going to take that day. She told David that they were going for a walk as she put Dennis in the buggy. It was five miles to the bank; it would be a long walk for them. Teresa pushed the buggy as she talked to David the entire way to the bank. She pointed out all the sights and places of interest along the way so that David would not get bored.

They arrived at the bank before it opened. Teresa sat with her two sons on a bench in a park across the street from the bank. While there, she explained to David how a nearby traffic light worked. David was very inquisitive and was enthralled with his

mother's detailed explanation of why there were traffic lights and how they worked. Before they knew it, the bank had opened for business.

When they entered the bank, Teresa and the children approached the receptionist. Teresa told the receptionist that she wanted to talk to the bank manager. Since Teresa was only twenty-two years old, was wearing a housedress, and had two young children, the receptionist did not think that she was a worthy client for the manager to spend any time with. The receptionist told Teresa that he was busy in a meeting. Teresa went back to her children. After thirty minutes she returned to the receptionist again asking to see the bank manager. The receptionist indicated that the bank manager was still busy. This went on for two more times.

After waiting an hour and a half, Teresa was tired of the responses that she was getting. When the receptionist again told her that the bank manager was busy, Teresa had had enough. She told the receptionist in a pleasant but very firm voice, "I have two young children with me today. Until now, I have seen to it that they have been very well behaved and quiet.



However, if I don't get to see the bank manager soon, the baby is going to start to cry and my older son is going to start running around...and I am going to let them!"

Without any hesitation, the receptionist said, "He will see you now."

Mr. Jones, the manager of the bank, was about seventy years old. As soon as Teresa introduced herself to him, the manager recognized her name. He told her, "Your husband was here yesterday and spoke to me about a business loan. However, he did not have any collateral."

Because Teresa was unfamiliar with the word, she asked Mr. Jones, "What is collateral? Please tell me what the term means."

The bank manager then went on to explain in "bank language" what the term meant.

After he informed Teresa what the word meant, she asked without any hesitation, "Isn't a bank a lending house? It doesn't sound like you lend money unless the person already has money. In other words, you only lend money on a sure thing."

Giving Mr. Jones a few seconds to absorb what she said, Teresa went on to add, "Well, I want you know that I have more collateral than you have money in this bank to lend. I am twenty-two and my husband is twenty-eight. Between us we have over seventy years of hard work ahead of us. We have many years in which our determination and drive will get us ahead in life. My husband and I have our youth on our side. You can't put a monetary value on that kind of collateral, but we both know that it is an invaluable asset." As she spoke the words, Teresa was very well aware that she had gotten her philosophy on life from her parents. She knew that she had proved to the bank manager that through their hard work and determination, they would be able to pay the loan back.



The bank manager looked at Teresa and said, "You tell your husband to come in tomorrow morning to pick up the check."

Curious, but not surprised, Teresa asked the bank manager why he had changed his mind. He replied, "Because of your beautiful brown eyes!"

Teresa was not happy with his response so she quickly replied, "You know that's not true. You agreed to give us the loan because you knew what I said was true. My husband and I are going to work hard to be able to pay back your loan."

After thanking Mr. Jones, Teresa went back to the park bench to have lunch with her sons. Soon, she started the long five-mile walk back home. Once they finally arrived, all three of them were exhausted and needed to rest. After he got up from his nap, Teresa told David, "You must not tell Daddy where we went today." Of course, David agreed.



After dinner that night Teresa told Stanley, "By the way, you can stop by the bank tomorrow to pick up the check for the loan."

A confused Stanley asked, "What? What are you talking about?" Teresa told Stanley that Mr. Jones had told her to tell her husband to pick up the check.

Stanley asked, "How did you talk to Mr. Jones, we don't have a phone. Did he drive all the way out to the house to talk to you?"

When Teresa responded with, "I went to the bank to talk to him."

Stanley asked, "How did you get there?"



"I walked." "

Walked?!? What did you do with the children?"

"I took them with me! If you don't believe me, call David in and ask him where we were today."

When David told his father that they walked to the park and sat on a bench before his mother talked to a man, Stanley started to cry. He was totally overwhelmed by all that Teresa had done to get the loan they needed for him to start his own business.

The next day when Stanley went to the bank, Mr. Jones told him, "Mr. Moore, I never saw your potential when you were here the other day. I have come to realize that

you have a very nice little family. I know that you are going to be very successful with your business because of your determination and hard work as well as the support and encouragement of your wife.”

It was because of the fine example that Giovanna and Rocco had shown their family that Teresa knew the power of hard work and determination. She also knew the future of her family depended on her ability to make the bank manager realize that she and her husband were

excellent candidates for a business loan. It was because of her strength of character and her undaunted belief in her husband and herself, that she knew that she had to pursue the loan with the courage of her conviction.

Because of Teresa's determined effort to secure his initial business loan, together she and Stanley were able to begin their very successful business pursuits.

Teresa expertly carried on the Proia family tradition of hard work and determination

as well as the strong belief in yourself. One more of Rocco and Giovanna's children had skillfully put into practice the lessons for success in life that they learned from their parents.



Just Give Him A Wrench & It'll Be Go! Go! Go!

Rocco and Giovanna were thrilled with the arrival of their son Arthur on August 3, 1921. The happy, playful, beautiful baby boy was the perfect addition to their loving family. From a very young age, the little Proia Prince loved to play with his toy cars and trucks. He would spend much of his early days “driving and racing” his toys on the imaginary roads he’d built throughout the Proia home. He’d make a wide variety of loud sounds with his mouth to give his vehicles personality and character as they moved around the various rooms. Of course, when his cars and trucks stopped, they would always come to a screeching halt. Much to his delight, they’d sometimes even



crash into other vehicles. Arthur loved playing with his cars and trucks so much that when he slept, he even dreamt about them. As he slept, his family always knew that he was dreaming about cars because he would even make his racing and crashing sounds in his sleep!

As Arthur grew up, his interest in mechanical things continued. At a young age, he was able to fix any problem that he had with his bicycle. He’d take his bicycle apart, spreading the pieces all over the backyard and garage. When he first started repairing his bike, he often didn’t keep track of all the pieces he’d taken off. Then, he’d become very frustrated and angry with himself because he couldn’t put his bike back together again. But it wouldn’t be long before Arthur would be able to make some “minor adjustments” and have his bike up and running again in no time at all. As he got older, he grew more careful about exactly how he took off the parts of his bike and where he put every piece. In a relatively short period of time, he became an expert

at repairing his bicycle. True to the enterprising Proia tradition, he soon was able to repair the bikes of his friends and neighbors to earn a little extra spending money.

Because he couldn't afford to buy new ones, his father Rocco often drove older trucks. As clever and resourceful as Rocco was, he was not an expert mechanic. He was capable of doing minor repairs on his trucks but any major repairs were far too challenging.



Arthur and Jack Rea

When he was relatively young, Arthur began trying to help his father repair the trucks. Although he didn't have any formal training, he quickly became a very adept mechanic. Because of his natural mechanical skills, he was often called upon to work on his father's old trucks. The problem Arthur often had was the same one he had when he was learning to repair his bicycle. He was usually not very careful about keeping track of all the pieces that he took off of his father's engine. The parts would be spread all over the backyard and garage so that Arthur usually had a difficult time putting the engine back together again. This often frustrated his father, who needed his trucks up and running as fast as possible. Slowly Arthur became as organized about repairing his father's trucks as he had about fixing all the broken bikes in the neighborhood.

With the passage of time, Arthur became an expert at repairing cars and trucks. In fact, he could diagnose the problem with the engine, carburetor, alternator, pistons, or brakes of a truck just by listening to the vehicle run as his father drove it into the garage. There were many times that Rocco didn't even know that there was a problem brewing underneath the hood of his truck. Arthur would often walk out to the garage and tell his father that he needed to fix something on the truck. It would always upset



his mother when Arthur would miss dinner because he stayed in the garage for hours until the truck was fixed. Sometimes, he'd work on repairing his father's trucks long into the night. Arthur wouldn't be satisfied until the truck was running as smoothly as possible.

Top: Albert, Arthur and Mary Rea
Bottom: Anna, Jo, Teresa, Virginia

Arthur's reputation for being an expert mechanic soon spread throughout Washington. He was considered the absolute best mechanic in the city, if not the entire country. People would come from miles around to bring their vehicles to Arthur for repair. Everyone knew that he was an expert and would be able to fix any mechanical problem their vehicle had. Before long, Arthur was so busy repairing vehicles that he often had a difficult time keeping up with all the business that came his way.

As his reputation spread, the owners and drivers of racecars at the Arden Downs racetrack in Washington started to bring their vehicles to Arthur to repair and tune up. The owners and drivers had complete confidence in Arthur's ability to have their racecars performing at their highest level. Because he repaired several of the racecars, many of the drivers and owners invited him to come to the racetrack to see them compete. Most of the time he was so busy that he didn't have the chance to go to the track. However, because he enjoyed seeing how the cars he worked on performed in the races, sometimes he'd go for an afternoon to see a race or two.

One sunny afternoon, the owner of a racecar that Arthur had worked on invited him to view an important race at Arden Downs. When he arrived, the owner invited Arthur to go with him into the race pit. Arthur had always sat in the stands, so to actually go into the pit and be with the crew was a real thrill and a huge honor. Arthur

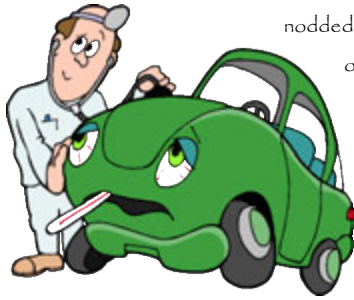
was excited to be with the pit crew as the driver brought the car in to have a tire changed or get advice as to how to improve his performance on the track. Arthur also enjoyed being so close to the cars as they zoomed by, whirling round and round the track. The wind the cars created as they whizzed by and the sound of the engines' roar were exhilarating to him. Arthur was having the time of his life!

As he was standing in the pit, the sound that one of the racecars was making caught his attention. There was something so unusual about the noise that Arthur knew there was something wrong with that car's engine. It was making a slight pinging sound and backfiring occasionally. At first, knowing that it was a competitor's racecar, Arthur didn't do anything about the problem. However, after a few more laps around the racetrack, he couldn't be quiet and ignore the problem any longer. On the car's next lap, he waved the driver to come into the pit. The driver knew that particular pit was not his so he just ignored Arthur's waving as he whizzed by. Undaunted, Arthur waved with more zest and enthusiasm on the following lap; however, the driver still didn't stop. On the next lap, Arthur practically jumped in front of the car to get him to stop. This time it worked and the bewildered driver pulled into the pit area.



Arthur ran up to the driver and told him that there was something wrong with the engine of his vehicle; the timing was off on his racecar. Because of this, the racecar was not performing at its peak level. It was affecting the speed and efficiency at which the car's engine was running. Arthur told the driver to pop the lid on the hood of the car. Grabbing a few wrenches and screwdrivers, Arthur was able to quickly adjust the car's timing. He told the driver to rev the engine to be sure that the adjustment was correct. It was now perfect! Arthur told the driver that his car would now run much better. The driver quickly thanked him as he jumped back into his racecar.

When the driver drove around on the next lap, Arthur listened very intently. He waited for the driver to go around the racetrack two more times before he smiled as he



nodded his head up and down in approval. Because of the adjustment Arthur made to the timing, the driver was able to drive much faster.

With every lap the driver took, he gained speed. Eventually he was able to get to the head of the pack and cross the finish line first, winning the race. Of course, the driver and owner of the winning vehicle were

thrilled. They both ran to Arthur and thanked him for all his help. They told him that they would soon be over to see him so that he could tune up their racecar before every race.

Understandably, the owner of the vehicle who had invited Arthur to join them in the pit was not pleased with Arthur helping the other participant in the race. Because of the adjustment that Arthur made, his competitor was able to win the race. However, it only confirmed the owner's belief in Arthur's outstanding ability to diagnose problems in racecars. His request was that Arthur never again work on his competitor's vehicles during a race in which they both were competing. Arthur laughed and promised he would do that.

The story of what Arthur did that day quickly spread throughout the region. Soon, Arthur had even more clients hoping that he would tune up their vehicles. Although the wait time was often very long, everyone always felt it was well worth the wait.

A fascination for cars that began for Arthur in the backyard of Giovanna and Rocco's South Street home helped him develop the skills needed to become a master mechanic and diagnostician. How proud his parents were to know yet another of their children had built a lasting, honorable career for himself. Once again, another Proia child had made their parents proud!!

The Boy Who Took A Stand

It was the 17th of May, a spring beautiful day in 1924, when Giovanna and Rocco Proia welcomed the newest (and last) addition to their loving family. The beautiful baby boy was delivered by Dr. Clarence McCullough in his parents' upstairs bedroom of their home on South Street in Washington, Pennsylvania. As were all the older Proia children, the new baby was absolutely beautiful! From the day he was born, the entire family cherished the newest Proia Prince; he was a darling child filled with personality and love.

After the delivery, Dr. McCullough thoroughly examined both Giovanna and her adorable baby boy. He determined they were both healthy and doing very well. To help the doctor take care of both Giovanna and the baby, her friend, Palmira Colombo, was also in the bedroom. Palmira and her husband Antonio were good friends of the family. Mr. and Mrs. Colombo were given the honor of being the godparents for the new baby boy.



Unidentified boy, Anna, George, Lucia

After he was sure Giovanna and her baby boy were doing well, Dr. McCullough got ready to leave. Needing the information for the birth certificate, he then asked Giovanna what the baby's name was going to be. In those days, it was the Italian custom that the godparents had the honor of naming the baby. Usually, the godparents would ask the baby's parents what name

they liked for the baby and then give the baby the name the parents wanted. However, that was not how Palmira handled the situation.

Before Giovanna could say anything, Palmira loudly announced that the baby would be named Anthony. Her husband was named Antonio, and with the birth of this baby boy, it gave Palmira the perfect opportunity to honor her husband by naming this child after him. Dr. McCullough looked at Giovanna for approval of the name. Exhausted and weary from just giving birth, as well as wanting to give the baby's godmother the respect she was due, Giovanna weakly nodded her head yes. Palmira was thrilled!

Because Palmira was so delighted with the birth of the baby boy who she brazenly had been able to name after her husband, she wanted to do something very special for



the child. After the doctor left, Palmira told Giovanna that she was going to the best department store in downtown Washington and buy the baby a beautiful brand new crib. As far as she was concerned, there would be nothing too good for baby Anthony; she would purchase the finest crib money could buy for her godson. Giovanna was shocked when Palmira told

her of her plan. She wondered why Palmira would want to buy a new crib when Giovanna already had a perfectly good one that she'd used for all her other children. The ever frugal and cost conscious Giovanna told Palmira that she didn't need or want a new crib for baby Anthony.

Palmira told Giovanna that she wanted baby Anthony to have a fine new crib to sleep in every night because he was her special godson. Giovanna tried to explain that she already had a crib for the baby and that this was hopefully her last child, so a new crib was totally unnecessary. As Giovanna tried to explain why a new crib wasn't needed for the baby, Palmira became very angry. Palmira was absolutely insulted that her generous gift to the baby had been refused. She thought that Giovanna should have accepted her offer if for no other reason than it was a gift from Anthony's godparents. In no uncertain terms, Palmira told Giovanna exactly how she felt about

the situation; Giovanna had insulted her by refusing her generous offer. She immediately stormed out of the house in a big huff.

The last thing Giovanna wanted to do was to insult or even upset her good friend Palmira. However, she felt very strongly that the gift of a new crib for the baby was a very poor choice and totally unnecessary. When Rocco got home from work that evening, she told him all that had happened that day. Rocco could see that Giovanna was very upset over the situation. To assure his beloved wife that she had absolutely done the right thing, he told her that he would have done exactly the same thing. He was sorry that Palmira had gotten so upset, but Giovanna was wise to tell her that they didn't need a new crib.

When Giovanna was feeling better, she and Rocco made several trips to the Colombo's home to apologize. However, Palmira was too hurt and insulted to accept the apology. The relationship between the Proias and the Colombos became very strained. Palmira and Anthony Colombo never came back to the Proia's home to visit or see the baby again. The two families spoke to each other only on very rare occasions and then only when they were forced to.

Not wanting to make the bad situation even worse, the Proias did not select another couple to baptize their baby. Rocco and Giovanna knew that baptizing the baby at that point was totally out of the question. They hoped that as time passed, the Colombos' feelings on the matter would soften....they just didn't realize how long it would take. Months went by and the



George and his friend

Colombos did not return to the Proia home. Then a few years went by and still there was not a visit from the Colombos. A reconciliation between the families just was not going to happen.

As the time passed, Anthony grew up to be a precious little boy. He was a delightful child with a sweet, charming personality that brought great joy to his family. Anthony was filled with love and showered it on everyone, especially his mother. He absolutely adored his mother and frequently told her how much he loved her as he showered her with kisses. Every day he would tell his mother how beautiful she was and how lucky he was to have her as his mother.



However, for some unknown reason, Anthony didn't like his name; he absolutely didn't want to be called Anthony. As he grew, he had lots of friends to play with in the neighborhood. There was a boy in the neighborhood that was a little older than Anthony who he admired a great deal. The boy's name was George. Anthony wanted to play with George all day long and to be just like him. His admiration for George was so great that he slowly started to tell everyone that his name was George, too. The next step was that he started to tell people not to call him Anthony but to call him George. He would proudly tell everyone, "My name is George Proia." The Proia family loved their little prince so much that soon everyone was calling him George.

When George was almost five years old, Dr. McCullough told Giovanna that she needed to have an operation. Concerned with the possibility that she might not survive the surgery, Giovanna was determined that George had to be baptized before

she went into the hospital. She and Rocco went to visit the Colombos to try to reconcile with them one last time. Giovanna explained her medical concerns and the need for her young son to be baptized before she had the surgery. The Colombos yielded to Giovanna's request and reconciled with the Proias. After the friendship resumed, the first order of business was that the child had to be baptized. Rocco quickly made arrangements at the Church of the Immaculate Conception for the baptism. All was going very well with the Colombos and the baptism so the Proias didn't mention that Anthony was now going by the name George. Giovanna and Rocco knew that the Colombos wouldn't be happy with the name change.



The day of the baptism finally arrived. The Proia's purchased a brand new outfit for their precious son on this momentous occasion. During the ceremony, the priest asked Rocco, "What name is this child to be baptized?" Now Rocco had a real dilemma on his hands. He knew that the Colombos had named his son Anthony but that his son did not like the name. More importantly, he also knew that his son loved the name George and that is what he wanted to be called. He didn't want to create a scene in the church with the Colombos and his young son. The quick-thinking

Rocco slyly replied to the priest, "Ask the child what his name is."

When the priest asked the boy what his name was, he proudly replied with his usual response, "My name is George Proia!" Rocco beamed as he smiled at his son; he had outwitted the Colombos. However, once again, Palmira was horrified and insulted. Because they were in a church, Palmira knew that she would have to hold her tongue and not cause a commotion. Much to the Colombos' dismay, the priest then baptized the child with the name George Proia.

Everyone returned to the Proia home for the dinner to honor the baptism. Palmira loudly expressed her displeasure with the name that had been given to their godson. She repeated several times, "This is the first family that I have ever heard of where the children tell the parents what to do." None of the Proia's responded to her statements. Although it was a long, rather strained dinner, at the end of the day the Proias and the Colombos were still friends. It was because of the boldness of young George to pick his own name that the friendship between the two families was never as close as it had once been years before...and that was just fine with Giovanna and Rocco.

Throughout his life, the youngest Proia prince was always known as George Proia. When he was enrolled in kindergarten, the teacher was told that his name was George. His diploma from Washington High School was issued in the name of George Proia. In 1943, when he joined the Army, his name was given as George A. Proia. The name on the headstone of his grave in the Philippines is George A. Proia. The little boy who wanted his name to be George was indeed always known to the world as George Proia.



Throughout his life, Rocco and Giovanna always dearly love and were very proud of their youngest child George....never so filled with pride and love as on his baptismal day when he stood before the priest and proudly announced, "My name is George Proia!"



Virginia Prepares For The Ice Age

It was mid-November, 1945, and in Michigan, that meant it was deer hunting season. Jack, who enjoyed trooping through the woods of northern Michigan, would soon try once again to snare a mighty twelve-point buck. After months of planning and dreaming about his great outdoor adventure, Jack would soon be able to join his hunting buddies John, Dominic, and Tony for their long fourteen-hour drive to Iron Mountain way up in the northern peninsula. Along with their hunting clothes and hunting supplies, the four long-time friends had carefully packed ten days' worth of food into their cars. The night before their departure, the buddies were like four little boys on the night before Christmas! Their excitement for the next day didn't allow



them much sleep because they just couldn't wait to get on the road. Finally, after a restless night, they were able to get up at three in the morning and start their long, long drive up north. Soon, they would be "Off into the wild blue yonder!"

As the men bid their lovely wives good-bye, the women were looking forward to a

vacation from the routines of their daily lives. Phylinda, Lillian, Helen, along with Virginia, would not have to prepare the elaborate dinners for their husbands each night. They would not be making meatballs, pasta, minestrone, lasagna, or frittata for ten days! With their hubbies gone, the women would have the luxury of preparing simpler meals that were less time consuming to put together. Life would be slower and less complicated for the next few days, and they were all looking forward to it.

There was only one issue that needed to be addressed. Lillian and Dominic did not have any children so she would be spending the entire ten days and nights alone in her home. This wasn't anything that the gregarious and outgoing Lillian enjoyed or looked forward to doing. Her good friend Virginia had the perfect solution to the situation...Lillian would spend the ten days with her and her young sons, Tommy and Jackie. Of course, Lillian was thrilled with the invitation and quickly accepted. When Dominic drove to Jack and Virginia's home for the trek up north, he not only had everything he needed for his hunting adventure, he also had his beloved Lillian and her suitcase for her stay with Virginia. As the men drove down the driveway, Virginia and Lillian giggled with excitement over the time they'd spend together.



It was a Saturday so Lillian didn't have to go to work as a cook at Mt. Caramel Hospital. Lillian was delighted to spend the day with Virginia and the boys. It was very cold and snowy outside, so the ladies decided to do things inside the house and not even venture outside. Tommy and Jackie couldn't resist the freshly-fallen snow. The boys delighted in playing in the snow and building a snowman.

Virginia and Lillian were happy to have the time to chat and laugh as they tried out a few new recipes. When the boys finally came inside, they were welcomed with some freshly made hot soup to warm them up. Lillian then made chocolate chip cookies with the boys. The boys measured and stirred the ingredients for the dough before they put it on the cookie sheets. Virginia and Lillian assured the boys that they had never had a more delicious cookie in their entire lives. Tommy and Jackie beamed with pride as they had warm cookies and milk with the ladies.

Later, Lillian gave Virginia a break by bathing the boys before going to bed. Virginia and Lillian read the boys a book and shared a few stories with Tommy and Jackie before tucking them in bed for the night. The ladies then had the evening to listen to "Your Hit Parade" all by themselves. Although Dominic and Jack were good

husbands, their idea of a good time on a Saturday night was not listening to that program. The ladies spent a wonderful evening together as they tapped their feet, bobbed their heads, and sang along with the many popular songs that were played. Much too soon the program ended. The ladies then spent the rest of the evening laughing and reminiscing about the many good times they'd spent together. Before they knew it, it was past midnight....much later than either one of them usually stayed up!!

The weather outside continued to worsen; the wind was howling, the temperature was dropping, and the snow was falling. The ladies decided it was time to go to sleep in a nice warm bed; both of them would sleep in Jack and Virginia's bedroom. Virginia suggested that Lillian get ready for bed first as she checked on the boys. Lillian quickly changed into her warm flannel nightgown. The ever-moderate Virginia took her nightclothes into the bathroom to change for bed.

When Virginia came into the bedroom, Lillian was shocked. She looked at Virginia in utter disbelief! With her eyes wide open and hardly able to speak, the dumbfounded

Lillian asked, "Where are you going!?"

Virginia, equally shocked by the question, responded with, "To bed, why!?"

Still stunned by Virginia's appearance Lillian replied, "With all those clothes on!?" Looking down at what she had on, Virginia suddenly realized what Lillian was referring to. Virginia not only had on her long pink floral flannel nightgown, she had a heavy grey wool sweater over the gown and, on top of that, she had Jack's heavy



Virginia's pal Lillian Ciccarelli

burgundy wool striped flannel robe sashed tightly around her waist. On her feet, she had two pair of Jack's wool hunting socks (which, of course, didn't match) to keep her feet warm. Additionally, she had a long red-plaid wool scarf wrapped around her neck a couple of times and knotted tightly in the front. To complete the stunning outfit, Virginia had tied a brightly-colored wool babushka over the tightly-knitted wool blue and green cap on her head, being sure to cover her ears!

Realizing that perhaps, just maybe, Lillian needed an explanation for her get-up, Virginia told her, "I have this on to stay warm....I just don't like to be cold!"

Lillian then retorted with, "Well, you have on enough clothes to be warm at the North Pole!"

At that point both of the women broke into loud uproarious laughter that continued for a long time. Every time Lillian would look at Virginia, she'd start to laugh all over again. This, of course, would set off Virginia into another laughing spell. It took quite some time for the ladies to settle down; Lillian just couldn't get over the sight of Virginia in her stylish sleeping attire and giggled for quite some time. When Virginia finally got into bed, Lillian asked her if she needed any covers or did she have on enough clothing to keep her warm through the rest of winter. Virginia quickly answered with, "Yes, I need the blanket because I don't want to get cold!!" Of course, this started the laughter all over again.

Through the many years that followed this event, Lillian and Virginia would always reminisce about that night. Of course, they'd again laugh and laugh when retelling the story. Often times, both of them laughed so hard that that they'd soon bring themselves to tears. Then of course that's what good friends like Virginia and Lillian do when they get together.



A New Land, New Opportunities

It was the spring of 1955; Tommaso had just turned eighteen and recently completed his studies at the technical high school in Arpino, Italy. He and his mother, Ersilia Rea, decided it was now the right time to leave Arpino to begin their new life in America. Ersilia and her son would board the magnificent Andrea Doria in Naples for their long voyage to New York. Before long, they'd be reunited with Luigi Rea, Ersilia's husband and Tommaso's father. Luigi had left his family in 1948 to join his brother Jack in Michigan. For the last seven years, Luigi had been living with Jack and his wife Virginia in Dearborn.



Being a typical teenager, it was going to be difficult for Tommaso to leave Arpino. As a newlywed, his only sister Bruna wouldn't be going with them. She and her husband Gino would be staying in Italy. Also, his beloved Nona would remain behind. During Tommaso's entire life, his family had lived with his elderly grandmother whom he loved dearly, but his Nona was too frail to make the trip. To make matters even worse, he had many good friends and several cousins that he'd known his entire life, and leaving them wouldn't be easy. Furthermore, there was a certain charming, beautiful, dark-haired young woman named Valentina who had won his heart. The very thought of leaving her behind was almost more than he could bear. Tommaso didn't even want to imagine what it would be like without seeing his beloved Valentina every day. However, it didn't matter that he didn't want to leave the wonderful life he

knew and loved in Arpino. Tommaso understood that he must accompany his mother to join his father in America.



Once he settled into his new life in Dearborn, Tommaso began to realize how difficult it was to learn the ways of this new Land of Opportunity. At school in Italy, he'd studied English so he had a good foundation of the language. However, now that he was in America, he realized that having a good command of the language was much more difficult than he'd thought it was going to be. It was going to take a great deal more effort to understand and speak this new language with ease.

Since Tommaso didn't want to sound like a "foreigner," he quickly recognized the need for him to improve. With the help of his Zia Virginia, he enrolled as a full-time student at Fordson High School. There he would practice the correct pronunciation and usage of the English language in each of his classes. To further help him hone his English skills, he encouraged his uncle, aunt, and cousins to speak to him in English rather than Italian. Additionally, he'd listen very closely as his Zia Virginia told him many interesting and entertaining stories. Further, he'd watch television with a very serious intent; he listened to all the words spoken, the inflections in voices, and the mannerisms of the actors. With all his hard work, Tommaso slowly but surely became very fluent in English. After all, he wanted to be a true American!

In order to help his son get a little spending money, Luigi got him a job as a janitor at the Italian-American Club in Dearborn. Tommaso reported to work at the scheduled time, and did a great job cleaning the Club. However, he was very unhappy about the work he had to do. Sweeping, cleaning, and scrubbing weren't things that Tommaso wanted to do. After all, he had been educated in Italy and felt that he should be able to get a job where he would be able to use his head more than his back.

Tommaso was determined to find a job in an area that better suited his qualifications, interests, and goals in life.

Each day, he'd scour the help want ads in the Detroit Free Press for a job that was more suitable for his skills and talents. Finally, one Sunday in mid-November, he found a small ad for

Marcus Engineering
Services that stated

Detroit Free Press

"Needed: Young man, mechanically inclined." Tommaso was positive he was exactly the young man they were looking for! He quickly showed the ad to his Zia Virginia and asked her to call the company for him. Early the next morning, Virginia phoned the number listed in the ad. She told Mr. A.F. Marcus, the owner of the small company, that her nephew was a wonderful candidate for the position but that he did not speak English. The man asked, "What language does he speak?" Virginia answered, "Italian." The man replied, "That's okay." He then went on to explain that many years earlier when he immigrated to the United States from Germany, he couldn't speak English either. However, at that time, someone gave him a chance and hired him. Now this was his opportunity to return the favor to someone else. Mr. Marcus set up an interview in his office for Tommaso for first thing the next morning.

When Zia Virginia told Tommaso the good news, he was elated. His ever-protective aunt said that she would go with him on the bus the next morning to the interview.

Grateful as he was, Tommaso declined her offer. He wanted to move forward on his pursuit of this job opportunity on his own. The business was located in Detroit on Woodward Avenue near Forest Street, which was a long distance from where he was



living in Dearborn. The bus trip would involve Tommaso changing busses and getting transfers. Tommaso indicated that he just wanted Zia Virginia to tell him exactly what busses and transfers he'd need to take to get to the interview. With some hesitancy, but with confidence in Tommaso's abilities, his aunt

agreed. The only thing she asked was that he call her when he got in the area of the

business where the interview would be held. The next morning, the self-assured Tommaso began his journey to his all-important first interview. Before Zia Virginia knew it, Tommaso triumphantly called to tell her that he'd arrived.

Mr. A. F. Marcus, the owner of the business, was a very kind and insightful man. When he interviewed Tommaso he saw someone with great potential. Mr. Marcus could see that the young man would be an honest, hard-working, intelligent employee who would be a great asset for his growing company. The owner was so impressed with Tommaso that he hired him on the spot. Through the years, Mr. Marcus took great care to mentor Tommaso in his route to become an outstanding mechanical engineer. Because Mr. Marcus saw so much of himself in the young man, he gave Tommaso a great deal of guidance and attention. Every day, he would stop by Tommaso's desk to see how he was coming along. Each time he did, he was very pleased with the speed at which Tommaso was learning the trade. Mr. Marcus was also impressed with the caliber of the work Tommaso produced; it was always meticulously done and of superior quality.

Soon, Tommaso and Mr. Marcus developed a very close relationship. A special bond developed between the two. When it was almost time for the company Christmas party, Mr. Marcus called Tommaso into his office. There were gifts spread all over the owner's desk. Mr. Marcus wanted Tommaso to help him organize the Christmas gifts he'd purchased for his employees. The owner would hand Tommaso one gift at a time as he checked the name off the employee list. Tommaso would then write the name for whom the gift was intended on a tag that he'd attach to the gift. As they were working their way down the list, Mr. Marcus picked up one of the gifts and read the next name out very loud. "Tommaso Rea, who in the hell is this guy?!" For a second, Tommaso looked at him very puzzled and quite confused. Then he saw the twinkle in Mr. Marcus' eyes and the smile on his face. Before he knew it, the two of them burst into loud uproarious laughter.

For almost three years Tommaso continued to work at Marcus Engineering Services. During that period, Mr. Marcus was very generous in sharing his time and expertise with his young, eager employee. Because of his interest in the future of the young immigrant, Tommaso learned a great deal while working at the small company.

The knowledge and skills he acquired laid a solid foundation for Tommaso's future career in mechanical engineering. Throughout the time he worked at Markus, he thought of how very fortunate he was that Mr. Marcus came into his life. The wonderful opportunity Mr. Marcus gave him, as well as the outstanding role model that he was, helped to shape the very positive and productive direction Tommaso's career took.

After leaving Marcus Engineering, Tommaso spent the remainder of his career

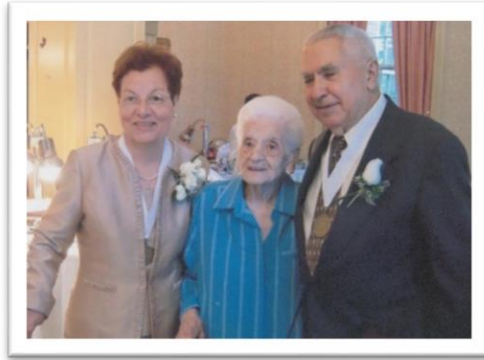


Valentina, Tommaso's mother Ersilia, and Virginia

designing machines that were used in a variety of manufacturing firms. During the forty-six years that his career spanned, he advanced from a being a

draftsman, to a designer, to the project manager, and finally the senior project manager. After Marcus Engineering Services, his next job was with the Survey Engineering Corporation. During the three years he worked there, he continued to design machines. Then, he went to the Buhr Machine and Tool Company. While working there, he began not only to design the machines but also had the opportunity to actually see the piece being made and then work. It was very gratifying for Tommaso to see a project go from a design on paper all the way to a working piece of machinery. For the last ten years of his career, Tommaso worked at the Ekman Machine Tool Company. Throughout his career, Tommaso always enjoyed his work a great deal. The satisfaction he gained from the design, building, and creation of a working machine made him a proud, very fulfilled man.

Tommaso never forgot the good fortune that came his way when he answered that small ad in the newspaper in 1955. Mr. A. F. Marcus gave him the start he needed to begin his career in mechanical engineering. He hired



Valentina, Virginia and Tommaso

Tommaso when he was just an inexperienced young man who had only a limited command of the English language. It was because Mr. Marcus realized the potential that Tommaso had, and took the time to nurture his untapped capabilities, that such a solid foundation for his career was laid. The knowledge and experience he gained from Mr. Marcus was the underpinning of his long and highly successful career. Tommaso always felt that he was, indeed a very fortunate to have a mentor like Mr. Marcus to guide his career. Although he worked long and hard for all that he achieved in his life, Tommaso always felt that he was indeed a lucky, lucky man.

The relationship between Mr. Marcus and Tommaso is just one more example of how immigrants to America show their gratitude for the opportunities offered by their new country by reaching back and helping someone else. It is through the help and support of earlier immigrants that many new arrivals to this country were able to find success.

By the way, just in case you were wondering about the lovely young lady that Tommaso left back in Arpino, there is great news to share!! Not only was Tommaso successful in his career, he was also very successful in love. He returned to Italy and married the beautiful Valentina in 1959. They raised two fine sons who bring them much joy and happiness. With the love and support of his beloved Valentina, Tommaso has indeed achieved the American Dream!

Cleopatra Reigns At Winkelman's

In 1950, Jack and Virginia Rea were able to purchase their second home. They had outgrown their original home and needed more space for their family which had grown to include four children; Tommy was ten, Jackie was seven, Annie was four, and Mary was three. Their new home was located on Calhoun Street in Dearborn. The Rea family enjoyed living in the neighborhood that was within walking distance of schools,

church, doctors, and stores. Jack and Virginia also appreciated that the neighborhood was quiet and the neighbors were friendly. The Nicols family were Greek immigrants who lived two houses from the Rea's new home.



In 1954 George, their oldest son, decided to go back to Greece in the hope of finding himself a bride. After weeks and weeks of traveling around Greece in search of the perfect woman, George had yet to meet

anyone that he was interested in. He was ready to give up and return home without a wife, but as destiny would have it, one sunny afternoon he met the beautiful Cleopatra. The young eighteen-year-old was a real beauty queen. However, George knew that beauty could only go so far; he had to be sure that she was as well-mannered, intelligent, and gracious as she was lovely. After spending the afternoon with Cleo and her family, George was positive that he'd found the woman of his dreams. As a proper young Greek man must do, George asked Cleo's parents for her hand in marriage. Within a few weeks of meeting, George and Cleopatra were married.

A few months after their marriage, the happy couple left Greece for the United States to start their new life together in Michigan. The young couple moved into the Nicols home with the rest of George's family. Soon after moving in, Cleo and George were thrilled to find out that they were going to become parents. Early the next summer, they were delighted to welcome a daughter, Mary, into their family. Mary was not only their first child, she was also the first grandchild in the Nicols family. The entire family, including her grandparents and uncles, dearly loved the beautiful little girl. Everyone doted on the little dark-haired doll with curly hair, sparkling eyes, and radiant smile.



As Mary began to grow up, Cleo would take her for a walk around the neighborhood every day. Mary was a very delightful child who had a charming personality. As she and her mother walked down the street, little Mary would always smile and talk to everyone. One of the neighbors that Mary was particularly attached to was the youngest Rea daughter, also named Mary. Cleo would allow her daughter to go over to the Rea's, and the two Marys would play together in the backyard. When it was time for Mary Nicols to come home, Cleo would call to her from their backyard. Mary was having so much fun that she would just ignore her mother. Cleo would call, "Mary, louw!" ('Now' in Greek) Finally, Cleo would have to walk over to the Rea's and get her daughter. In the winter, the two Mary's would play inside the Rea house. One day, Cleo noticed Virginia's sewing machine when she came to pick up her daughter. Because she was so kind, Cleo asked Virginia if she could do some sewing for her. It didn't take long before Cleo was doing a great deal of sewing for Virginia.

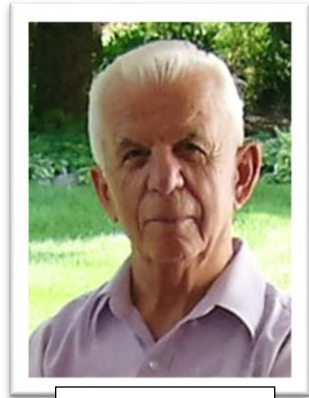
While living with George's family, Cleo helped her mother-in-law with the household chores of cleaning, washing, and cooking. In her spare time, Cleo enjoyed sewing, which was her favorite pastime. She had a real talent for both sewing and fashion. In no time at all, Cleo could put together a stunning outfit that was modern and stylish. When she wore the beautiful clothes she'd made, everyone quickly noticed her talent. They appreciated her fine workmanship as well as her eye for design and fabric selection.

Soon, he was sewing not only for her family but also for many of her friends and neighbors.

One of Cleo's Greek friends suggested she should apply for a job as a seamstress. The friend thought that Cleo should go the women's clothing store Winkelman's in their neighborhood to see if the store needed

anyone to do alterations. Cleo was unsure of the idea so she discussed it with Virginia one afternoon while she was at her house. Virginia

told Cleo that, with her outstanding sewing skills, she could certainly get a job at Winkelman's without any problem. However, since Winkelman's was a women's clothing store that had several locations throughout the metropolitan Detroit area, she thought Cleo would have a better chance of getting a job if she went to the corporate offices in downtown Detroit to apply for the job rather than just going to the local store. Cleo agreed but she had a favor to ask of Virginia. Since Cleo was not confident of her English skills, she wanted Virginia to go with her when she went to the corporate offices. Virginia readily agreed.



George Nicols

Within the week, Cleo and Virginia were on a bus headed for downtown Detroit to apply for a job at Winkelman's. Once they got to the corporate offices, Virginia helped Cleo complete the necessary paper work.

Soon, it was Cleo's turn to be interviewed and Virginia accompanied her. She told the interviewer that Cleo did not speak English very well; she was there to assist her through the process. Virginia told the lady that Cleo was an excellent seamstress who did a great deal of sewing for family and friends. She went on to point out that Cleo had sewn the very dress she was wearing that day. When the interviewer looked at

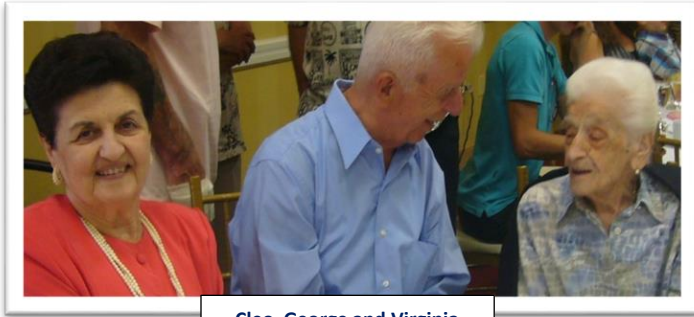


Three generations of the Nicols Family plus Virginia (in hat & gloves) and daughter Ann on right

Cleo's dress, she could immediately see that Cleo was an expert seamstress. Once it was apparent to Virginia that the woman was impressed with Cleo's sewing ability, she told the lady, "Although Cleo does not speak English very

well, her sewing skills are outstanding. If someone would just take a little time to show her what alterations they want done, and how they want the work completed, Cleo would be able to do the job. Not only would she be able to do the alterations, she would do them very well."

The interviewer thought for a minute. Then she offered a suggestion to Cleo. The woman would hire Cleo to work for Winkelman's but with certain restrictions. She explained, "We will hire Cleo for one day. If the head seamstress at the Winkelman's store does not like Cleo's work, at the end of the day she would receive pay for that day and then her employment with Winkelman's would be terminated. However, if the head seamstress was pleased with the caliber of Cleo's work, she would continue to work for Winkelman's."



Cleo, George and Virginia

Virginia smiled at the interviewer because she was pleased with what she had heard. Knowing that Cleo would exhibit only the finest of workmanship, Virginia told the interviewer that Cleo would accept the employment opportunity only if one request could be honored. The interviewer said she had to hear what it was first. Virginia went on to explain, “Cleo does not know how to drive. It will be necessary for her to only work at the store that is close to her home so that she can walk to work. If she cannot work at that store, she will have to look elsewhere for a job.”

Because the interviewer was so impressed with Cleo, she quickly answered, “Yes” without any hesitation. The interviewer could readily see that Cleo was going to be an asset for the alteration department at Winkelman’s. It was agreed that Cleo would only work at the store that was close to her home. Before leaving the corporate offices, Cleo and Virginia were then told the day and time that Cleo was to start her “trial” day of employment. Virginia knew that Cleo would have a very successful first day working for the store. On the appointed day, Virginia walked with Cleo to the store. She introduced her to the store manager and head seamstress. Once Virginia saw that Cleo was comfortable in the alteration room of the store, she told her that she was leaving but would be back at quitting time to walk back home with her. Virginia was very confident that Cleo did not need her any longer. Cleo was also very confident in her ability to do anything that would be asked of her that day. Both of the ladies knew that Cleo would do an excellent job of completing the alterations for the store.

When Virginia returned at the end of Cleo's shift, she asked the store manager and the head seamstress how things went. They both sang words of high praise for Cleo's work. Not only was the quality of her work superior but she was very fast and efficient. The two of them were very impressed with Cleo's sewing skills and her



ability to learn new techniques very quickly. Without any doubt, they wanted Cleo to work for them full-time. In fact, they wanted her to start immediately.

Virginia informed the ladies that she knew they would be more than pleased with the caliber of Cleo's work. She also informed them that Cleo would

be an ideal employee; she would be honest, reliable, and hard-working. Winkelman's would be both very fortunate and very proud to have Cleo as a seamstress.

When Virginia told Cleo what the store manager and head seamstress had said about her, she was very proud. She now had a new confidence in herself and her talents. What she didn't know was that she would have several happy years working for Winkelman's. Cleo went on to other seamstress positions in various establishments including bridal shops and a very renowned, privately owned alteration store in a prestigious part of town. Her creative sewing skills opened many doors that gave her the opportunity to meet numerous interesting people.

All of this because two little girls named Mary loved to play together. Now who would have thought that could have happened!

A Drawer, A Spool & A Little Prince

After three years of wedded bliss, Jack and Virginia Rea's dream of becoming parents was finally coming true. It was very early on the snowy, Saturday morning of November 16, 1940 that Virginia realized that her first child was soon going to be born. When Virginia woke up her husband Jack to tell him of the impending birth, he



immediately jumped out of bed and sprang into action. As quickly as he could, Jack helped Virginia to the car and sped off to Women's Hospital in Detroit. In a few hours, Dr. James B. Seeley delivered their son Thomas. The first Rea Prince was lovingly welcomed into the world. Jack and Virginia were totally and completely awed by their beautiful baby boy. Little Tommy filled their lives with much joy and happiness. Jack and Virginia were very proud of their little prince and were very eager to "show him off" to family and friends.

When the Rea family visited Washington, Pennsylvania, little Tommy always got unending attention from both his grandmother and Aunt Annie. The two ladies spent the days playing with Tommy and entertaining him with singing, dancing, and laughing. Smiles never left the faces of Giovanna and Anna when Tommy was with them. The little prince from Michigan had been able to bring much laughter and happiness into their lives.

Because Tommy had delighted his grandmother and aunt so much, when it was time for the Reas to return to Michigan, both of the ladies became very sad. The thought

of being alone again in the house was almost too much for them to bear. In an attempt to keep some joy in their lives, Giovanna asked Virginia if Tommy could stay with them for a little while after they returned to Michigan. Giovanna assured Jack and Virginia that it would be only a short visit; just until his parents were able to come back and pick him up again. Tommy would stay for just a few weeks...or so. To make Giovanna happy, Jack and Virginia reluctantly agreed to the short-term arrangement.

The entire time that Tommy spent with his grandmother and his aunt was wonderful for all three of them. Tommy spent his days alone with his grandmother



while his aunt was working at the Hazel-Atlas Glass Company. Giovanna would spend a great deal of time preparing all the foods that the notoriously picky eater Tommy enjoyed. Then, she would take great delight watching him eat the food. She was even known to feed Tommy far beyond the point at which he was capable of feeding himself. Giovanna also taught Tommy many lively Italian songs. She would clap her hands as they both sang the songs while they danced around the kitchen.

During the day, Giovanna also had responsibilities that she had to attend to. One of these tasks was sewing and mending clothing for the family. Giovanna had an old, treadle Singer sewing machine that she'd proudly used for many, many years. Her beloved Rocco had purchased the machine for her. He'd made certain that Giovanna had a deluxe model complete with a cabinet that had several drawers to hold her thread, pins, needles, scissors and other sewing supplies. Through the many years of use, the knob on one of drawers had broken off. Since the knob was missing, it was very difficult for Giovanna to open the drawer. She could only do so by carefully

rocking the drawer while applying pressure and putting her gnarled fingers under the drawer to slowly pull it forward...not an easy feat. She'd asked both of her sons, Albert and Arthur, to fix the drawer by replacing the knob. Both had the best of intentions to replace the knob for their mother, but somehow more important things always seemed to take precedence.

One day as Giovanna was struggling to open the drawer on her machine, Tommy was nearby his grandmother playing on the floor with one of his trucks. As he was driving his truck around the sewing machine, he looked up and watched his dear grandmother struggling to open the drawer. As he watched, he noticed that the drawer was missing its knob; if it only had a knob the drawer would be easy for his dear grandmother to open. Tommy continued to watch her grappling to open the drawer. As he watched Giovanna work and work at what should be an easy task, he noticed a nearby empty wooden spool of thread. As he continued to analyze the situation, Tommy slowly walked over to his grandmother's side. He gently took her hand and said, "Nonnie, I'm going to fix this drawer for you."

Then, to Giovanna utter amazement, her precious little grandson picked up the empty spool of thread. Tommy meticulously examined the hole that ran through it from end



to end. He then carefully looked at the hole that was in the drawer. Before Giovanna knew it, he quickly ran out to the garage to get just the right sized screw, bolt, washer, and a screwdriver. When he got back to his grandmother's side at the sewing machine, he once again examined the holes in the drawer and the empty spool of

thread to be sure that the screw he'd selected would fit through the holes in both of them. Tommy then took the screw and ran it through the hole that went through the wooden spool. With the utmost care as not to damage his grandmother's precious

sewing machine, Tommy then put the spool with the screw in it up to the drawer and tightened the screw to the washer and bolt with the screwdriver to keep them tightly in place. He then turned to his grandmother and lovingly said, "There Nonnie, now it will be easy for you to open the drawer."

Giovanna could not believe her eyes! Had her darling little grandson really been able to replace the missing knob on her sewing machine drawer with just an empty wooden spool? Of course, only an absolute genius would be able to figure out how to do that!! For years she had struggled opening that drawer with the missing knob, and her brilliant grandson had figured out how to fix it. She hadn't even asked him; the very clever and thoughtful child had figured it out all by himself. Giovanna immediately wrapped her arms around her precious little grandson, held him close to her heart as she hugged him, and kissed him again and again. What a wonderful gift this dear little boy was!!

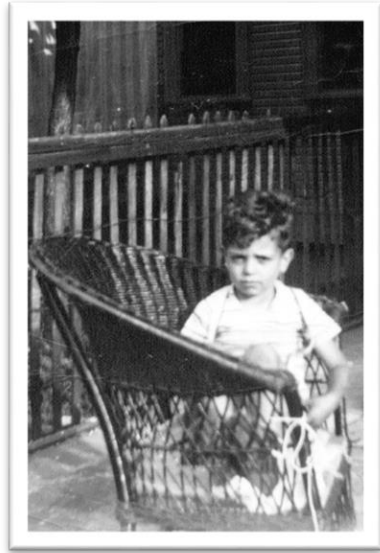
For many years the wooden-spool knob that Tommy had put on Giovanna's sewing machine remained in place. Giovanna never allowed anyone to replace it with a knob that would have been much more appropriate. Oh no, Giovanna would never allow that to happen! She was so very thrilled that her prized grandson had been thoughtful and clever enough to replace the knob in such a marvelous way. Giovanna proudly told everyone and anyone who entered her home what her little prince had done for her. It was a tender, loving gesture that



Tommy had done for his beloved grandmother. Giovanna treasured her grandson and the very special drawer knob for the rest of her life.

Out Of The Mouths Of Babes Comes Joy

Young children learning the English language are often unable to understand its very complicated structure. They are confused by words that sound the same but have more than one meaning, which often leads them to apply the wrong meaning to the words that are said. Frequently they totally misunderstand the intended meaning of a word or term. At times a small child will inappropriately interpret what a word means and create their own interesting use of the word. Sometimes the misunderstandings are very humorous.



Misunderstanding One: Going To A Shower

It was a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1947. Virginia had been invited to a bridal shower for the daughter of a dear friend. She had donned a lovely floral dress, her best dress shoes with a coordinating pocketbook, a stylish hat and of course the necessary fashion accessory of pristine white gloves for the event. She was a real 1940's fashion plate as she prepared to leave for the shower.

The children were left in the very capable and loving hands of her husband Jack. He was a doting father who was totally devoted to his children. Jack was looking forward to spending the afternoon with the children as Virginia went off to have some fun with her lady friends. He was sure to entertain the children with his antics while playing games with them.

Before leaving, Virginia checked on each of the children. On the floor of the living room, Tommy and Jackie were playing together with their many toy cars and trucks. Baby Annie was doing what she did best; she was sleeping away in her crib. As she



prepared to leave the house, Virginia gave each child a big hug and a kiss.

Just as Virginia was about to walk out of the door, three and half year old Jackie suddenly came running towards her. He was shouting, "Mommy, Mommy! Wait you forgot something!"

Virginia was surprised with the unexpected outburst of her young son. Thinking that perhaps she had forgotten the gift, she quickly checked but she had that. What could Jackie be talking about? She turned to her young son and said, "I think that I have everything that I need. What do you think I've forgotten?"

At this point Jackie was out of breath from running to get to his mother before she left the house. When he finally reached her, Jackie was waving an umbrella. She was very puzzled and couldn't understand what was going on. Virginia looked at Jackie for a further explanation of what he meant. Jackie handed an umbrella to his mother and said, "Mommy, you said that you were going to a shower. You will need to take your umbrella so that you don't get wet!"

Trying not to laugh at her young son's misunderstanding of the term shower, Virginia gently tried to explain the difference between wedding shower and a rain shower. The



explanation was totally beyond Jackie's grasp at his tender young age. Not wanting to hurt her young son's feelings, Virginia graciously took the umbrella in her hand. She then gave her son another big hug and kiss before walking out the door proudly carrying the umbrella in her hand. Virginia had a big smile on her face and lots of love filling her heart.

Misunderstanding Two: The Personal Beer Garden

Though out the years at their various homes, Jack and Virginia always had a small vegetable garden in their backyard. Jack would till the little garden plot and plant the seeds while Virginia took care of the watering and weeding. During the summer, there would always be a few tomato, pepper, and cucumber plants along with a variety of lettuces growing in their garden. With the vegetables they grew, Virginia was able to prepare delicious salads for their family dinners.

Ever the hands-on teachers, Jack and Virginia encouraged their children to participate in the planning, planting, and care of their garden. Some years the children were able to talk their parents into planting their personal favorite's corn, green beans or pumpkins for carving on Halloween. Virginia had a watering can that each of the children took turns using to water the precious plants. The children took great delight and pride in watching the plants grow.

One day, Virginia found her six year old son Jackie digging at the edge of the sandbox in the backyard. In his hand he had a small hand trowel and was busy turning over the sand. Then he put down the trowel and picked up a large stick to make deep holes in the sand. Finally he took some caps from beer bottles that he had found in the alley and carefully dropped one in each of the holes he'd made. Very gently and with great precision, he covered each of the caps in the holes with more sand. Finally, he took the watering can and tenderly watered each of his new plantings. Jackie had followed all the steps and procedures used by his parents when they planted their vegetable gardens to a tee!

Even after watching Jackie for a few minutes, Virginia was thoroughly puzzled by his actions. She absolutely had no idea of why he was doing what he was doing. With

great interest, Virginia asked her young son, “Jackie, what are you doing in the



sandbox?”

“Oh, I’m planting a garden!” announced Jackie with great pride.

Still very baffled by his actions, Virginia went

on to say, “Garden? What kind of vegetables are you planting in your garden?”

With even more pride in his voice, Jackie announced, “Oh, I’m planting a beer garden! I planted the caps from beer bottles that I found in the alley and soon we will have our own beer garden growing in our backyard!”



As she stalled for time to think of how to explain what in fact a beer garden was, all Virginia could do was smile and give her son a big hug....she was just too proud of him to speak!

Just Cause You're Older, Doesn't Make You The Right One

Sunday, September 22, 1946 was an unusually beautiful day in Detroit, Michigan. Jack and Virginia Rea were already the proud parents of the two Rea Princes, Tommy and Jackie. However, they were eagerly awaiting the birth of their third child. Within forty-five minutes of arriving at the hospital that day, Virginia delivered a baby girl. Jack and Virginia named their first Rea Princess Ann. Their daughter was a beautiful child with dark curly hair, big brown eyes, and a winning smile. Little Annie was the perfect addition to their family.

Time passed very quickly for the Rea family; it had grown to include a second daughter, Mary, who was born in 1947. Soon it was 1950; Tommy was ten, Jackie was seven, Annie was four, and Mary was three. Because they were so young, the girls still spent their time playing together at home. However, the boys had begun to



venture into activities outside of their home. Tommy and Jackie were very active in the Cub Scouts. Both boys loved belonging to their troop, going to the weekly Cub Scout meetings, wearing their uniforms, and spending fun times with other boys their age. They also enjoyed learning basic scouting skills such as knotting techniques and basic first aid. Tommy and Jackie always had a great time when they participated with their troop in

outdoor activities, including camping, hiking and swimming. Both boys relished the time they spent together in Cub Scouts.

One of the activities the Cub Scouts sponsored was the “Little Miss Dearborn” contest. At one meeting, the troop leader told the Scouts about the contest and encouraged them to enter any younger sisters, cousins, or friends. Each scout was given an entry form with all the rules clearly listed. Tommy and Jackie ran home because they couldn’t wait to tell their mother about the contest. The two of them burst into the house, waving the entrance forms, and started giving their mother all the details. Both boys were excited because they wanted to enter their baby sister Mary into the contest.

Virginia was pleased her sons wanted to enter their baby sister. However, after reading the rules on the entry form, she explained Mary was too young to enter the contest. Tommy and Jackie were very disappointed Mary couldn’t be in the contest because they knew that she was so beautiful, she’d absolutely win the first prize in the contest. They tried over and over to convince their mother to enter Mary, but Virginia told them that based on the rules, Mary was too young. She then told the boys that since their sister Annie was a year older, they could enter her in the contest. Neither boy wanted any part of that. Mary was so much more beautiful and she was sure to win. They also knew that Annie certainly didn’t have a chance!

As much as the boys carried on, their mother did not give in to their pleas. Virginia finally told the boys that it was going to be Annie or it would be no one.

Disappointed, the boys finally reluctantly agreed to enter her. However, they had absolutely no confidence in her ability to win the title. They knew that Annie just wasn’t Little Miss Dearborn material!

When the evening of the contest arrived, Virginia put Annie’s prettiest little dress on her. Annie also wore her best pair of dress shoes along with a new pair of white anklets that even had a little lace trim. Virginia spent extra time combing Annie’s hair, making sure all her curls fell perfectly into place. Then she added a little bow to her hair for just the right finishing touch. As far as she was concerned, Annie looked absolutely perfect!

At the contest, all the parents were very proud of their precious daughters. Each of the little girls did a fine job of walking across the stage. When the girls reached the center of the stage, they were asked to turn around so that the judges could see them from every angle. All the girls looked wonderful when they twirled around before taking their place with the other contestants. Every parent knew that their daughter was going to be the winner!

When the final selections were made, Annie's name was called in the list of finalists. Virginia burst with pride when they called her daughter's name. After all the eliminations were made, Annie was one of the two finalists for the title. Now Virginia was holding her breath and crossing her fingers that her daughter would win. At



last the final announcement of the winner was made. Annie was named the first runner-up for the coveted title. She'd won second prize in the Little Miss Dearborn contest. Virginia was thrilled beyond belief that her daughter had done so well in the contest!

When Virginia and Annie returned home, Tommy and Jackie were waiting to hear how their sister had done in the contest. Virginia told her sons, "Both of you should be very proud of your little sister Annie because she was awarded the title of first runner-up. Annie won the second place prize in the Little Miss Dearborn Contest."

What? They were supposed to be proud of Annie because she had only won second place? The very disappointed boys just looked at their mother as they both emphatically said, "We told you Annie wouldn't win. If you'd let us enter Mary like we wanted to, she would have won first prize and been crowned Little Miss Dearborn!"

Tommy and Jackie knew their chance to brag to all their friends that their baby sister Mary was the new Little Miss Dearborn had been unfairly snatched away just because she was a few months too young. This was their first lesson in learning that sometimes life just doesn't always go the way you think it should.

A Precious Gift Wrapped In A Pink Blanket

It was early in the morning on Wednesday, December 31, 1947. After having three children already, Virginia knew that she was in the early stages of labor. However, she was also aware that it was almost a full month before her due date. Virginia decided to wait a little longer to see how things progressed before saying anything to her husband Jack. Before too long, she let Jack know that they'd need to go to the hospital soon because she was certain that their fourth child was going to be born that day. Virginia was absolutely correct; within thirty minutes of arriving at the Mt. Carmel Hospital in Detroit, their baby was born.



Similar to most births during 1947, the baby was delivered in what was called "Twilight Sleep." Virginia was given a combination of gases that included ether, which made her unconscious and unaware of the birth process. When she woke up hours after the baby was born, she had no memory of the labor or birth. Since Virginia had three other babies delivered through the same process, she

expected the nurses to bring in her new baby soon after she awoke that afternoon. However, several hours had passed since she'd recovered from the delivery and the baby still had not been brought to her. Virginia began to get concerned and asked the nurse why she had yet to see her baby.

Before long, Dr. James B. Seeley, her doctor, entered her hospital room. She knew that this was very unusual and was somewhat puzzled that he was there. The doctor had a very grave and solemn expression on his face; Virginia immediately sensed that he didn't have anything good to tell her. She quickly asked, "Where is my baby? Why hasn't the nurse brought my baby into me yet?"

When Dr. Seeley spoke, he chose his words very carefully. He said in a very somber voice, "Virginia, this morning you delivered a baby girl. However, I am very sorry to have to inform you that there are major problems with your baby. She was born with a serious birth disorder that is called Mongolism."

Virginia was totally confused and overwhelmed. She really couldn't comprehend what Dr. Seeley had just told her. In a shocked voice she asked, "What are you telling me about my baby? What is this disorder 'Mongolism' that you are talking about? I have never even heard of it!"



The doctor then went on to tell Virginia, "Mongolism is a severe birth disorder that will affect your daughter both physically and mentally. Physically your baby looks very different than your other children. She has an upward slant to her eyes, flattened facial features, a protruding tongue, broad short hands and feet, as well as poor muscle development. Because of all these physical defects, she will probably not live a very long life. Additionally, you need to know that her mental development will be minimal. She will never learn to talk or walk. The baby will probably not even be able to sit up by herself. Your daughter will never even be able to recognize you as her mother. To be brutally honest with you, the baby will never be anything more than a human vegetable."

Virginia's head was spinning. As tears were rolling down her cheeks from the horrible news she had just been told, she could barely form the words to ask, "Why? Why did this happen? What went wrong? How could this have happened? What had she done to deserve this awful thing to happen to her? Why was God punishing her?"

Trying to comfort Virginia, Dr. Seeley explained that the doctors didn't know why some children were born with Mongolism; they only knew that it happened. He also assured Virginia that the abnormality didn't happen because of anything that she had done. It was just a fluke of nature.



Everything that Dr. Seeley told Virginia totally overwhelmed her. She couldn't, or didn't want to, understand what the doctor had told her about her baby daughter's condition. When her head cleared a little, she asked the doctor, "Is there a specialist on this condition, Mongolism that you said my daughter has? I need to talk to someone who is an expert on her condition to better understand what it is."

Dr. Seeley told Virginia that there was a doctor that he knew who specialized in children with Mongolism. The doctor said that he would try to get the specialist in to talk to Virginia in the next few days. Dr. Seeley then went on to tell Virginia that it was best if she did not see her baby. He also advised her not to take the baby home. The baby's future was very bleak and she would require twenty-four hours a day care. Virginia would be wasting her time caring for a baby that had so many problems. Rather, it was best if she sent the baby to live in an institution where they would know how to best take care of a child with all her problems and limitations.

Virginia was absolutely stunned by what the doctor had just said to her. She had given birth to a child that had so little potential that he told her that it would be worthless to even try to do anything for her. How could this be happening? As she listened to him, it was all just too much for her to comprehend. However, she did know that she respected the knowledge and opinion of Dr. Seeley, her doctor of many

years. He was an expert in the area of babies and their development. If he told her that there was not any hope for the normal development of her new baby, then she should respect his advice. She knew absolutely nothing about Mongolism and he knew a great deal about it. If he told her there was not any hope for her child and that she needed to be institutionalized, she would follow his advice.

Soon after Dr. Seeley left her, a nurse came in the room. Since it was a Catholic hospital, all the nurses were nuns. The nurse said that she had seen Virginia's baby. She went on to say, "She is such a beautiful baby." What?!, thought Virginia! Dr. Seeley had described a baby that was so deformed that it looked like a monster! What was this nun talking about?

The nun went on to say, "God would send a baby like her only to special people. God must have thought that you are very special to send her to you." Again, Virginia couldn't believe what the nun was saying. Virginia thought that she was saying these things to her just to make her feel better. However, it sure wasn't working!

The nurse then left the room and came back with the baby who was tightly swaddled in blankets. The nun attempted to hand the baby to Virginia, who was crying. She was so distraught and upset that she refused to take the baby. She remembered everything that Dr. Seeley had told her about the baby's deformed appearance and she thought that the baby would frighten her. Additionally, Dr. Sealy had told her not to even see the baby. He suggested that she try to just forget she ever had the baby and to send it to an institution. His words had a very strong effect on her.

A little while after the nurse left the room with the baby, Jack came to see her. Virginia told her husband what Dr. Seeley had said about their baby. Jack said, "I went to see the baby before I came to see you. I didn't see anything wrong with the baby." After a few seconds, he said that he remembered that the baby's hands were tied. Jack became concerned with what the doctor said about their daughter as well as why her hands were tied, so he decided to go back to the nursery to check on her.

As soon as Jack got back to the nursery, he asked the nurse to let him see his daughter again. As the nurse was holding the baby, he examined his daughter very closely. As he carefully looked at the baby, he confirmed his original opinion that the

baby was perfectly beautiful. Once again, he saw that her hands were tied. Jack asked the nurse, "Why are my daughter's hands tied?" She answered, "The baby was born with long fingernails. She was scratching her face. We didn't want the baby to hurt herself so we tied her hands so that she couldn't scratch her face." That seemed like a reasonable thing to do; Jack was satisfied with her answer.

When Jack returned to Virginia's room, he told her what the nurse said about why the baby's hands were tied. He also told her that he looked at the baby very closely. Jack assured Virginia that the baby was absolutely gorgeous. He then went on to tell her, "She is beautiful! There is nothing wrong with the baby." Virginia then told him again what the doctor said. She also said that Dr. Seeley was going to bring a specialist to talk to her about the baby. Since he thought that Dr. Seeley was wrong about his newborn daughter, Jack agreed that it was a good idea to hear what another doctor had to say.



That night when Virginia tried to go to sleep, she kept on thinking about the horrible things Dr. Seeley had told her about her baby. Around and around the words kept spinning in her head. All night long she tossed and turned in bed, but sleep wouldn't come to her that night. Her mind just couldn't rest nor could she accept what she'd been told about her baby. Again and again, Virginia went over everything Dr. Seeley had told her about her newborn daughter. She just couldn't understand what had been told to her. It was just too difficult for her to absorb the magnitude of his words.

When morning finally came, Virginia was totally exhausted. The horrible things that Dr. Seeley told her about her baby daughter had completely crushed her. Also, she had been up all night repeatedly going over everything that they had told her. She still couldn't believe all that had happened. She wondered if it was just a nightmare and she'd wake up to realize it was only a bad dream. That's what she was hoping would happen; however, it did not happen that way. In the light of morning, Virginia was certain that everything that she'd been told about her baby was all too real.

By the time that the nurse came in the room to bring Virginia her breakfast, she'd made up her mind about certain things. First of all, she wanted to see her baby one time before she was sent to the institution. As awful as the baby looked, she was the baby's mother and she wanted to see her just one time. Virginia told the nurse that she wanted to see her baby as soon as possible. The nurse told her that she'd see what she could do. However, hours passed and the baby was never brought to her.

By mid-morning, Dr. Seeley came back into the room to see Virginia again. This time he brought the doctor who specialized in children with Mongolism with him. The specialist told Virginia about the baby's physical features and mental development. He told her basically the same things that Dr. Seeley had; the baby's future was very bleak. The specialist then went on to say that he had a friend who was a doctor with a child with Mongolism. Because that doctor knew the limitations of the child, he and his wife never took their baby home but rather sent it to an institution. He went on further to say, "Mrs. Rea that is what the doctor who was in the same situation as you did. He did what he thought was best for his child. I think that you should strongly consider doing the same with your daughter." Now Virginia knew for sure that her baby daughter would be faced with many major challenges in her life. Virginia thanked the specialist for the information and opinions he shared with her.



Virginia then told Dr. Seeley that she wanted to see her baby. The doctor reminded her of everything that he had told her the day before about her child. This time he

emphasized the baby's many limitations and the bleakness of her future. Dr. Seeley also repeated what the specialist had told her about the baby.

Virginia answered with, "Won't you please bring me my baby? I would like to see my daughter just once."

At just that moment, her husband Jack walked in the room. Dr. Seeley informed him of Virginia's request to see the baby and the uselessness of her request. To the doctor's dismay, Jack agreed with his wife. Virginia was the baby's mother and she should see the baby.

Against his better judgment, Dr. Seeley finally gave his consent for Virginia to see her daughter. He told the nurse to go to the nursery and bring Virginia's baby to her.

Virginia had prepared herself for the greatly deformed baby that Dr. Seeley and the specialist had described to her. She knew that the baby would have so many physical abnormalities that she would be very hard for even her mother to look at. When the doctor said that the baby would be very disfigured, Virginia was aware that she would probably look like a monster. However, it really didn't matter what she looked like, Virginia only knew that she was the baby's mother and she wanted to see her daughter.

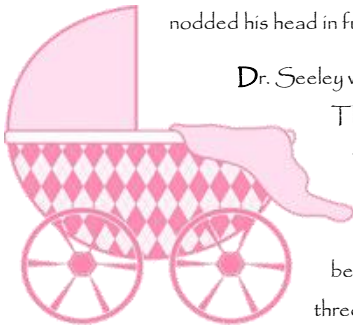
When the nurse brought the baby in Virginia's room, she was tightly bundled up in blankets. Her entire body was swaddled; even her face was loosely covered with a blanket. As they handed the baby to Virginia, she prepared herself for the terribly deformed child that she knew she was about to see. As she took the baby into her arms, she held her tightly close to her heart. When she slowly lifted the blanket covering the baby's face, she couldn't believe what she saw!

The baby was not a monster at all. In fact, she was exactly as Jack had said she was, absolutely beautiful. Virginia had given birth to three children prior to this baby and they were all gorgeous. However, this baby had them all beat! She was definitely the most magnificent baby she'd ever seen!! She was not the monster that Dr. Seeley had described at all; she was exactly the opposite! With tears in her eyes, she looked at Jack and said, "You were right, she is beautiful!"

As Virginia held the baby in her arms, she knew that she could never allow this precious little angel of hers to go to an institution. No, the baby would go home with her and Jack.

Virginia looked at the doctor and told him in a strong, determined voice, "Dr. Seeley, I have changed my mind. This child will not be sent to an institution. Jack and I are going to take the baby home with us. She is as much our child as our other three. We will raise this baby with our other children." She looked at Jack and he proudly

nodded his head in full agreement.



Dr. Seeley was outraged. He couldn't let this happen.

The doctor quickly told her, "Virginia, stop and think of what you are talking about doing. You are the mother of three other children. You are not thinking of them. All of your time will be spent taking care of this child and your other three will be neglected. You will waste all of your time with this child and your other children will suffer."

Virginia answered with what she knew in her heart was correct, "Oh no, Dr. Seeley! You have it all wrong. My other three children will not suffer or be neglected because of this child. Rather they will be better people because of this child!"

Virginia was absolutely correct in her response to Dr. Seeley about her youngest daughter's effect on the family. Every member of the family adored her and knew that she was their greatest blessing. Each of the baby's three siblings certainly became a better person because of her. They also all learned a great deal about the importance of patience, determination, and unconditional love from their sister. However, what Virginia did not realize was the profound impact her youngest child would have not only on her three other children but on all who knew and loved her daughter. Mary was a precious little baby girl who was a very special gift not only to the Rea family but also to the world!

The Tyke Takes Over The Town

When Tommy was four years old, he spent a few months living in Washington, Pennsylvania with his grandmother and Aunt Annie. This was the second time Tommy had spent an extended period of time away from his parents. It was the middle of 1945, and his Uncle George had lost his life in December of the previous year while fighting in the Philippines during World War II. Tommy's grandmother and aunt were so sad that they asked Tommy's parents if he could stay with them. Wanting to help her mother and sister through a difficult period, Virginia and Jack agreed that their young son could again stay in Washington for a short while.



As everyone expected, Tommy had a wonderful time while with his Nonnie and Aunt Annie. Both of the ladies thoroughly enjoyed the delightful little boy who, without even knowing what he was doing, lifted their spirits with his antics. Each morning, Tommy would greet his Nonnie and Aunt Annie with a big kiss and hug, along with never-ending words of love for both of them. He also entertained his grandmother and aunt when he sang all of the many nursery rhymes that he knew, complete with movements to act out the words during his performance. Additionally, he would make them laugh with his endless silly jokes and comic routines. Tommy was able to fill their days with the joy and happiness that they desperately needed to fill the void left by the loss of their beloved George.

Adventure One: A Rewarding Walk

One day, his Aunt Annie took Tommy on a walk to downtown Washington. They were going to go to Isaly's Ice Cream Shop for a treat of an ice cream cone. As they left the house on South Street, the happy Tommy skipped down the block as he told everyone he saw that his favorite aunt was going to take him to Isaly's for ice cream. Before they knew it, they'd turned on Main Street, which ran directly into downtown Washington. Tommy was aware that in five or six more blocks, they would reach the drugstore. His head was spinning with thoughts of what flavor ice cream he was going to get...maybe his favorite chocolate, or maybe strawberry, or maybe even just plain vanilla. He even had a plan to try to talk his aunt into getting him get a sundae with whipped cream and a cherry on top! He knew he'd be able to do it!! Even at only four, our Tommy was already a master of persuasion.

While Annie and Tommy were on Main Street, they needed to walk under a large viaduct that was built for trains to pass over the busy street. As they approached the overpass, Tommy and his aunt could see that there were a lot of men standing around and a big commotion was going on. As they got closer, they could hear a lot of yelling among several of the men. At first, Annie and Tommy couldn't figure out what they



were so upset about. The hollering was very loud and filled with many colorful words. From the tone of the words that were being exchanged, the men were obviously very angry and irritated with each other. Because of the potential seriousness of the situation, Annie tightly held on to Tommy's hand as they slowly continued to walk toward the viaduct.

Once they'd gotten closer, they saw what was causing all the commotion. A huge eighteen-wheeled semi was stuck. Although the tractor part of the semi had fit under the viaduct, the trailer portion was just a couple inches too high to clear. It appeared that the driver was probably traveling at a high rate of speed when he entered the area under the viaduct. Approximately six feet of the trailer was now stuck tighter than two

peas in a pod. The problem was exacerbated when the driver tried to backup to get out but only succeeded in wedging his truck even tighter under the viaduct.

Annie realized that what the men were arguing about was how they were going to be able to remove the semi without doing any further damage. If the men weren't careful, not only would the semi's trailer be totally ruined but also extensive damage would be done to the viaduct. The situation was rather dangerous, so Annie decided that she and her nephew shouldn't walk any closer toward the viaduct. Rather, she thought it better to stand back and watch how the problem was going to be resolved.

The yelling and arguing among the men continued. As it did, it seemed to get even louder and more intense. Tempers were flaring as the men shouted possible solutions to each other. The representative from the city's road commission wanted to cut off the top of the trailer, which would be the fastest way to get the road open and functioning again. However, because that would totally destroy the trailer, the owner



of the truck certainly didn't want that done. The trailer would be worthless to him if the top of it was cut off. The owner of the semi was yelling that in order to save the trailer, they should unload all the items on it; then the

trailer could be dismantled, piece-by-piece. In doing it that way, the trailer could be rebuilt and he wouldn't lose this valuable piece of his equipment. The problem was that it would be a slow, tedious process taking a great deal of time and would mean the road could be tied up for days. The road commissioner absolutely would not agree to that solution. A third man, who was a police officer, was shouting that there was a

major traffic jam that had to be cleared up. As far as the officer was concerned, a solution had to be agreed upon on as soon as possible. Traffic had to be able to move on the road.

As Tommy was listening to the men exchange their heated comments, he was very quiet because he was analyzing the situation. He talked his aunt into walking just a little closer to the viaduct so that he could get a better view of what was going on. After a few minutes, Tommy came up with a solution of his own. In his loudest voice, he shouted out, "Hey mister! Why don't you just take some of the air out of the tires?"

Suddenly, all three men stopped shouting. Because there was such pandemonium, none of them knew who had made the brilliant suggestion or even where it had come from. The city road commissioner turned toward the voice and shouted out, "Who said that?" Tommy answered with, "I did." The man could not believe that a small child could figure out such a logical solution when the three grown men could not. The commissioner then walked over to the semi's owner and asked him if taking the air out of the tires was a workable solution. The stunned owner responded with, "Of course it will!" Within minutes, they started to let enough air out of the tires so that the trailer would be lower and easily released from under the viaduct.

The semi's grateful owner then walked over to Annie and Tommy. He told Tommy, "You are a very smart little boy. Because of you, a big problem was fixed with very little trouble. You deserve a reward for that." He reached in his pocket and handed Tommy a brand new, shiny fifty-cent piece.



Tommy's eyes just about popped out of his head when he saw the large coin. He was too young to understand the value of money, but he sure knew that it was a big shiny coin! Looking up to his aunt for approval first, he took the coin in his hand as he said, "Thanks, mister. I'm just glad I could help!"

The man let out a hearty laugh as he responded with, "Help??? Kid, you saved the day!"



Virginia with unidentified child, Jackie and Tommy on sofa. Mary and Annie below

When they finally got to Isaly's, Annie was so proud of her nephew that she told him he could have anything he wanted on the menu. Tommy couldn't believe his ears. This was his

lucky day! He ordered a

yummy strawberry sundae with lots of whipped cream and a big red cherry on top!

When they finally got home, Tommy ran in the house and shouted to his grandmother, "Nonnie, Nonnie! Look what I got!" He proudly held out his hand with the shiny fifty-cent piece.

His grandmother was shocked to see the coin in her little grandson's hand. She asked him if he'd found it. He responded with, "Oh no, Nonnie. I got it as a reward! I saved the day for a trucker!" Tommy then went on to tell his grandmother the entire story. Giovanna was so impressed with what her grandson was telling her; however, she was not the least bit surprised that Tommy had been able to figure out how to solve the problem. She always knew that her little grandson Tommy was a very brilliant little boy. After all, he was part Proia!

Adventure Two: Christmas In July

One year Jack and Virginia and their family visited Virginia's mother and sister, Anna, in Washington for Christmas. Of course, the Proia's had a large, beautifully-decorated Christmas tree in their living room. Tommy was a little toddler who was absolutely enchanted with the tree. He and his grandmother spent a lot of time together admiring all the colorful ornaments on the tree. While sitting on his Nonnie's knee, she told him that the Christmas tree was just for him. It was "Tommy's Tree"

and it was there only for his delight. He was thrilled that both the world and the tree revolved around him.

Several months later in July, the Rea's returned to visit the Proias again. When Tommy ran into the house, he bolted into his grandmother's arms. The two of them dearly loved each other. They hugged and kissed for a long, long time. As far as the two of them were concerned, it had been much too long since they'd been together. Tommy spent the entire afternoon and evening sitting on his grandmother's lap. He was thrilled to be with her, and she was overjoyed to have her grandson with her once again.

When it was time to go upstairs to bed for the night, Tommy walked through the living room on the way to the bedroom. All of sudden, he started screaming and crying. Everyone ran into the room to see what catastrophe had happened. Through his sobs, Tommy explained that he was upset because his beloved Christmas tree was gone. His parents, grandmother, and aunt all tried to explain to him that since it was July, they no longer had a Christmas tree. Again and again, they tried to make it clear to him that a Christmas tree was only put up at Christmas time. The young child just couldn't accept that the Christmas tree, HIS Christmas tree, was gone. That night, Tommy had a hard time falling asleep; he woke up several times crying about the tree.



Foolishly, everyone thought that by morning Tommy would forget about the missing Christmas tree. They couldn't have been more wrong. As soon as he awoke, Tommy continued to cry about missing his beloved Christmas tree. He carried on so much that his Nonnie and Aunt Annie finally knew they had to get another evergreen tree. They put the tree in the living room and carried all the decorations up from the basement. It was only when the tree was totally decorated that little Tommy stopped crying. Much to Tommy's delight, the family celebrated Christmas in July that year!

A Budding New Landscaper

On Sunday, September 26, 1943, a second son, whom they named Jack, was born



to Virginia and Jack Rea. It was a sunny afternoon; a perfect day to welcome the newest Rea Prince to their loving family. Virginia and Jack were thrilled that now they had two wonderful sons.

From the day he was

born, little Jackie was completely adored by his parents. With great joy and happiness, they welcomed the beautiful, brown-eyed, curly-haired little boy. Jackie was perfect in every way. He was a terrific eater who always eagerly finished his bottles. Once he started eating food, his mouth was open before his parents even had the food there. Jackie was a marvelous sleeper from the day he came home from the hospital. Before his parents knew it, he was sleeping through the night. However, it was his delightful personality that charmed everyone who knew him. At a very young age, he knew the power of a smile and rarely was without one on his adorable little face.

As a small child, Jackie truly enjoyed playing outside. The Rea's had a large sandbox in their backyard in which Jackie spent a great deal of time playing. He'd take his toy trucks and drive them all around the sandbox. Young Jackie would create roads and hills for his trucks to drive on as they traveled around the sandbox. Jackie would also use his little shovel and pail to create magical sandcastles. Sometimes the sandcastle would get to be very large and elaborate, complete with a moat around it to protect King Jackie from any intruders. Jackie loved playing in the sandbox so much

that Virginia sometimes had a difficult time getting him to come inside the house for lunch or to take his nap.

Little Jackie also enjoyed the many different kinds of flowers that his mother always planted in the front and back yards of their home. Sometimes, Jackie would pick some flowers to “plant” in his sandbox. He wanted his sandbox to look as great as their house did. Virginia had an abundance of flowers, so she didn't mind that her son picked some of the flowers to beautify his sandbox. Naturally, after a few days of being in the sandbox without any water, the flowers would wilt and die. Wanting his garden to continue to look nice, he'd just pick more from his yard. All summer long, Jackie made certain that his sandbox was adorned with beautiful flowers.

One lovely summer day, Jackie was in the front yard and noticed their neighbors, the Scappaticcis, also had beautiful flowers in their backyard. As he walked closer, he realized that the pretty flowers were different than any his mother had planted. Very innocently and without any hesitation, Jackie walked into the neighbor's backyard and picked a handful of their most beautiful flowers. With a smile on his face, he clutched the flowers in his hands as he skipped back to his own backyard. Slowly and very carefully he placed the flowers all over his sandbox. When he was done, he was pleased with how great his newly-decorated sandbox looked. Of course, in just a few days, those flowers wilted and died. Because he liked the neighbor's colorful flowers so much more than his mother's, Jackie walked over into their yard again and picked another generous handful of flowers. This time, he was more selective as he took only the largest and most vibrant flowers. After all, if he was going to plant flowers in his sandbox, why shouldn't he have the best flowers available!?! Again he returned to his own yard to beautify his sandbox. As before, after a few days, the flowers wilted and died; so it was back to his neighbor's yard Jackie went. Again and again for several weeks this pattern was repeated. Our budding decorator spent a lot of time to make sure that his sandbox always looked its best.

One day toward the end of summer while Virginia was working in the yard, Giuseppe Scappaticci, their neighbor, approached. Virginia could tell that he had something serious to discuss as he didn't have the huge, wide grin on his face he usually had. His eyes were dark and serious; missing was the usual twinkle in his eye. Additionally, his

voice was too formal and stern for Virginia's comfort. Immediately, Giuseppe told her that they had something important to talk about. Virginia had always gone to great lengths to get along with all of her neighbors, so she couldn't imagine what they needed to discuss but she knew it wasn't anything good.

Virginia was surprised and embarrassed to find out that her young son had repeatedly gone into the Scappaticci's yard and picked many of their most-prized flowers. Giuseppe indicated that Jackie had not done it once or twice but had been doing it every few days for weeks. Unaware of the problem, Virginia told her neighbor that she would immediately speak to her son. She went on to explain that Jackie was a small child and obviously did not understand that he could not take the flowers from their yard. She went on to say to Giuseppe, "I know that you have a gate that stops people from going into your backyard. Have you been sure to keep the gate latched? Jackie is too small to reach the latch, and I don't think he could have entered your yard if the gate had been properly closed."



Now it was Giuseppe's turn to be embarrassed as he realized Virginia was correct. Jackie couldn't have entered the yard to get the flowers if the gate had been properly latched. He nodded his head as he responded with, "You're right. He couldn't have gotten into the yard if we had been more careful about keeping the gate door properly closed and latched."

As they continued to discuss the situation, Virginia agreed with Giuseppe that her son should not have taken the beautiful flowers from their yard. She also assured him that she would talk to Jackie so that he understood that he shouldn't continue to take any more flowers from the Scappaticci's yard. Then she added, "Jackie is just a little boy who was understandably attracted to your beautiful flowers. Although I will talk to him about the matter, he is only a young child and may try to skip into your backyard again to get more flowers. However, if you keep your gate properly latched, he won't be able to enter your yard." With a smile on her face and in her sweetest

voice she added, "Don't you agree that it will take both of us working together to correct this situation?!?"

Of course, all that Giuseppe could do was smile back as he agreed with Virginia. The two neighbors were able to come to a mutually agreeable solution to the problem. Before leaving, Virginia took Giuseppe over to Jackie's sandbox. When he saw how Jackie had decorated the sandbox with the flowers from his backyard, he started to laugh. Giuseppe and Virginia both agreed that although they weren't happy with how and where Jackie had gotten the flowers, the flowers certainly did make the sandbox look great!

Virginia was never positive that Jackie didn't go back in the Scappaticci's yard again to get more flowers. If Jackie did, they never said a thing. It seems that they, too had gained a new appreciation of little Jackie's decorating skills!!

Roadblocks To A Road Trip

Jack and Virginia's third child was a daughter that they named Ann. While still in the Delivery Room, Virginia decided her daughter's future and told her husband what it would be. Both Jack and Virginia felt strongly that education was the key to success for all of their children. They were absolutely positive that a career in education was perfect for their daughter. As a teacher, Annie, as she was called by her family, would have an honorable, respectable profession. They knew that with the schooling and skills necessary to be a teacher, their daughter would be well prepared for life.



However, while in junior high, Annie foolishly had other ideas. Her dreams were filled with thoughts of becoming a hairdresser; this would open the doors to a world of beauty that was calling her name. The allure of glitz and glamour was very hard for Annie to resist. She had visions of being able to create the hairstyles that would attract many to her. In no uncertain terms, Virginia and Jack emphatically told their daughter that they would not permit that to happen. They would never allow their daughter to be a hairdresser.



Annie's next career plans went in the direction of becoming a legal secretary. On a popular television show in the 1960's, Perry Mason, Della Street was a legal secretary. Della played an important role in lawyer Perry Mason's ability to solve cases. Annie knew that she could be a great legal secretary, also. Again, Jack and Virginia informed her that this was not an acceptable career for her to pursue. However, somehow their daughter missed their message. In ninth grade Annie was assigned to do a report on a career she was interested in; she did it on being a legal secretary. She received an "A" which she proudly, but ever so foolishly, showed to her mother when she came home from school. Virginia was furious; hadn't she told her daughter that she and her father didn't approve of such a career?

Without any hesitation, Virginia ripped up the report and threw it in the trash as she loudly and clearly told Annie, "No daughter of mine will ever be a secretary!" Annie got the message that time!



Growing up in the 50's and 60's, it was rather unusual for an Italian girl to go on to college after graduating from high school. In Jack and Virginia's circle of friends, a daughter usually became a secretary and married within a few years of graduating. However, the progressive thinking Jack and Virginia felt it was very important their daughter go on to college so that she could further her education. With a degree, Annie would be able to have an honorable career that would open many doors for her



Mary & Annie Rea sit on either side of their friend.

future.

Additionally, an education would enable their daughter to always “stand on her own two feet” regardless of what events might occur in her life.

Against all the usual traditions within their Italian community, Annie was even allowed to go away to college. This was an extremely radical occurrence among their Italian friends.

In the mid-1960's when Annie left for college, things were not as liberal as they are today. Everyone lived in unisex dorms; coed dorms were not even thought of at that time. Additionally, there were very strict curfews enforced: the students could only stay out until ten o'clock on school nights and midnight on the weekends. Every night at the indicated times, the front door to the dorm was locked and a bed check was conducted to verify that all the girls were safely in their rooms. Virginia and Jack thought that was great! It was just the way they'd do it!

There were also rules and regulations about leaving the dorms overnight on the weekends. If a girl was lucky enough to have “blanket privileges,” she could sign out to leave the dorm on the weekends without the housemother calling her parents for approval. If she had “restricted privileges,” she could sign out to leave the dorm but only to go to places that had previously been approved by her parents. However, if she had “parental consent only privileges,” the girl would not be able to leave the dorm overnight for any reason unless the housemother called home and talked to her parents.



Guess which one Annie was given? You're right! Without any question, Annie was given the strictest privileges level—which really meant no privileges at all. She was allowed to leave the dorm only after Virginia had given her consent!

After being away at school for a month or so, Barbara Pence, one of her roommates, invited a bunch of girls to spend the weekend at her parents' home. Annie enjoyed Barbara's company very much because she was such a wonderful person. Barbara was an excellent student who had very high standards for herself and she was lots of fun. She often spoke of her family and her life growing up in the country. Since Annie was a city girl, going to visit Barbara's parents in the country sounded very exciting.

On the night before they were to leave for the weekend at Barbara's parents' home, Annie went with the other girls invited to Mrs. Thompson's, the housemother's, office. Like all the others, Annie filled out the necessary forms. Since she was the only girl who didn't have "blanket privileges," she had a lot more forms to fill out. Also, since Mrs. Thompson would have to talk to Virginia to get permission for the outing, she called the Rea's home. Because Annie had told her mother all about Barbara, she just knew that Virginia would let her go. After speaking with Virginia, Mrs. Thompson told Annie that her mother wanted to talk to her. Annie was positive her mother just wanted to wish her a good time at Barbara's home.

However, that isn't what happened. In her most stern and authoritative voice, Virginia told her daughter she absolutely could not go to Barbara's parents' home. Virginia wanted to know what was Annie thinking or maybe she wasn't even thinking! After all Virginia hadn't met Barbara or spoken to her parents. To top it off, Virginia was upset with the way Annie had handled the matter. She hadn't informed her mother of the plan in advance and had offended her



by thinking she could just troop off wherever and whenever she wanted to. She was sent away to college to get an education; not to run around the state having a good time. Annie tried to explain to her mother that all the other girls were going and she wanted to go, too. Virginia just abruptly interrupted Annie and told her that she would discuss the matter with her daughter further on Sunday during their weekly phone call. As of that point, she did not want to hear anything more about the matter; the discussion was closed.

Understandably, Annie was shocked, humiliated, and embarrassed by what had happened in front of all her new friends and the housemother. All the other girls would be going to have a great time at Barbara's, but she would be stuck all alone in the dorm. With a heavy heart and tears rolling down her cheeks, Annie went back to the room crushed and disgraced in front of all the other girls! No words of consolation helped, she was devastated. How could her mother do this to her!?

On Sunday, Annie had the dreaded phone conversation with her mother. The first thing that Virginia asked her daughter was what she had done that weekend....wanting to be sure that she had completed all of her studies. Without any hesitation, Virginia then went on to reprimand Annie for the way the situation about going to Barbara's home for the weekend had been handled. How could Annie have ever thought that she would be allowed to go to someone's house that her mother didn't even know? Didn't Annie realize that the reason she was sent to college was to get an education and not to have a good time? Hadn't the rules of her staying in the dorm been made perfectly clear to Annie before she left to go away to school? Every time Annie tried to explain herself, she just made the situation worse. Her mother was not going to back down on her decision to stop her from visiting Barbara's home for the weekend.

However, Virginia did offer her daughter a way to go to Barbara's home for another weekend. The first thing that had to happen was that Barbara had to come to the Rea's so Jack and Virginia could meet her. Once they were able to spend the weekend with Barbara, they would decide if she was the caliber of person they would want their daughter to spend any time with. Seeing this as a glimmer of hope, Annie readily agreed to invite Barbara for the weekend as soon as possible. Both Virginia and Annie were pleased with the outcome of their conversation.

A few weeks later, Barbara was invited to the Rea's. As Annie knew would happen, both Jack and Virginia inspected Barbara's every movement. Throughout the weekend, Barbara was scrutinized, monitored, and carefully watched. They took note of her manners, communication skills, and the way she interacted with the members of the family. At the end of the weekend, Virginia took Annie aside and informed her that they were indeed very impressed with Barbara. They liked her



intelligence, personality, and mannerisms. Without any doubt, Barbara had passed the test of fire and was given the coveted Rea Seal of Approval!! In fact, even today, if you look closely, there is still a slight indentation on Barbara's forehead where Virginia proudly applied the Rea Seal of Approval Stamp!

Foolishly, Annie thought that she could now be given permission to spend the weekend at Barbara's home. Oh no, that was not going to happen quite yet. Virginia informed Annie of what the next

step in the process was. Next step?? What was her mother talking about? Hadn't Barbara passed inspection? How could her mother expect that there was even more that needed to be done? Holding her breath, Annie just shuddered to think what hurdle she had to jump next!!

Virginia informed Annie that she would have to talk to Barbara's parents. It was necessary for her mother to chat with Barbara's parents to "get to know them" before any visit could take place. Also, Virginia would have to be sure that Barbara's

parents were aware of the potential visit as well as be able to assure her that they would be home the entire weekend Annie was there. Once the phone call was made, Virginia would begin to seriously consider a weekend visit.



Seriously consider? What was going on up to this point? How could her mother continue to humiliate her any further by continuing with these outrageous demands? However, Annie knew her mother meant business. If she wanted to ever be able to go to

Barbara's home, this hurdle would also have to be jumped. As much as she didn't want to, Annie agreed to the next requirement.

Before leaving, Virginia and Jack told Barbara how much they enjoyed having her visit and that they hoped she would come again soon. Virginia also got Barbara's parents' phone number from her. She then asked her when would be the best time to call her parents. Virginia asked Barbara to please tell her parents she would be calling in the near future.

A few weeks later, Virginia did make the phone call to Barbara's parents, Pauline and Bud Pence. Virginia soon learned that both of Barbara's parents were extremely warm and friendly people who welcomed many visitors into their home. During the phone conversation, they told Virginia all the right things that she needed to hear. It didn't take long

before Virginia was convinced that indeed Barbara's parents were very outstanding people. The decision was finally made! She would allow her daughter to spend time at the Pence's home. This was a monumental step for Virginia (and for Annie)!



Through the many years since that first weekend visit, Barbara and Ann have shared a wonderful, dear friendship. They have visited each other's homes many, many times, traveled the world together, and shared many adventures as they journeyed through their lives and careers. In fact, Barbara has become a cherished and much loved member of the Rea family by osmosis! All of the Rea's realize that Barbara is a treasure that they are indeed fortunate to have as part of their family.

A Girl & Her Best Buddy Nellie

Jack Rea enjoyed going hunting every fall for rabbits, pheasants, and deer in the woods of Michigan. Through the years, he always had a beagle for a hunting dog as a trusty companion on his adventures in the wilderness. None of the beagles were ever allowed in their home but rather had a house located in a large kennel in the backyard. Each dog



was well cared for and lived a rather pampered life. Although the dog officially belonged to Jack, everyone in the family was fond of him or her. However, it was Mary who had a very special relationship with all of the dogs, especially one named Nellie.

Through the years, Mary adored Nellie and they enjoyed the time they spent together in the backyard. Sometimes they would play together, other times they would sit and “talk” to each other, and at other times they would share food together. Because the bond between them was very great, there were a number of touching experiences that the two of them shared.

Doggy Tail One: Sharing Cereal With Nellie



Virginia would sometimes serve cornflakes with fruit and milk to her children for breakfast. At times, there would be a little bit of cereal left at the bottom of the box. Mary would look at her mother and say, “Doggie,” which meant that she wanted to give the rest of the cereal to Nellie. Knowing how much Mary loved Nellie, Virginia would let her take the remainder of the cereal out to the dog. What Virginia didn’t realize was exactly how Mary would feed the cereal to Nellie.

Mary would go out to the backyard and sit on the ground next to the doghouse. Nellie immediately came out to greet her favorite member of the Rea family. After giving Nellie a hug, Mary showed the dog the box of corn flakes. With great delight, Mary reached into the box and pulled out a handful of the cereal. Then Mary put her hand out, and with much enthusiasm, Nellie quickly licked the cereal from her hand. With just a few corn flakes left on her hand and not wanting them to go to waste, Mary used exactly the same technique as the dog had; she used her tongue to lick the remaining cereal from her hand. Again Mary reached into the box to get some more cereal and let Nellie lick her hand to lap off the flakes. Once Nellie had taken her lick, Mary again took care of any remaining flakes in just the same way.

When Virginia saw this from the back door, she immediately ran out to the backyard. As she got to Mary and Nellie at the doghouse, Virginia took the empty cereal box away from her daughter. She then told her daughter that she could not continue to feed the dog. Both Mary and Nellie just looked at Virginia in utter bewilderment. Neither one of them could understand why she was so upset....they were only sharing the cereal! Isn’t that what Mary had told her mother that she was going to do? So now what was the problem?



Walking with Mary back to the house, she explained to her why she was not to eat any of the cereal that Nellie had not licked off her hand. Although Mary told her mother that it would not happen again, she was unable to keep her promise. Whenever she had the opportunity, Mary would share any food that she had with her very special friend Nellie. Each time, Nellie would always lick the food off her hand first. Then Mary would lick off her hand anything that Nellie had missed. Mary figured that “while in Rome, do as the Roman’s do” certainly was the best way to handle any bits of food that Nellie left. After all, Mary knew her mother said that her father worked very hard to earn money to buy the food for their family, and she didn’t want them to waste any of the food. Mary was only doing what her mother wanted!



Doggy Tail Two: The Ice Cream Cone Confusion

On warm, sunny, summer afternoons, Virginia occasionally gave her children an ice cream cone as a treat. After scooping the ice cream into the cones, the children often went to sit in the backyard to enjoy their treat. On one particular afternoon, Virginia’s older three children were all swimming in the pool at Hemlock Park. She and Mary were home alone when she decided that the two of them would enjoy a little ice cream together. Virginia gave Mary the cone that she had made and told her to sit on the back porch. Then she told her daughter that she would join her on the porch as soon as she made her own cone and put the ice cream away. In just a few minutes, Virginia went out on the porch to join her daughter, but she was not there.

When she looked around the yard, she saw that Mary was sitting on the ground right outside the doghouse. However, Virginia was alarmed to see that Mary was sharing her ice cream cone with Nellie. Mary would put the cone toward the dog and let her take a big lick of it. Then it would be her turn; she would take a lick of ice cream from the cone. As Virginia ran to her daughter to stop her from sharing the ice cream cone with the dog, she saw that the two of them were delighted to be able to take turns

licking the ice cream. When she finally reached Mary, Virginia reminded her that she shouldn't share food with the dog. Virginia took the ice cream cone from Mary's hand and gave it to Nellie to finish eating. Although Nellie was very pleased to get the entire cone, both she and Mary were totally puzzled by Virginia's actions. Why did Virginia seem to be upset with them? Neither Nellie nor Mary had a clue!



While she was walking Mary back to the house to make her another cone, Virginia again explained to her daughter why she shouldn't share her food with Nellie. Of course, Mary promised she would never do it again. However, because Mary loved Nellie so much, she just couldn't resist. Virginia would often find her daughter sharing other treats with the dog including suckers, potato chips and cookies. After all, isn't that what best friends do?!

Doggy Tail Three: Playing With A Shoe



The backyard at the Rea's house had a fence all around it. There was also a gate that was always kept closed so that the young Rea children wouldn't wander off to the front yard and into the street. As young children, they were not allowed to leave the backyard unless one of their parents was with them. The children spent many wonderful hours playing in the yard with their friends and toys. When they were in the yard playing, Virginia and Jack knew that they were safe.

One lovely spring day while the other children were at school, Virginia put Mary on the back porch to play with her toys as she started to prepare dinner. After a few minutes, Virginia went to the back door to check on Mary but she was not on the porch. She stood on the porch to look for her daughter in the backyard, but she couldn't see her anywhere. Virginia ran off the porch and looked everywhere throughout the yard for her. She was very alarmed as she called out, "Mary, Mary! Where are you?" However, there was no answer. She then went to the gate to make sure that it was properly closed and that the latch was secured in place. Virginia was

somewhat relieved to find that the gate was shut, but she still couldn't find her daughter.

Where could Mary be? Searching throughout the backyard, Virginia started calling even louder, "Mary, Mary! Your Mommy is looking for you, where are you Mary?" Still there was no answer. Now Virginia was beginning to panic! Searching, searching everywhere in the yard, she was now screaming, "Mary, Mary! Answer me, where are you Mary?"

Suddenly Virginia heard Mary's soft little voice, "Here I am Mommy!"

When Virginia followed her daughter's voice, she saw her little head sticking out of Nellie's doghouse. Shocked, but relieved, Virginia asked her daughter, "What are you doing in there?"

Mary held out her shoe and coyly told her mother, "Doggie got my shoe!" Mary went on to tell her mother that the dog had taken one of her shoes into her house. She'd gone in the house only because she had to retrieve her shoe.

Although Virginia didn't really understand the situation, she lifted her daughter out of the doghouse. When she did, she realized that her daughter was filthy; she was covered with much of the straw and dog hair that was on the floor of the doghouse. Virginia carried Mary inside and scrubbed her from head to foot. She also told her daughter that under no circumstances was she ever to go into the doghouse again. Being the sweet child that she was, Mary promised her mother that she would never do it again. Of course, not!



Mary was a very obedient child who always tried to follow her mother's rules. However, it was very difficult for her to obey her mother when it came to Nellie. A few days after finding Mary in the doghouse, Virginia was able to discover how and why her daughter had really gone inside. While she was sitting on the back porch watching Mary play in the backyard, Virginia saw her young daughter walk over to the doghouse. Nellie warmly greeted Mary with a generous lick on her face as Mary gave Nellie a big hug. Mary began talking to Nellie and the dog seemed to listen to her very intently. Mary then took off one of her shoes and put it near the dog's mouth. Immediately, Nellie clamped her mouth down on the shoe, which totally delighted Mary. As she heartedly laughed, Mary grabbed the shoe and shook it out of the dog's mouth. Mary laughed loudly as again and again they playfully exchanged the shoe. Mary thoroughly enjoyed taunting Nellie to grab her shoe so that she could take it away from the dog again. Finally, Nellie decided she had enough of the game and took the shoe in her house...which was exactly what Mary wanted her to do. Next, Mary crawled inside the house to get the shoe and then brought it back outside the house again. Once outside, the game started all over again. As Virginia watched, she couldn't believe her eyes!!

Waiting until Mary was inside of the doghouse, Virginia walked over to the kennel. She pretended not to know where Mary was and called out, "Mary, Mary, where are you?"

Mary smiled as she popped her head out of the doghouse and said, "Here I am, Mommy!"

When Virginia asked, "What are you doing in there? Didn't I tell you that you could not go inside the dog house again?"

Thinking she would be able to fool her mother again, Mary held up the shoe and said, "Doggie got my shoe!"

This time her mother answered with, "Oh, no! I was sitting on the porch watching you. I saw exactly what happened. You gave Nellie your shoe."

With that, Mary knew she had been caught! She just looked at her mother with her big, remorseful eyes and said, “Sorry, Mommy.”

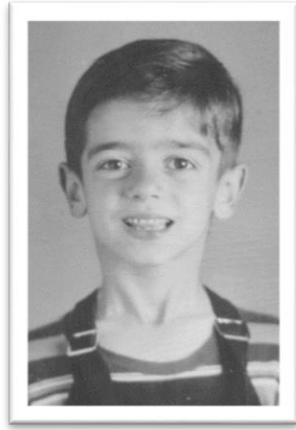
Mary’s sweet words melted her heart. Once again, Virginia gently picked up her filthy daughter from the doghouse. As she carried her inside, they talked about the need for Mary to follow the rules and stay out of Nellie’s house. While bathing Mary, they again talked about the situation. Virginia told her daughter that if she couldn’t stay out of Nellie’s house, she would not be allowed to go around the dog. Upon hearing that awful fate, Mary cried as she repeatedly promised her mother that she had learned her lesson and would never go in the dog’s house again.

By this point, Virginia knew that the bond between Mary and Nellie was great. She was aware that Mary’s love for Nellie was so intense that she’d not be able to keep her promise. However, Virginia felt that if the relationship meant that much to her dear little Mary that it was fine with her if she broke the rules...once in a while.

The Teenager & The Changeable Clock

Like all young teenaged drivers who just got their driver’s license, Tom jumped at every opportunity to put his new driving skills into practice. Tom was eager to use his father’s car to drive any family member anywhere they needed to go. He’d volunteer to drive his mother to the grocery store, pick-up their Zia Lucia for dinner, drive his brother and sisters to any appointment they might have or to take care of any errand that needed a car to complete. Of course, he also wanted to use the car for his own personal driving; he wanted to use the car to visit friends and go to social events. Tom was often known for taking the longer, more scenic routes getting to his destinations. His rationale for doing this was that he was “avoiding traffic” and he was using the opportunity to get in a “little more driving experience” whenever possible. Sure!

His father, Jack, always worked the midnight shift at Ford's. After dinner with his family, Jack would go to bed for a few hours before going in to work. Once his father was sleeping, Tom would start to think of reasons why his mother should allow him to use the car. Often times, he needed to go to the library to check out a book he wanted to read or work on a big, crucial report for school. Other times, he had to go to a friend's house for just a minute to pick up something that was very important. Occasionally, he would receive calls from friends who needed help in an emergency situation. No matter what the reason, it was always of the utmost importance that Tom used the car to handle the situation.



Virginia knew that her son was a good boy. She felt that if he said that it was important that he used the car then it probably was. However, she wasn't willing to let Tom use it unless it was absolutely necessary. Without any doubt, Tom would assure his mother that it was only because it was of the "utmost importance" or "extremely crucial" that he needed to use the car. Most of the time Virginia didn't buy into his stories and refused. However, every so often he was able to convince her that it was vital. Virginia would relent and off Tom and the car would go.

When Tom was granted this privilege, there were certain rules he had to abide by. To begin with, he had to follow all the driving laws; there would be no speeding, recklessness, or eating (let alone drinking) in the car. He also could only go to the one destination that he'd told his mother that he was going; he could go absolutely nowhere else. In addition, Tom was not to have any of his friends in the car with him. Finally, because his father would get up to go to work at 10:30, he had to be back home with the car no later than 9:30. Without hesitation, Tom always promised to follow each and every rule about the use of the car that his mother had thoroughly discussed with him. Off he'd go, keys in hand and a sly smile on his face!



Tommy and Jackie

was no way Virginia could contact her son. She began pacing back and forth, looking out the windows in the living room to see if she could spot the car coming down the street.

When it got to be 10:00 and Tom was still not back with the car, his mother began to



panic. What could have happened? Certainly it had to be something serious or Tom would be back home. The minutes ticked away and still he didn't return. By the time it was 10:30, Virginia was at the point of desperation. What was she going to do? Her son wasn't home with the car and it was time for Jack to get up to go to work. Virginia decided to wait five more minutes.

One evening after using one of his many “perfected” excuses, Tom left with the car. About 9:25, Virginia started to look for her son to return. When it became 9:45 and Tom still wasn't back, Virginia started to become concerned. Something must have happened. Maybe he was hurt in an accident, or maybe the car broke down and he couldn't get back home, or worse yet, he was lying in a ditch dead. Since these were the days before cell phones, there

Five minutes passed and still no Tom. Virginia thought just another five more minutes. At 10:40 she would have to wake up Jack....but Tom was still not back. Virginia knew she had to think fast so that her husband wouldn't find out Tom had kept the car out longer than he was supposed to. The quick-thinking Virginia came up with a plan. She would turn back the time on the clock thirty minutes. She would wait until 11:00 o'clock for her son to come home. Even if he wasn't home by then, she would have to wake up her husband and Tom would have to suffer the consequences of not following the rules for using the car.

At 10:59 the car came rolling in the driveway. Tom came charging into the house with his tale of woe as to what catastrophe occurred that prevented him getting home when he was supposed to. Virginia didn't have time to listen to his crazy story; she told him to go straight to his room. Then she went into her husband's bedroom and woke him up. Although it was really 11:00, the clock indicated that it was only 10:30. In order to make the plan work, Virginia had to have the television turned off so that he wouldn't see that the eleven o'clock news was on. Additionally, she had Jack's coffee ready for him to drink before he set off for work. As he walked out the door, she handed him his lunch and told him she was tired and was going to bed.

Once Jack had driven the car out of the driveway, Virginia went into action. First, she reset the clock so that it had the correct time. Next, she went into Tom's bedroom and verbally raked him over the coals. She told him how worried she was and how very disappointed she was in him. When Tom tried to explain to his mother the outrageous reason he had for being late, Virginia told him she didn't want to hear a word out of him. Finally, because he had abused the privilege of using the car, he was grounded, and it would be a long, long time before he ever got to use the car again.



When Jack came home from work the next morning, he told his wife that there must be something wrong with the clocks in the house. Virginia acted bewildered as she asked him why he thought that. Jack explained that he'd arrived at work late. Next, he pulled out his pocket watch to see if it matched the time on the clock on the wall. Of

course, the time matched. Jack was puzzled and Virginia acted like she had no idea what had happened.

That was the first time this happened; unfortunately, it wasn't the last time. This scenario was repeated again and again with Tom. Virginia always believed her son when he promised her that he had learned his lesson and would be home on time. Sometimes, he actually was; however, more times than Virginia would like to admit, her son came home later than he was supposed to. The turning back of the clock technique needed to be used repeatedly throughout Tom's teenaged years. If Jack ever caught on to the little trick, he never let Virginia or Tom know that he knew about their devious ways. He probably figured that it was better for all three of them that way. Smart man!

Learning To "Work Smart"

Jackie idolized his father and wanted to spend as much time as possible with him. Although Jack dearly loved his son, he often worked two jobs to support his family and was not home a great deal. His primary job was working at the Ford Motor Company. He'd worked there for many years and earned a fine income to support his family. However, Jack wanted to give his family more than just the basic necessities in life, so he had to earn more money. To do this, he also owned a construction company with which he did cement work and small building projects in the residential area surrounding their home. The work was seasonal, so Jack could only do construction when the weather would permit during the late spring, summer and early fall. During that time, Jack often worked at both jobs, which meant he would work sixteen to eighteen hours a day. Because of his grueling work schedule, Jack was able to spend only a limited amount of time with his children.

During the summer when he wasn't in school, Jackie longed to see more of his father. Since Jack worked construction during the day and at Ford's during the night, Jackie knew his only chance was to go with his father to his construction jobs. From

the age of four or five, Jackie begged his father and mother to let him go with Jack on his construction sites. However, his parents knew he was much too young. He would quickly become bored, he'd get in the way of the work that needed to be done, and, most importantly, he could easily get injured with the heavy work that was done on the



various jobs. As much as he begged and pleaded, Jackie was not allowed to accompany his father to the job sites.

After several years of relentlessly asking his parents if he could spend the day with his father at a construction job, they finally relented. Before he was allowed to go, there were a number of rules he was told that he would have to follow.

First of all, he had to stay with his father and not wander off the job. Next, safety was a primary issue, and he had to be very careful so that he didn't accidentally get hurt or

injured. Also, he had to understand that he would have to spend the entire day with his father; he wouldn't be able to leave after a little while because he was tired or bored. Finally, his mother would pack him a lunch to eat; there would be no stopping at a restaurant for food or even an ice cream cone. Of course, Jackie readily agreed to anything he needed to so that he'd be allowed to spend more time with his father.

When he was about ten or eleven, the big day finally arrived when Jackie was allowed to go to work with his father. His dream was finally coming true; he'd be able to spend the entire day at his dad's side! He was absolutely sure that they'd have a wonderful day laughing and talking away the hours as they stood side by side at the construction site. Jackie knew that things just couldn't get any better than this! Before his father

even got out of bed that morning, Jackie was up and dressed. He just couldn't wait for the fun to begin.

Since Jackie was a rule follower, as soon as they arrived at the construction site he quickly jumped out of the truck and stood right next to his father. Jackie knew that the best part of the day was going to be that he would be by his father at all times. As the day went on, no matter where Jack went, his son was right by his side. In fact, the closer he could get to his father the better it was for Jackie. Things were going



Jack sits and cuts his cake

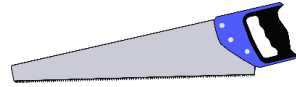
exactly as Jackie had always dreamed that they would.

Wanting to be of great help to his father, Jackie

always had his nose into everything his father was doing. When Jack gave directions to the workers at the beginning of the day, Jackie listened very carefully because he wanted to learn everything that was needed to assist his father. As the day progressed and the actual work began, Jackie stayed right by his father's side so that he could help him as much as possible. In fact, there was often not even an inch between them because Jackie wanted to be right there with his father at all times. What he didn't realize was that he was staying so close to his father that he was actually getting in the way.

In an effort to get something useful for Jackie to do, as well as to give him a little "breathing room" from his overzealous son, Jack had to think of a simple task for his son to do. Since he was in the process of putting down some forms for a driveway, he

needed a variety of tools. He'd brought several long, heavy boards needed to make the form but was unable to carry the small tools that he'd also need to use. He thought that this would be the perfect job for Jackie to do to assist him. He told his son, "Go get me a saw from the truck."



As soon as the words were out of his father's mouth, Jackie darted out to the truck to get a saw. In an instant, he found a nice sharp saw and turned around to run back to bring it to his father. After he raced back to his father, he proudly handed him the saw. Jackie was sure that his father would be very pleased with the speed at which he'd been able to bring him the exact tool that he needed. However, he was shocked to find out that his father was disappointed in him.



When he was handed the saw, Jack looked at his son with frustration. He said in a very disgruntled voice, "What do you want me to do with this?"

Jackie was completely bewildered. Hadn't his father just told him to get a saw? He certainly did not understand what was going on. What had he done wrong? He had gotten a saw for his father just as he'd been asked, so what was the problem? His confusion was quickly cleared up by his totally dissatisfied father.

In a gruff, direct voice Jack told his son, "I don't need just a saw to make this form. I also need a hammer, nails, and stakes to do this job." He then told him in Italian to run, "Scapa!"

Even faster than he had darted to the truck the first time, Jackie bolted to the truck to get all the tools that his father said he needed. As quickly as he could, Jackie gathered a hammer, lots of nails, and several stakes. This time when he jetted back to

his father, he had all the items that Jack needed to make the form. His father was very pleased that his son had brought him everything that he needed. Jack nodded his head in approval as he told his son, "Bene!" (Good in Italian.)

This was a very essential lesson Jackie learned that very first day he worked with his father. He quickly figured out that his dad wanted him to think of the total job that needed to be done and not just one small aspect of a project.

Jackie realized that a person needed to "work smart" in order to be the most efficient and productive. Jack taught his son that from the beginning of a job, it was necessary to think about exactly what needed to be done, the steps in the process of completing the job, and all the tools that it would take to finish the job. When a person stops to think the job completely through before starting, they will not waste



time and energy going back over things again and again. On that first day working with his father, Jackie not only had to run back to the truck to get all the tools his father needed, he also had to be told specifically what tools were necessary to complete the job. Because he wanted to please his father as he continued to spend time with him, Jackie immediately began to "work smart." He analyzed each task while his father worked and figured out everything that was needed to efficiently complete the job. By studying the various jobs his father worked on, Jackie was able to be the best assistant Jack ever had.

The lesson that Jackie learned that day never left him. To this day, he tries to always "work smart" and eliminate any wasted time and effort. Because of this, Jack, as Jackie is called today, is the proud owner of a very successful business of his own.

One of the first things that Jack teaches his employees is to “work smart” so that they will be the most productive and effective. Jack often tells his new employees about the first day he worked with his father and how the lesson he learned that day taught him to be efficient by thinking things out before he started to take any action. This valuable lesson that he learned from his father on his own first day of work was very vital in shaping Jack into the successful businessman that he became.

A Christmas Fable

It was New Year's Eve, 1947. Virginia and Jack had spent a hectic holiday season with their three beautiful young children; Tommy was seven, Jackie was four and Annie just one. The excitement of Christmas had filled their home with much joy, love, and happiness. The children were thrilled with the gifts that Santa had brought and enjoyed playing with them in the days that followed. Much of the time had been spent visiting with friends, eating far too often, and staying up much too late.

The holiday season had absolutely exhausted Virginia. After the children were all tucked in their beds that night, she told Jack the holiday had totally worn her out. She suggested that they take down the Christmas tree and put away all the decorations that night. Virginia felt that if the children woke up in the morning to find that things were “back to normal,” it would calm things down in their home. Jack was tired also and said that he thought that they should wait for another day when he had more energy. Virginia said she felt strongly that they needed to start the New Year off with a calm, peaceful house.

Now Jack was a smart man. He knew that once Virginia made up her mind about something, it was going to happen. Without any further questions or discussion, Jack trudged down to the basement to get the many storage boxes for the Christmas tree ornaments and other decorations. Jack made the many trips up and down the stairs to get the boxes. All the time, he kept on thinking that he wished he was in bed sleeping rather than spending the time taking down the tree.

Packing all the decorations away was a slow, tedious process. Everything had to be handled carefully and arranged neatly in the storage boxes. First, the tinsel came off the tree. Each shimmering silver strand was delicately placed back in its original box so that it could be used again next year. The many ornaments were next to come off; each one carefully lifted off the branch and gently placed in its storage container to keep it safe until the following Christmas. The last and most difficult thing to remove was the lights. Round and round the tree the lights were unwound; taking them off was a slow, slow process. While Jack was taking the decorations off the tree, Virginia was fussily organizing things in the boxes.

As Jack was removing the last of the lights, something underneath the tree in the far back corner caught Virginia's eye. She looked at it and couldn't quite figure out what

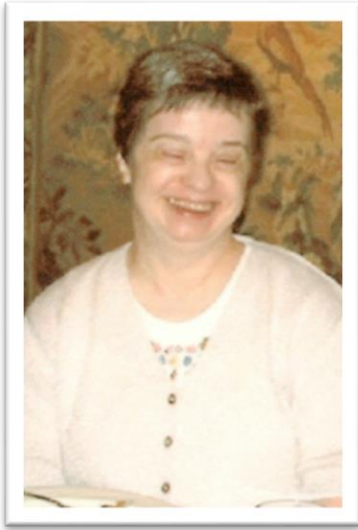


it was. Had one of the children thrown a toy and it had landed there? Or had an ornament fallen off the tree and rolled into the corner? Virginia went closer to the tree to see what it could possibly be. The closer she got, the more puzzled she became.

When she finally got close to the tree, Virginia realized that in fact it was a large present. 'How could that be?' she thought. Virginia knew that the children had opened all of their gifts on Christmas morning, so how had this package been missed? She pointed out the box to Jack and

asked him if he knew anything about it. Jack looked quite puzzled as he answered, "No."

When Jack worked his way to the back of the tree and retrieved the package, the two of them couldn't believe their eyes. It was absolutely the most breathtaking package



that they'd ever seen! The entire box was tied with a truly magnificent glittery gold ribbon that formed a perfect huge bow at the top. The package was wrapped in beautiful dazzling red and green Christmas paper that even had real diamonds on it.

Virginia and Jack were overwhelmed with such an elegant package. While gazing at the exquisitely-wrapped box, they asked each other, "Where had this beautiful package come from? How did it get behind the tree? Who had sent such a fabulous gift to them?" They were totally bewildered and confused.

Suddenly Jack noticed that there was a tag on the package. His eyes widened as he read what it said out loud to Virginia, "Special Delivery for the Rea Family." On the back of the tag it said, "With lots of love, From Santa Claus"

Slowly and ever so carefully, Virginia and Jack untied the bow and removed the fabulous ribbon from the package. Then Jack held the box as Virginia slowly removed the wrapping paper being careful not to tear or rip it. Jack gently placed the box back on the living room floor. Both of them just stared at the box before they decided to take the top off. Very gradually and cautiously, Jack removed the lid. They were finally going to find out what was in the mysterious box!

They were totally shocked! Much to their amazement, there was a baby doll sleeping very peacefully at the bottom of the box. Then they realized that it wasn't a baby doll....it was a real live baby. In fact, it was not just any baby, it was the most beautiful baby that Virginia and Jack had ever seen! How could this be? Just then the baby open its eyes and looked up at Virginia and Jack. Then the baby sweetly smiled at the two of them, closed its eyes, and went back to sleep.

Very carefully, Jack reached into the box and lifted out the baby. Jack kissed the baby as he handed the precious little bundle to his wife. As Virginia gently took the baby, she too kissed the baby gently on her forehead again and again. The two of them spent the rest of the night taking turns holding the baby in their arms. They rocked, cooed, and kissed the baby all night long.

Because they didn't realize how much time had passed, they were surprised when the children all got out of bed and came into the living room the next morning. Virginia and Jack told the children the story of the spectacular package they'd found in back of the Christmas tree the night before. Each of the children was given a chance to hold their new little baby sister. A precious little baby girl named Mary was welcomed into the family with much love and happiness.

As the morning progressed, the boys started to think about the way their parents said that the new baby had arrived at their home.

Tommy and Jackie were older and wiser than their little sister Annie; things about the baby's



arrival just didn't sound exactly right to them. The two brothers began to remember

that it had been an entire week since Santa had delivered their presents. How could baby Mary survive in a box for over a week? How could she breathe? How could any air get inside the box?

Quick thinking Virginia replied that the package had been wrapped with very special paper. It, as well as the box, had tiny, tiny holes in it that allowed the air to come through for Mary to breathe. The boys did not seem like they believed their mother. Virginia told Jack to get the paper and box. Jack and Virginia were absolutely



shocked that neither boy could see the holes. They assured the boys that the holes were there. Virginia also told the boys that since they couldn't

see the holes, it was obvious that a trip to the eye doctor was in their near future.

For a little while the boys were pacified. However, it didn't take long before they had another doubt about their parents' story that they had to clear up. Once again, Tommy and Jackie thought about the baby being in the box for over a week. Soon, they had a few more suspicious thoughts about the baby's arrival. If the baby was in the box for that long, how come she didn't cry when she got hungry? Wouldn't they hear Mary crying? If the baby didn't eat for a week, how come she didn't starve to death?

This one took a little longer for Virginia to respond to, but not much longer. Quickly, she was able to tell the boys about the special bottle that was in the box with the baby. The bottle was very unusual; it had enough formula to automatically feed the baby for a week. Since the baby was never hungry, she never cried. Virginia told them she had forgotten to mention the bottle because it had run out of formula during the

night and they were just using one of Annie's bottles to feed the baby. Of course, the boys wanted to see this "special bottle." Virginia sent Jack to look for it, but he couldn't remember where they'd put it. As soon as they found it, they assured the boys they'd show it to them.

Again the boys question had been answered, but Tommy and Jackie still had their suspicions. After another secret powwow between the two boys, they knew that they had a challenge that their parents just would not be able to explain. This time they came to Virginia and Jack with their fingers holding their noses. Now what's going on, thought Virginia. The boys asked, "If the baby was in the box breathing and eating for over a week, wouldn't she have a really stinking diaper that would smell up the whole room? They sure knew that Annie's diapers were very stinky every day. So after a week, the smell from the new baby's diapers would be terrible!"

Oh, Virginia had to think really fast with that one! In a flash, she thought of the definitive answer that she was sure would stop all the questions. She took the gift tag from the box and showed it to the boys.

"See," she said, "The tag says 'Special Delivery for the Rea Family' on one side and on the other it says 'With lots of love, From Santa Claus.'" She went on to say, "We all know that Santa Claus can perform all kinds of magic, and he certainly used all his magic when he sent baby Mary to us!"



That totally shut down the questioning right then and there! Those two boys were never going to question anything about Santa, especially after he had just given them so many wonderful gifts a few days before on Christmas!!

Everyone who knew and loved Mary thought that Virginia was right. Mary did indeed have a magical effect on others. It was magical the way that Mary always smiled to warm the

hearts of all who knew and loved her; it was magical the way her charm would brighten everyone's day; it was magical the way Mary's strength of character to always "do it

herself" would inspire others to achieve their greatest potential; it was magical that the example set by Mary when she overcame all her challenges in life with courage and determination inspired those around her to do the same; and it was magical the way Mary could brighten up everyone's day with her cheery outlook on life.

Santa had certainly used his magic when he gave the Reas the very special Christmas gift of Mary!!





*Some might say
that Mary was magical.*



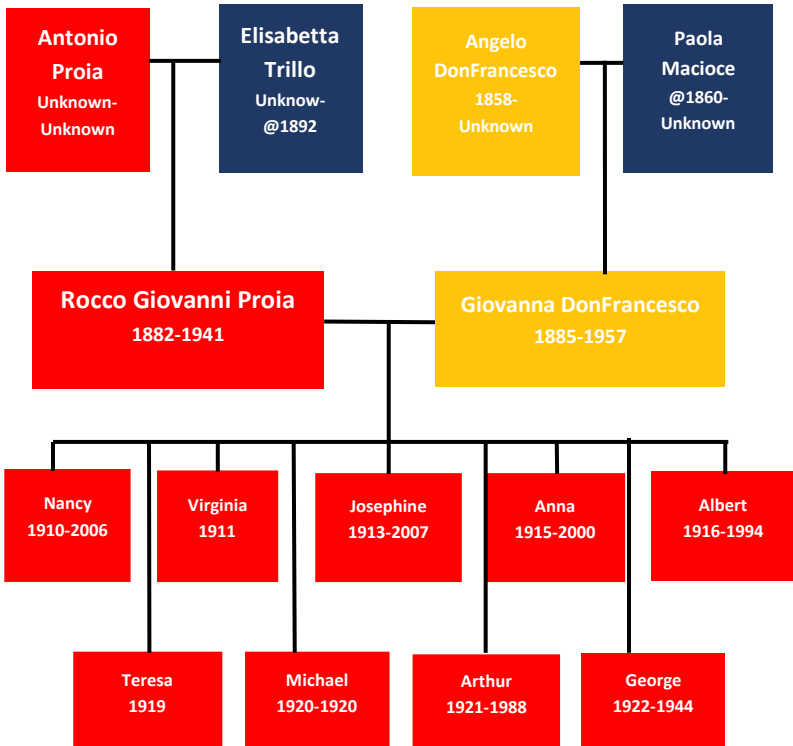
Others would say

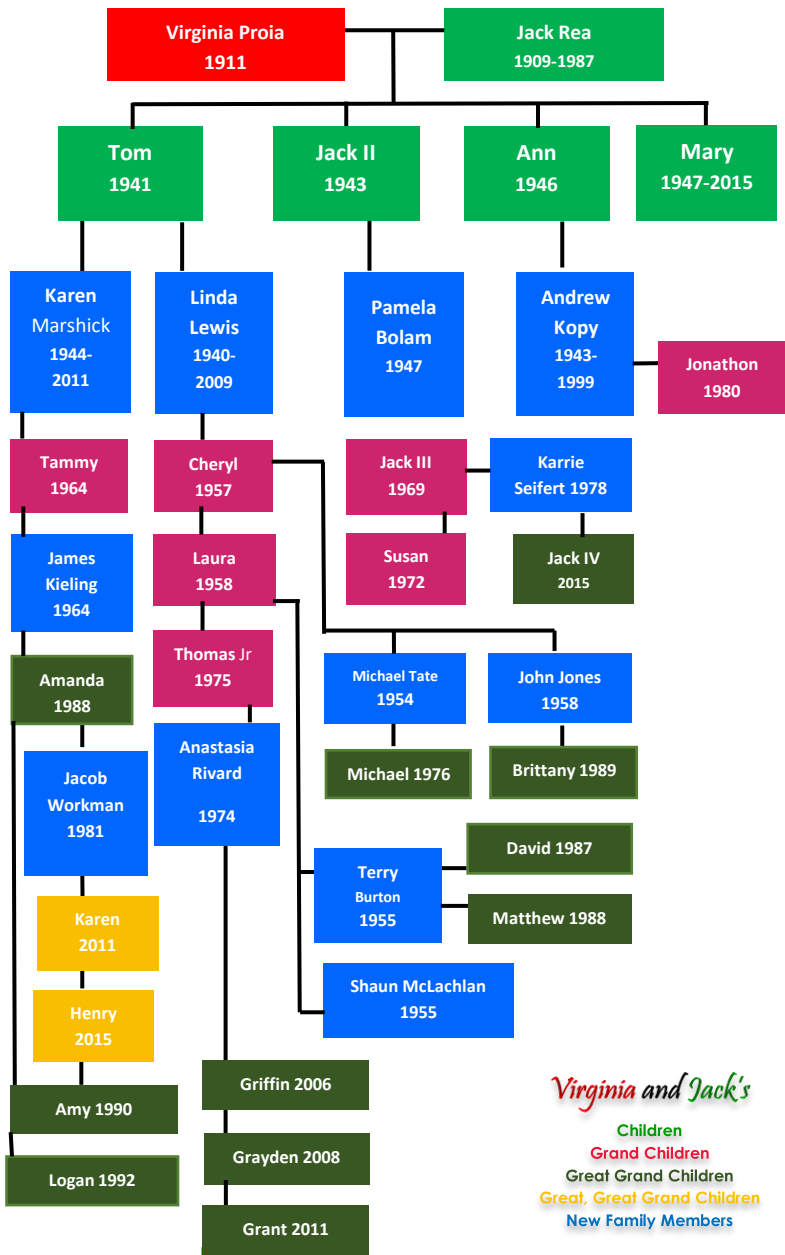


*She was a
special gift
from God*



Virginia Proia Rea's Family Tree







The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.

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to officially certify that

GIOVANNA DONFRANCESCO PROIA

who came to America from

ITALY

is among those courageous men and women who came to this country in search of personal freedom, economic opportunity and a future of hope for their families.

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The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.

proudly presents this

Official Certificate of Registration

in

THE AMERICAN IMMIGRANT WALL OF HONOR

to officially certify that

ROCCO PROIA

who came to America from

ITALY

is among those courageous men and women who came to this country in search of personal freedom, economic opportunity and a future of hope for their families.

Lee A. Iacocca
The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island
Foundation, Inc.



ROCCO PROIA

Rocco Proia, 58, of 45 South street, Washington, died suddenly of a heart attack at his home Thursday, October 16, 1941, at 8 p. m. He was stricken only a few hours before his death.

Mr. Proia was born at Arpino, Italy, January 17, 1882, and came to the United States in 1905. For the last 26 years he had resided in Washington. He had engaged in the trucking business here for a number of years.

Surviving are his wife, Giovanna, and the following sons and daughters: Mrs. Robert W. Davis and Mrs. John F. Kenny, both of Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Jack Rea of Detroit, and Mrs. Stanley Moore. Anna, Albert, Arthur and George, all at home.

Friends will be received at the Proia home. Funeral services will be held Sunday at 3 p. m. in Immaculate Conception Church. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

MRS. JENNIE PROIA

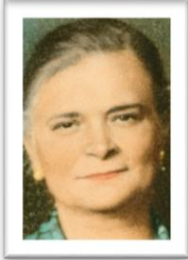
Mrs. Jennie Proia, 45 South street, widow of Rocco Proia, died in Washington Hospital, Sunday May 5, 1937, at 12:15 a. m. While not in the best of health for some time, her death was unexpected.

Born in Ardeno, Italy, September 27, 1885, she was a daughter of Angelo and Pauline Machochi DonFrasco. Mrs. Proia was a member of Church of the Immaculate Conception and Ladies Auxiliary to Alpine Lodge. She was married October 17, 1907, in Rome, Italy, to Rocco Proia, who died October 16, 1941.

Surviving are five daughters, Nancy, wife of Robert W. Davis, Fairfield; Virginia, wife of Jack L. Rea, Dearborn, Mich.; Mrs. Josephine Kenny, Washington, D. C.; Anna Mary, wife of Cosmo Mastantuono, Washington; Teresa, wife of Stanley Moore, Los Angeles, Calif.; and two sons, Albert, Boston, Mass., and Arthur Joseph, Washington.

A son, Michael, died in infancy and a son, George, died on Leyte island in the South Pacific in





*Families
Are Forever*

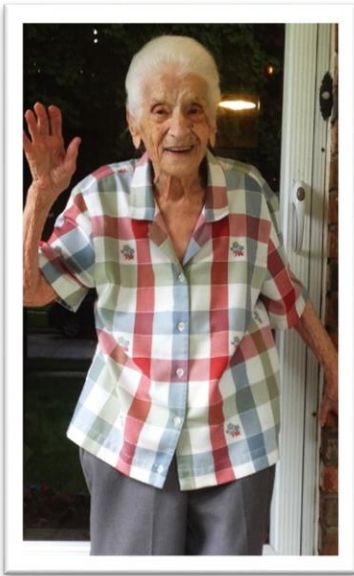


Proia Rea Family



Afterword

A Publication of Kitchen Table Press



Another book is finished and I hope you've enjoyed my second effort and will share these stories with others in our large and growing family.

Now this is what I need you to do. Go make a cup of coffee; then get a pencil and some paper. Sit down at your kitchen table and begin a story of your own. It really doesn't matter what you choose to write about, just write.

Don't worry about whether you've spelled everything correctly or you've added a comma in the right place. Just write, and write, and then write some more. What's important is that you get your story down. All that editorializing

can come later. You need to add to our family's collection of memories.

Don't tell me you can't do it! I don't want to hear it!! Of course you can. You are more than capable. After all you are a member of my family either by birth, marriage or because I chose you. So there are no excuses, just get it done. Don't you dare disappoint me!

Virginia Proia Rea

Chairwoman of the Board, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer

Chief Storyteller, Chief Recipe Officer, Chief Historian, Chief Advice Giver