

A Grain of Sand

Carmella LaSalle
1865-1949

Orazio DeVenezia
1862-1946

Lucia Venezia
1855-1907

Antonio Saporito
1858-1909

NICOLA DeVENEZIA
1890-1956

MARIA SAPORITO
1896-1993

COLETTE *Married* Alfred Siano
Alan *Married* Virginia Karchefsky
Robert
Lisa
Brian
Arlene *Married* Edward Reese
Edward
Tania
Randall
Marie *Married* Donald Ungemah
David
Joseph
Janet *Married* Robert Kraemer
Amy

LUCY *Married* Henry Scala
John *Married* Lola Bevilacqua
John
Karen
Mark
Nicholas L. *Married* Nancy Meola
Matthew
Henry *Married* Patricia Sorrano
Maria
Gina
Alyssa

ORAZIO
1918-1921

ANTHONY *Married* Anne Kraft
Carole *Married* John Meola
Christopher
Brian
Melissa
Deborah
Nicholas John *Married* Diane Magestro
Robert
Mark
Jason
Robert
Joanne *Married* Edward Connoly
Melinda
Suzanne
Frances
Christopher

IRMA *Married* Daniel Conforti
Diane *Married* Carmen Garfole
Elizabeth Ann
Daniel
Jean
Nicholas

HELEN *Married* John Domeny
Linda
Kathryn
Andrew
Judy
Martha

EDWARD *Married* Alice Goeliner
Edward
Lynn
James
Thomas
Paul
Peter
David

MICHELINA *Married* Anthony Iuso
Theodore
Elaine
Mary Jane *Married* Richard Kirkaby
Nancy *Married* Michael Cifelli
Michelle

RICHARD *Married* Ann Lupardi
Marie
Debra
Richard
Nicholas
John
Brenda

MARIE

A GRAIN OF SAND
Marie DeVenezia

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*"I will bless thee, and I will
multiply thy seed as the stars of
heaven, and as the sand that is by the
sea shore..."*

-- Genesis: Chapter 22; Verse 17 --

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This work would not have been possible without the continuous assistance of my daughter Helen. I am grateful and thankful to her for all the work she has contributed.

I also thank Linda, my granddaughter, for the long hours of work she gave because she and her mother believed it would be done.

I want to thank my dear daughter Marie for all the encouragement she gave me to continue this work. Many times I vacillated, because I felt age and time were against me.

I sincerely want to extend my thanks and gratitude to all of my loyal assistants for all the time and love they have unselfishly given to a cause in which they believed.

INTRODUCTION

This narrative will show the life of an immigrant in America, not only through the hardships endured, but also through the compensation of a hard life sustained by God's guidance and by faith in the adopted country.

It pays tribute to a country which gave immigrants a home and the opportunity for honest and productive lives for themselves and their families.

This was an achievement made possible through faith in God, themselves, and the country that received them.

I want it known that the task of bringing this narrative to light was initiated by two of my daughters, Marie and Helen. I did not believe it was possible for me to be able to put on paper the facts of my life. I want to show them their faith in me made this possible.



Chapter I

I was born in the city of Avellino in the southern part of Italy. Avellino runs parallel to Naples about 60 kilometers away.

However, I was raised in Atripalda, a place to which my family moved after my father returned from America.

My father had stayed only one month in America. As many other people were doing, he had given up our farm to try his fortune in America. After pooling his resources, he had rented an apartment for his family in the town of Avellino and had sailed for the shores of "the Promised Land" with my brother Luigi, the second son of our family.

There were five children in all. Guiseppe, the oldest, was serving in the Italian army. My sister Emilia, my youngest brother Marco and myself lived in town with mother.

My mother's father, Grandfather Pellegrino, lived with us while my father came to America to try his fortune.

Since I was only four years old, I was too young to realize what was going on. When my father reappeared I was delighted and I could see that my mother was happy too. I can remember sitting in the middle of their large bed playing with some coins that my father had put in my hands.

"American money," he said. I looked at their happy faces and I felt happy too.

My next remembrance is of a happy family living on a small family farm on the outskirts of the town of Atripalda, a town only two or three kilometers away from Avellino. It was like a little isle in itself. On one side our farm was surrounded by the houses of the town. Since our land was at a high level, there was a retaining wall on the other side. At the back of the farm there was a lane which connected with a playground for the children of the town. The town was a little over 5,000 in population and was divided in two by a stream passing right through the town. Two bridges joined the town together.

Life was quiet there. Two nights a week a band played on the main street. The street was wide and couples would stroll in their best clothes, enjoying the fine music.

My mother, Lucia, would first go to church with my sister and myself to receive the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Then we would go to listen to the music. On those occasions I was rather bored. I would take a little nap in church. When we went outside I would hold onto my mother's skirt, leaning first on one leg and then on the other trying to figure out what it was all about. I wondered why I should be made to stand on my legs and listen to the band when I would rather be on the loose and playing around. However, I did not dare leave my mother's skirt because by now it was dark, and I did not want to get lost and walk home alone. I had heard so many stories about spirits coming out at night, especially at places where some accident had occurred. The gate to our farm was located on the side where there was no street and no houses. There was just a stretch of empty land where the boys of the town would play games. A wall separated this playground from our farm. On our side of the wall there was a drop and a small hole in the wall, which allowed a trickle of water to pass through. My mother had a barrel underneath the trickle to catch the water, and in the summertime I would climb into the barrel and enjoy the coolness of the water. Also, as the story goes, there was a legend that a fig tree had once grown near the wall on the side of the farm. The branches of the tree were showing above the wall on the side of the playground, and a boy, tempted by the luscious fruit, climbed the wall to get some. While reaching out to pluck one of the figs, he lost his balance and fell below and died.

That story had me in terror. If I had to pass the gate alone at night, I was sure the spirit would get me. For that reason I did not dare to let go of my mother's skirt on those special nights.

Every Thursday was market day. My mother would dress up in better clothes, take a wicker basket, and do the marketing while my father cleaned the barn. He would put fresh straw on the floor and feed and water the animals. That done, he would have a breakfast of bacon and eggs and then he, too, would go to the market but only to appraise the prices and keep abreast of the trends in selling and buying.

The feeding of the animals was also a part of my mother's chores. Two nights a week, Thursday and Sunday, she would take over the chores of tending to the animals' needs. That work done, my mother, my sister, and I would get ready for our special Sunday night treat.

After church on Sunday, Mother would proceed to prepare a special Sunday meal while my father played bocci with friends. I loved those Sunday mornings watching my father play and I would root for him to win. After dinner, my father would take a rest and, after resting, he would freshen up and go to a certain tavern to play games of cards with friends.

After my mother's work was done, she would take my sister and myself to church for the benediction. Afterwards we would join my father at the tavern. He would call the owner and say, "Filomena, see what Lucia wants," and then my mother would order while Father would finish the game and join

us for supper. After supper we would all go home together. My three brothers were not with us because they were all in America.

One day in school, while I was studying geography, I began to wonder why my father hadn't stayed in America since America seemed so wonderful.

I asked him and he said that since he was a farmer and a free man making his own decisions he could not stand the regimentation of a factory. He did not like to be ordered around and he also did not like to be indoors all day since he loved the open air.

This explanation appeased me though I felt he had not given himself enough time to really find out.

I loved school. Every morning, after delivering milk to a few customers, I would get ready for school. The school, which I attended, started at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 1:30 p.m. with no intermission for lunch. We went five days a week.

Chapter II

I was ten years old when my secure childhood foundation began to crumble. On a cold Thursday morning my mother was getting ready to go marketing. The kitchen was clean and swept and she was ready to go when she suddenly said to me, "Maria, please light the fire. I'm getting the chills."

I proceeded to do what I was told and then she said, "Maria, make a strong fire. I am very cold."

Although the mornings were cold, usually the sun would come out later and warm things up. A fire was needed only mornings and night. Preparing breakfast would warm it up sufficiently enough to be comfortable and at night there would be a fire on the hearth for a few hours. My father would sit near the fire and tell us stories. How I loved those story times! After the stories we said our prayers, and then went to bed.

This particular Thursday morning my mother, much to my disappointment, did not go marketing. I always looked forward to the goodies in her reed basket. She would give these to us when she came home.

There was a bread making day every week. The grain was brought to the mill to stone ground the day before bread making, Mother sifted the grain with a coarse sifter to remove the bran and leave a dark flour for our bread. The same night she would prepare the dough with the yeast and leave it to rise over night.

Those mornings were very special. Mother would make pizza (fried dough) for breakfast, the mouth watering smell of freshly baked bread tantalizing the nostrils.

All that and our peaceful living were being destroyed that chilly Thursday morning. My mother's chills turned out to be pneumonia. Eight days later my mother died. It was January, 1907.

I was too young to realize the enormity of my loss, but soon enough I had to learn. After the funeral there was visiting from relatives and friends, bringing of food and baked sweets and demonstrations of sympathy. All that lasted one week as was the custom.

Then the deep mourning and confinement ended and the family had to adjust and pick up the business of living.

Since I was just ten years old, all the attention had seemed like an endless party. When it stopped, there came the realization that mother wasn't there anymore. I missed her when I went to bed at night. She wasn't in the kitchen in the morning preparing a warm breakfast, and ready to bid me a good day when I went to school. Worst of all she wasn't in the kitchen when I came home from school. The kitchen was empty and cold. I couldn't stand the silence of the empty house. Where there had been cheer, now there was gloom. I would walk through all of the rooms thinking she would be in one of them. Then shivering and afraid, I would grab a few nuts and a piece of bread and run outside, to a straw stack, near the house. I would eat my lunch.

After lunch I would go and search for my sister out on the farm trying, as best as she could, at eleven years of age, to do Mother's work. I would help her as much as I could.

Dinner was prepared by the two of us, if one could call it a dinner.

Our father took over the care of the animals but as much as my sister and I tried hard to make Father's burden easier, it was not enough. We could not bake bread nor wash clothes. That was a task for a seasoned strong person.

Washing clothes took a lot of time. The first step was to fill a basket of two - maybe even three - with soiled clothes. These were brought to a stream to be given a preliminary washing with soap. Then the clothes were brought home, placed loosely in a large wooden tub and a cloth was spread over them. The next step was to spread wood ashes over the cloth, pour boiling water over it, and leave them there over night. The next day the cloth with the ashes was lifted off and the clothes were rubbed again on a wash board. Then you took the wet clothes to the stream again to be rinsed. I used to love to go to the stream for the rinsing because, when I was old enough, I would swish the sheets and shake them over head like a sail scattering water all over me.

If one were lucky and the weather were good, with lots of sunshine, the whole operation took three days.

I remember Mama going over to the clothesline and straightening the clothes into shape. She would put her hands in the pillowcases, turn them around as if one had blown in them like a bag, flatten them, fold them neatly and put them in a pile. She would also shake the sheets straight and fold them.

It took us three days of good weather, every two weeks, to have this work done.

Father realized the necessity of hiring a housekeeper for five days a week. The housekeeper would come early in the morning bringing her own young daughter with her and go home at night after supper.

I would go to school but my sister, being very young herself, got involved in playing with the housekeeper's daughter. The management of the house was left completely to the woman.

My father began to notice things missing and foodstuff diminishing rapidly. The stored supplies had to last till the new harvest. He feared if we ran short that it would cause a serious problem for him.

On one of his marketing Thursdays, he met a friend of his and confided his fears to him. The salary of the woman and the shortage of food would seriously hurt him.

His friend suggested, "Why don't you get married again?" My father answered, "So soon after my wife's death!"

His friend said, "My sister has been a widow for six years. She would be good for you."

And so my father met his future wife. She had three daughters of her own and a son in America. The oldest daughter, Virginia, was older than my sister. The second daughter, Carmela, was a little older than I and Maggie, the third daughter, was younger than I.

My father and the widow came to an understanding. She would bring over her milk cow to increase the revenue of the family, rent her piece of land and the house left by her husband, and come to live at our place. She wanted a father for her three daughters and my father needed a mother for Emily and myself.

Within three months after my mother's death they were married.

My sister resented her in the house, but I welcomed her. Having a substitute mother in the house brought life and warmth once again into our home. My sister was taken by our stepsisters and was having a good time. I felt left out since I was the only one in school, so I decided to quit school and join in the merriment. For awhile I enjoyed the crowd, but I soon began to miss school.

After the first months of adjustment my stepmother began to apportion duties to each child.

Emily was to become an apprentice for dressmaking. Carmela was to learn the trade of sewing linen and the older daughter, Virginia, was to be her helper. The younger girl Maggie was to attend school.

School would close at the end of August and reopen the first of November. I told my father I wanted to enroll.

Life began to run smoothly again. My stepmother was a good manager. She would give each of us an assignment and see to it that it was carried out. If we had a job in common like sewing, mending, or knitting, she would praise the job best done. We all became very active and laborious.

School was still my first love. When I returned to school I realized everyone feared the new teacher since she was considered to be a hard disciplinarian. I was afraid to report to her because I had quit school the previous year. I sat in the last seat in the room, in the rear, hoping she would

not notice me. I would listen, do my work, and skip out of the room at the end of the day. That went on for about a week when she noticed me, a stranger, sitting inconspicuously in the back of the room. She motioned me to come to the front of her desk. I was trembling and my legs were shaking. I stood in front of her. She wanted to know who I was. I gave her my name. Then she asked what I was doing in the back seat. I told her that the year before I had been in the same grade in Miss Loffredo's room but I had quit school. Now I wanted to resume my education. She asked me why I had not reported to her. Tears were rolling in my eyes. I could not tell her that I was afraid of her. She noticed my discomfort and asked again for my name. I said, "Maria Saporito."

She said, "I will straighten this out for you." Miss Maricondi was her name. She assigned me a seat in the third row, closer to her desk, so she could keep an eye on me. I did not like my seat, the last one in the third row, because it was next to the wall and was dark. I did not complain; I was afraid to speak since I did not want to arouse her ire. That whole year I learned a lot from her. She was a strict, good teacher. Looking backwards now I can measure the difference between an easy teacher and a harder one. That was my last formal school year. I was only in the third grade.

Chapter III

Fate had decreed more trouble for us. Father was ailing, complaining about discomfort in his stomach. Instead of going to consult a doctor he followed the suggestions of well meaning friends and tried all kinds of remedies recommended by them. Finally he developed a fever and an inflamed throat and a swollen face. A doctor came to care for him but his medication was not effective. He called for a consultation and the decision was made to take him to a hospital in Naples since there was more equipment there and more experts to deal with his sickness.

My father came downstairs dressed for his short trip. A coach (cab) was waiting to take him to Naples. I came up to him. He said, "Maria, don't kiss me. I will come back."

He never did, not even his body. My older brother Guiseppe, who had returned from America, accompanied him. We had no way to communicate with him. My stepmother was with her second child and had the family to care for, so she could not go with him. Gloom had fallen over our bubbling household and we were anxiously waiting for news. On the third day Guiseppe came back with the news that father had been operated on and was recovering.

The next day a telegram came from the hospital informing us of my father's death. Consternation followed this message. My stepmother screamed that she wanted to go to Naples and then she fainted. Being with child she was put to bed. A doctor was called and he said she could not travel in her condition. Her pregnancy was impaired and she had to have bed rest. Guiseppe went back to Naples to arrange to have the body shipped to our town to be buried in our cemetery. He came back alone with the sad news that when he got there he was informed they had performed an autopsy and buried the remains.

My stepmother worsened with the news. People were coming and going offering their help to my stepmother and the rest of the family. My sorrow was too deep for consoling words. Two and a half years since the death of my mother, I had learned not only the meaning of death but the death of a parent. Those two and a half years were more than ten to me. I

had lived through the complications and loneliness of one household and especially of a young girl needing her mother.

Now that my father was gone what was to become of me? I made myself as inconspicuous as possible. I did not want to be consoled. I wanted to give in to my sorrow and cry. No one missed me. I was a non-identity to be concerned about. What could a twelve-year-old girl possibly know about complicated problems? Night came. I was lying on a bed of freshly threshed straw out on the aria, a round packed surface space made for the purpose of threshing wheat, husking beans and drying corn. It was also an area for drying fruit and vegetables and legumes for storage for the coming winter supplies. There I was when the sky began to be studded with stars. Looking up at the stars I felt utter loneliness and despair. I loved my father and now he was gone too. During those terrible hours I grew like a sturdy oak tree. As darkness was descending, unfolding all around me. I got up and went upstairs to my stepmother's bedroom. I leaned over the bed and said, "Ma, you've got to stay well. What would become of us if you don't?"

It never occurred to me what was to follow later. This was the only family I had and she was the head of it. There were six children - three girls from her first husband, my sister and I, a two-year-old boy of hers and my father, and one to come.

Miraculously, she recovered. I expected life to continue the same, only she had to be both mother and father and we had to work a little harder. I never had gone through the process of a home being broken.

My stepmother had expected to retain custody of my sister and myself but my brother Guiseppe contested the legality of the custody. We were minors and had no say in the dispute. A family council consisting of my uncle (my father's brother), and a few cousins was formed. The council decreed that my sister and I should be my brother's wards and that he was to be our legal guardian.

I was not happy with the separation from the household that I considered rightfully mine. My stepmother and my brother haggled over the division of the little property my father had left and over the harvest.

My father died at the beginning of July, the wheat had already been taken care of and there was work to be done on the grapevines, but the main work had been finished. Now it was time to begin gathering the harvest. Guiseppe was claiming the legality of the settlement. My stepmother was aware it meant her very livelihood. All this was very oppressive and I was more unhappy every day.

The school closed on the last day of August and reopened the first of November. There was no talk about going back. I did not dare to ask. I had to work to earn my living. The day the school opened I felt my heart was breaking. There was peace and sanctuary in learning. I began to lose weight and my skin became dry.

My sister had found refuge at my uncle's house. He had asked my brother if my sister could go and live at his house for awhile. He was a widower with an only daughter who was sick and there was no one to attend to her needs. It would be a great relief to have my sister there. My brother agreed and Emily went to live with my uncle. Guiseppe was relieved to see her go because, being older than I, she would give him arguments. Emily was happy with my uncle. She managed the whole household and cared for our cousin. The daughter got well and my uncle asked if Emily could stay on to be company to his daughter who had become very fond of her.

Guiseppe decided to let her stay. She would come home weekends, look at me, and cry.

Winter passed. In the month of May, in a nearby town, there was a celebration of a saint's feast. My brother decided to attend with the whole family and his mother-in-law. I was given the job of taking care of the young child. He was just beginning to walk and had to be carried most of the time. I was not enjoying the occasion. In the middle of the square there was a woman sitting in a chair. She was dressed in black with a black band covering her eyes. She was a mind reader. There was a man standing in front of her who would incite the circle of people standing around to have their fortune told. Something prompted me to step forward and pay the two cents required as the price. The man asked the woman what she was seeing. Her answer was, "A very young girl, an orphan and very unhappy. The future looks brighter because she will pass over a lot of water." Then she stopped.

My sister-in-law's mother wanted to know what the fortuneteller meant when she said that I was very unhappy. I answered, "I don't know what she means."

Chapter IV

The next month Guiseppe received a call from the custodian of the cemetery. He was to bring a gallon of white wine and a quart of alcohol. He needed to clean the bones of my mother since her coffin had been exhumed. If he did not want to preserve the bones they would be put with the unclaimed, and at a given time, incinerated. Of course there was a fee for this work.

My brother, being busy, sent me over to the caretaker's house to deliver the requested wine and alcohol. I knocked at the caretaker's door and a woman appeared. It was his wife. I said, "I brought the wine your husband requires to clean my mother's bones."

She said, "He is at the chapel in the cemetery. Bring the wine to him."

Outside the chapel there was a closed coffin. I called. No one answered. Then I heard voices coming from the next chapel. I assumed he would be there. I went over, entered the chapel, and saw an open coffin containing the remains of a man with a mustache and no one else. The voices came from the burial grounds underneath the chapel. I called. Three people came up. I said I had come to bring the wine. One spoke up, "Go outside and wait for me. I am almost finished."

A cemetery did not frighten me. I was accustomed to seeing all kinds of skulls in semifinished niches where bones were deposited after being exhumed from their graves to make room for more deaths. People would buy a niche if they could afford one to use as a depository for the family remains. These niches measured about eighteen inches square and were closed with a white marble slab. Some people, not having the money for the marble slab, would leave the front open until they could afford one. Others would not claim the bones and they would be put all together in a room to be incinerated in due time. I had even seen the body of a baby in a glass coffin propped on a stool.

On All Souls' Day the cemetery would be open to the public so they could pay respect to their dead. On the first and second day of November people would bring garlands of flowers and burn candles on the graves of their loved ones.

No, I was not afraid of cemeteries, but I was not prepared to witness that to which I was exposed.

The caretaker, having finished his business with the other people, came up to me and said, "Follow me."

I followed him to the front of the chapel where I had seen the unopened coffin. He stopped and said, "This is your mother's coffin." He lifted the lid in front of me and there was my mother already dead three and a half years. Nothing had changed, the same composure, only her skin was dark brown. I was paralyzed. He proceeded to explain that her dress was of silk. If it had been cotton it would have deteriorated. With the point of a large knife he slit the dress and then inserted the point of the knife in my mother's nostrils and lifted the skull. He proceeded to dismember my mother's body, scraping off the flesh from the bones. I asked if I could leave and he said, "Yes."

I was in a daze. I could not believe what I had seen. At home I lay on my bed but I could not sleep. The memory of what I had witnessed haunted me. I could not eat. My sister-in-law wanted to know what the matter was but I could not talk about it. It was imbedded in my mind but I could not formulate it in words. My stepmother wanted to know if anything had happened to me and I would answer, "Nothing." Meanwhile, my nights were a nightmare. Sleep would not come. Every little noise would make me jump. Little by little no one asked me anymore. I was living with the horror of remembrance. The nights were the worst. In the daytime there was life around me. At night, alone in the darkness of my room, lying on my bed, sleep would not come. I kept seeing the man with the black mustache and the caretaker lift my mother's skull with the point of his knife. I surely would have lost my mind from the haunting agony if something had not happened.

Chapter V

My brother Guiseppe became dissatisfied with his life in Italy and decided to return to America. Because he was my sister's and my guardian he would take us with him. This had to be after harvest. I could not have lived in the house, town, or country without a nervous breakdown. The news infused hope in me. Once I was far away the nightmare would go away.

The next few months dragged by very slowly. The mirage of new places softened my fears. I was counting the hours and days of when I would leave for the Promised Land.

In September I went to work with one of my stepsisters on a farm owned by her aunt. The work consisted of gathering hazelnuts. A man would shake the tall trunks of the clump with a heavy wooden hammer. The nuts would separate from the half opened soft outer shells and drop to the ground. We would gather them and put them in a basket, which we carried on our arms. They would be dumped into a large container, which would be picked up by the men.

The work was to be divided into two portions. I would go for two weeks and Emily the last two weeks so we both would have a little money when we sailed for America.

On the Sunday that my sister was to relieve me and take over the work of gathering nuts, my employer asked me to go to town on an errand. I ran to the town and back. I wanted to be there when my sister arrived.

When I got back, Aunt Agnes told me that my brother and sister had just left. They had arrived while I was in town. They wanted to visit Saint Sylvester's shrine before sailing for America and they had stopped to pick me up. I said, "Why didn't they wait for me?"

Aunt Agnes replied, "They had to leave in a hurry because they didn't want to be caught up in the mountain before it got dark." I asked how long ago they had left and she said it had been about ten minutes.

I said, "I want to go. I'll catch up to them."

She wrapped a piece of cheese and bread in a napkin and said, "Eat this on the way."

I left running. I was positive that I would catch up with them. I had wanted so very badly to visit Saint Sylvester's shrine. There was a legend that the saint performed miracles. If one had sores of any sort, he would be cured immediately by bathing in a well up on the mountain. Every summer there were many pilgrims seeking the saint's cure. Now this was the last chance for me to be able to visit the shrine. I ran as hard as my young legs would carry me.

When I got to the bottom of the mountain there was a feast in the town of Sumonte for the Virgin Mary. Thousands of people had gathered there from villages in the vicinity. I still wished to climb the mountain but now I was afraid because I had heard that wolves roamed the mountains in the winter. Nevertheless, I wanted to catch up with my sister and brother.

I asked a storekeeper where the road was that led to the shrine and he said, "Who are you with?" I told him that I was hoping to catch up with my brother and sister. He said they could not possibly be up there because the trail was closed for the winter.

I was stunned! What was I to do now? I decided to search in the crowd for Guiseppe and Emilia. I knew that my brother loved feasts and bands and he surely would stay to enjoy the procession and the music. I searched all over but it was useless.

By now the sun had gone down and I was afraid to go back home. It was a long distance from Sumonte to Avellino. I decided to buy something to eat and after eating I thought I would hire a buggy for the ride home, but then decided I did not trust a strange driver.

I went inside the church to pray and try to find a way. Once in church my fears seemed to disappear. I felt secure and protected by God. My decision was made. I would stay inside the church for the night and go home in the morning to Atripalda. My sister would take my place at gathering hazelnuts, and no one would know the difference. I dozed in church until I was awakened by a hand shaking me. It was the sexton telling me that the church had to be closed and I had to leave. He wanted to know whom I was with. I said to him, "I want to stay in the church for the night because I have no place to go and no one is with me."

He said he could not allow me to do that. The church had to be empty when he closed the door.

I refused to leave. Here was a sanctuary of safety. The sexton came back with a couple more men and they identified themselves as being from Atripalda. They would take me home. I refused. I did not trust anyone and I was afraid to go home in the small hours of the morning. My brother would not understand my predicament.

The sexton was at his wit's end. He went to his home nearby and came back with one of his daughters offering me hospitality and safety in his home. I would be sleeping with his two daughters and leave in the morning. I felt safe in their care and went home with them. His wife was very warm and

solicitous and brought out a lot of food. I told them I had eaten but they insisted I should have more.

That night I slept with the two grown up daughters of the sexton. Their bed was very comfortable and I slept like a log the whole night.

When I awoke the sun was high in the sky. I looked around but saw no one. I called and the mother appeared and offered breakfast. I told her I wasn't hungry, thanked her and left. I was anxious to get home.

No one questioned my whereabouts. It was assumed I had stayed overnight at Aunt Agnes and left in the morning. I had not reckoned with Emily when she came back from Aunt Agnes. She wanted to know what I had done that Sunday when I had not caught up with them. I told her the whole story. She promised to not tell anyone but she held the secret like the sword of Damocles. Every time she wanted her way she would threaten to tell Guiseppe. Finally I got tired of catering to her and told her I would tell the story myself and she would not have to keep the secret anymore. After all, I had not done anything wrong! That ended the whole affair.

Finally, everything had been taken care of. The house and land were rented, the harvest sold, and the furnishings disposed of. The passport was ready and the passage assured. We were ready to leave for the land that was to become my home.

On the second day of November, a beautiful morning, sunny and mild, I awoke to the certainty of leaving my nightmare and unhappiness behind. I was looking forward to a happy future. My brother urged us to hurry so we would not miss the train. My stepmother was the only one seeing us off. She was carrying a bundle of our belongings on her head. She was carrying on a nervous conversation telling my sister and myself to be good and not to forget to write. The train arrived on time and we said good-by, good-by to all I had ever known. My stepmother slipped a little money in my hand and told me to spend it in Naples. Then she left. I started to cry. I could not stop - I was like a child being pulled out of her mother's arms. All I had known was there - good and bad - and now it was no more. My tears kept coming during the train ride. When I got off the train my eyes were red and blurred.

I had looked forward so much to seeing the city of Naples. Instead I was reviewing the life that I was leaving behind. As we descended the train we were surrounded by the carabinieri (police) asking us about our destination. We said, "America." They set us aside from some of the others and took us to an army camp. We were told we had to be quarantined because cases of cholera had broken out in the city. I was very disappointed because the city of Naples had been my dream city for a long time.

That night we slept in clean army beds, and we had plenty of good food there. I should have appreciated it, but I didn't. I wanted to leave for America!

While there, I was bitten by a mosquito on the eyelid. That was the very first time I had ever been bitten. My eye became swollen and I was worried,

very worried, that I would not pass the medical examination at the point of embarkation and that I would be left behind.

The ship was not allowed to enter port as a precautionary measure against contamination by cholera so the passengers had to embark by different means. The ship anchored three miles away from the city and I went on a rowboat and had to ascend the ship by means of a ladder.

Once I was on board, I felt I was on my way to a new life. Supper was our first meal. I was glad to approach the window dispensing the food. The food was placed in the container furnished us when we came aboard. The container and utensils had to serve us for the whole voyage and we had to wash and care for them. Usually the food consisted of a one-dish meal. I was hungry and ate very heartily.

After eating I proceeded to get acquainted with the ship by walking around it. I sat at the table on deck, which was designed to serve as dining table, reading table, and whatever one chose to do at it. When it rained you had to amuse yourself as best as you could.

We were sent to our berths early. I wanted to stay up to observe when the ship started to move. I was told by my brother to take the upper berth because it was better. I climbed and stretched my legs. It had been an exhausting day and I was soon fast asleep.

During the night the girl sleeping on the berth next to mine woke up. She said, "Maria, please come to the women's room. I feel sick."

I rubbed my eyes to acquaint myself with the surroundings and began to descend. The lady on the lower berth was vomiting. That stirred my stomach. After going with the girl I came back to my berth. After seeing so many people sick, I felt sick too. In the morning no one could partake of breakfast. The people were told to leave. The dormitory and go on deck because the room had to be cleaned and disinfected. Everyone lay on the deck moaning and exhausted. Suddenly our stomachs calmed and many heads went up. A change had taken place. The seasickness had come to a halt. People stood up and looked around.

The most magnificent panorama spread before our eyes. The city of Palermo, capital of Sicily, lay in the full splendor of the sun bathed in the blue water of the Mediterranean Sea. It beckoned to us in a friendly way but we were not allowed to enter the magnificent city, because of the possibility of contamination by us. Palermo did not have cases of cholera. The reason we had come here was to pick up some cargo and more passengers. Our short stay consisted of loading food supplies for the voyage.

The new passengers stared at our group. We were also looking them over. They were strangers to us and we were strangers to them. Their dialect was different from ours. At suppertime these newcomers went to the window for their rations in order to satisfy their appetites, just as we had done the previous day. Since we knew what could happen we partook of the food sparingly.

When I got up the next morning all of the new passengers lay on the deck moaning. Poor people! They too had to pay the price of the first day at sea. When the ship entered the high seas everyone was well again.

We who embarked in Naples never mixed with the passengers from Sicily. Their dialect and clothing made them different. The important thing was that we did not know them and they did not know us. We came from Naples and were Napolitanos and they came from Sicily. They were Sicilians. The feeling aboard was that we were two people instead of one.

The voyage was quite interesting for a young girl. I was only fourteen. What really amused me most of all was a passenger who was sort of a clown because he entertained the people with his antics. He was called "barbut" because he had a very thick beard.

On board I discovered the library. I became interested in novels and fairy tales. I was so fascinated with them that I read every fairy tale that was on board.

Another one of my pastimes was to watch the men play cards. Also, I liked to run around the ship from bow to stern and back again.

When land appeared on the sixteenth day after leaving the port of Naples, it was so fascinating to me that I wanted to shout for joy because now I was coming to the beautiful America. After a couple of hours we began to see the outline of the American shore and buildings. The Statue of Liberty with the light high in her hand was inviting us to come over.

On arriving in New York harbor a commission would board the ship to inspect the logs and to check on any mishaps or stowaways aboard the ship. As it happened, even with all the precautions taken by the officers of the ship, three cases of cholera occurred during the passage. I recall that the passengers had been asked to go to the back of the ship and three burlap bags containing the bodies were thrown into the sea from the front.

Consequently, the ship did not pass the inspection. The passengers were taken to Hoffman Island by boats and quarantined. Conditions at the island were deplorable. We were given one blanket and a pillow. The berths were without mattresses and the building was poorly heated. The links of the berth were poking into our bodies. Breakfast consisted of a cup of black coffee, one cold boiled egg and a piece of bread. Lunch was a bowl of soup. At night, every night, we had boiled spaghetti without any gravy. Every morning we had to be in line for a medical inspection.

On the fifth day the immigrants formed a commission to deliver a message to the authorities. The message stated that the passengers should be released or sent back to their country. The decision was effective for boats came to the island to bring the immigrants to Ellis Island, the point of disembarkation. There we had to pass another physical.

My brother did not pass the questioning because there were six people in the family and only one supporter. We were retained overnight so we could appear in court the next day.

That night we slept in the battery at Ellis Island. The food was excellent and in abundance. The dormitory was warm and the berths were of canvas and comfortable. That night I slept comfortably.

The courtroom was in the same building. After breakfast we were told to go sit in the courtroom and wait for our call. All this was very strange to me. I began to look around. I saw a very black woman with three small children. I had never seen a black person before. I was fascinated. The whole group seemed very beautiful. The lady seemed very refined and the children well behaved.

When my brother's name was called, he approached the judge's bench. He was asked how he intended to support his family. My brother told the judge in his own words since he could speak a little broken English. He said his sisters would not become a public charge because he could support them at first. Later they would be able to get jobs. Since Guiseppe (Joe) had lived and worked in America he had some proof for the judge. He handed the judge his excellent work record, a letter of reference from the Harvester farm equipment company and some pay envelopes showing good wages. This was evidence enough and we received the judge's approval.

Once again I was on another train. This time our destination was Philadelphia. We arrived in Philadelphia when it was dark.

I was not impressed with what I saw. We were in the poor section where there were narrow cobblestone streets, dark alleys and small houses. That night we slept in a second rate lodging.

Next morning everything looked hopeful. Guiseppe began looking for a place to live. He found a place in an alley. There were four families living there and each family had three rooms. The other three families were Jewish immigrants.

The day after we arrived was Thanksgiving Day. My brother told me it was chicken day because of all the chickens and turkeys that were getting killed. I did not believe it was the day to celebrate the killing of the chickens but I accepted my brother's words because he knew more about holidays in America than I did.

The day after Thanksgiving he took my sister and me shopping for clothes. It was the end of November and we needed everything - coats, dresses, hats and shoes. After that was accomplished the next step was to find a job for Emilia and myself. Guiseppe bought an Italian newspaper and searched the help wanted column. He took my sister and myself to a cigar factory where we secured a job. My work was very tedious. It did not include making cigars or cigarettes but consisted of stripping the hard part of the tobacco leaves. The wages were meager, \$3.50 a week for 55 hours of work. Those were hard times. Most of the immigrants who had come to seek a new beginning in America found themselves under sweatshop conditions.

With this little amount of money my sister and I had to pay back our brother for the expense of the clothes and the voyage. The amount to pay back for each of us was \$52.00. This seemed like an enormous sum for girls earning as little as we did.

Our living conditions were far from ideal but we were able to live. Our home consisted of three rooms. On the first floor was a kitchen that served as dining and living room. On the second floor was the bedroom my brother and his wife shared with their two children and on the third floor was Emilia's and my bedroom. The house was heated by a kitchen coal stove and no heat ever reached the third floor.

State Street in Philadelphia was a very commercialized street and very bizarre. Many merchants had a barker at the entrance of their stores and they would entice prospective customers to come in. Sometimes they would grab people by the arm to bring them inside. Twice a day I would pass this street going and coming from work. On the curb there were pushcarts with fruits and vegetables. I had never seen a banana or a grapefruit. I loved the bananas but the grapefruit left a bitter taste in my mouth. It was too sour for me.

There was no refrigeration then so provisions had to be bought every day. State Street was very convenient.

Routine was set for us in this land of opportunity. It meant working ten hours a day, coming home, reading an Italian newspaper, *IL Progresso*, and going to an occasional movie which cost five cents. That was our chief entertainment. There was another place that had a vaudeville show plus a film but that cost ten cents. The film was usually a cowboy picture. I loved going out on those nights.

One Sunday morning while my brother and sister were attending church I stayed home to prepare dinner. Two fellows came to the door. I asked them what they were looking for. One of them said, "Does Guiseppe Saporito live here?"

I answered, "Who are you?"

They said they were cousins of his wife and had come to visit. I invited them in but they declined. I told them he was at church with my sister. They decided to go and meet Guiseppe and Emilia at church. I thought that they would never find the church since they were new in the area but they left.

They came back after I had just gotten back from purchasing more food. I knew my brother would want them to eat with us and, lo and behold, my brother was with them! I was amazed. To have found my brother these fellows must be pretty smart!

After dinner Guiseppe wanted to show them Fairmount Park, a beautiful park in Philadelphia. I was invited to go along but I declined because I felt my duty was to be with my sister when her boyfriend called. I was taking over my sister-in-law's responsibility because she was working in New Jersey. She was working on a farm picking strawberries.

My sister and I joined her in July picking other fruits and vegetables. We picked blackberries in August. We were migrant workers and living conditions were deplorable, but I enjoyed that work that summer. Being young everything savored of adventure. I liked to shuffle my bare feet in the warm sandy soil. I liked the fresh air and chasing fireflies when it got dark. I liked to bathe in a ditch of water in the hot afternoons with other women workers. The experience of picking blackberries reminded me of Italy and how I used to pick blackberries so I could eat them fresh from the bushes.

That fall, life's routine was interrupted by one of my sister-in-law's cousins. One of the fellows I had met and entertained that summer appeared at our house again. This time he not only visited us but also informed us that he had come to stay. He wanted to find work and live in Philadelphia. I had been on the third floor. Hearing voices, I headed for the kitchen. There was Nicola. Instinctively I knew that he had come for me. I realized that this stranger was going to be my husband. It was a premonition that I had. I was only fifteen then. Guiseppe liked Nicola and invited him to live with us. A rolling bed was placed in the kitchen. At night after everyone had retired he would open the bed and sleep there. He liked the arrangement but I was not sure about it. He would go out most of the nights or play cards with my brother. Sometimes my sister-in-law and I would join in. At times, after reading the newspaper, we would discuss politics. He would buy a newspaper written in English and tell us the English version of what we had read in Italian.

My brother became dissatisfied with his current job and decided to look around for another one. This time he located one in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania, an industrial town seventeen miles north of Philadelphia. Bridgeport was quite rural, although industrialized too.

My sister and I found a job in Norristown, a bigger town across the river, in a hosiery factory. Our house was a large one. It had six rooms and a shed attached to the house. There were no utilities except running water. The shed was used as a summer kitchen. The rooms were large. On the first floor there was a living room, kitchen and a nice front porch. There was an outhouse in the back yard. On the second floor there were two large rooms - one for my brother and his wife and the other for their two children. On the third floor there was a room for my sister and myself, and another room, a spare room.

Guiseppe planted a big garden in the back yard. We lived quite comfortably in Bridgeport.

Emilia and I worked at a very tedious job in the hosiery factory. We manned a long machine with a bar across containing nail points. The bar extended across the whole length of the machine. We would pin rejected work to the nail points. The lower part of the machine contained rows of bobbins that looked like bowling pins. We would stretch the rejected stocking threads to the bobbins to reclaim the yarn. The bobbin would roll around

filling up with the yarn. Every time the yarn broke we tied a knot. That went on all day long. We walked up and down the length of the machine. Every time there was an empty pin we would hand one more stocking and we would continue that operation all day. The work was neither inspiring nor promising but furnished us a means of living.

One day the floor lady approached me with a proposition. There was a new type of machine in the next room to accelerate a different type of work. Would I give it a try? I said that I would. The new work doubled my income and also offered me the opportunity to learn a better paying job.

I began to enjoy life in Bridgeport. With more money I could afford better clothes. I made friends in the neighborhood and at work.

When Nicola appeared on the scene again I was now certain that he came because of me, but I was still very young and not ready yet to be caught in the net of matrimony. Nicola started to pay open attention and even showed signs of jealousy. I was having too good a time to want to start a serious commitment. He resented the attention any other boys paid me. I began to resent his attitude.

Finally he declared himself. He said he loved me and wanted to marry me. I had begun to live my youth fully at sixteen and I told Nicola I was not ready to marry. He was hurt by my refusal and told Guiseppe that he was going back to Newark, the place where he had originally lived.

Social life found me in the center of things. The friends I had made and the fellows I met made my life in Bridgeport a wonderful one. On Sunday afternoon there would be a gathering of young people at various neighbors' houses. We would dance and sing while the accordion supplied the music. It was usually played by one of the young boys. The boys would buy a few pints of beer and the party atmosphere was very enjoyable. Life was becoming very interesting and I loved it but a letter from Nicola to my brother urging him to move to Newark took away this life of gaiety. This city had more opportunities for moulders, my brother's occupation. In Bridgeport he was working in a paper mill.

I was very sad to leave my friends, but since I was his ward and a minor, I was obligated to follow my brother. During my stay in Bridgeport my sister had married and now lived in Philadelphia. Instead of going to Newark with Guiseppe I really wanted to live in Philadelphia with my sister but my brother threatened to have me arrested. At this difficult time I really wanted to be near Emilia.

In order to secure a job and find a place to live in Newark my brother left ahead of us. We joined him later. When we arrived in Newark by train we were met by my brother and Nicola. Nicola said hello and I greeted him back. Nicola paired off with me and took me to see Bamberger's Department Store and its escalator. He urged me to go on the escalator so I did. It was a thrilling new experience. After that he took us to dinner at the place where he was boarding.

Joseph (Guiseppe) had an apartment ready for us to live in but the furniture had not yet arrived from Bridgeport so we had to lodge for the night elsewhere.

Orientation to Newark was not easy. Philadelphia is divided into squares - north, south, east and west. Therefore it was easy to know your whereabouts. Newark streets were not planned as well.

After finally getting my sense of direction I began to hunt for a job, any job. I needed money. At one place of work there was another girl waiting to be interviewed. She was interviewed first. When she emerged she looked happy. I assumed that she had gotten a job, and that the outlook for me to be hired looked good.

I was ushered into the same office. The interviewer asked many questions, such as why did I want to work. My answer was that I needed money to live on. He responded, "You are a beautiful girl. You should live a better life than having to work."

He insinuated that I could own a car with a chauffeur if I wanted to. These words of luxuries kind of frightened me. Then he asked me if I had a boyfriend and I told him I had. After finding this information he told me I could go. Once I was outside I ran all the way home. I realized in what manner he wanted to use me. I did not even know what the English word prostitute meant. He tried to take advantage of my innocence and lead me to a corrupt life.

After that job interview I did not give up hunting for work. Luck was with me. I found one in another hosiery factory working in a better position than the one in Bridgeport. This new job paid better and I was able to save some money but even with this success I missed the life I lived in Pennsylvania. I missed my sister.

Nicola was pressing me to be married so we could live near my sister. The idea appealed to me. No definite plans had been decided but one morning I was called into the office by my employer. He said there was a young man that wanted to see me. To my surprise it was Nicola! He said that he had quit his job and was going to Philadelphia to look for another but first he wanted me to go to city hall with him so a marriage license could be issued. I was confused and taken by surprise. The thought of living near Emily appealed to me very much. I consented to go to city hall for the license. At the city hall we were told to come back in three days with witnesses. Nicola asked my brother and a friend of his to be witnesses. After we returned the clerk asked for the usual fee of three dollars, then he left and everyone went back to their jobs. Nicola left for Philadelphia.

Three days later he came back without a job.

It took us three months to get ready to have the marriage performed in church. We went to see our parish priest to acquaint him with our intentions. The priest asked if we had the license. We said, "Yes," and handed him the certificate we had received in city hall.

He looked at the paper and said, "Why did you do this?" I looked at the priest and said, "Do what?"

He answered, "You were married in a civil ceremony."

I said, "Father, we came here to be married."

He answered, "You should have brought the license to me. I would have taken care of the rest."

After the banns were read in three Sunday masses we were married in the church. There was a small reception. Nicola's friend was best man and my sister was matron of honor.

We had rented a two-room apartment where the bathroom was shared by four tenants. The water was in the hall. There was no heat, which meant we had to buy a coal stove. We also had to buy furniture and kitchen equipment. We had no gas and no electricity. Light was provided for by a kerosene lamp.

We had a few luxuries. Nicola invested in a china cabinet and I in a rocker.

This was the beginning of our married life. I was not quite seventeen and marriage was a life long commitment and I began to work at it. My husband was a good man, lighthearted and friendly and very much in love with me. Like all newlyweds the beginning was difficult for us. We had assumed too many responsibilities too soon. We had to pay installments on our furniture, rent and coal for the stove, kerosene for the lamp, and food. The stove served us both summer and winter. In the summer we fired the stove with wood.

My husband lost his job just before Christmas. We had married at the end of September. We had no money, but we invited a few friends to help celebrate our first Christmas. We borrowed the money for our celebration.

Hunting for a job in winter is a hard task. After a few weeks of fruitless searching on the part of my husband, I decided to ask my previous boss if he would rehire me. He did. For a young married girl life was not easy. I had to be at work at 8:00 a.m. Before leaving for work I had to prepare breakfast over a wood stove. After working all day I would come home to prepare supper. Then I would clean up. These tasks took care of weekdays. On weekends shopping, cleaning, scrubbing the floors and laundry had to be done. Laundry was done in a tub with a bench used as a support and the water had to be brought in from the hall. However, these tedious tasks were compensated by lighter moments. Friends would drop in nights to play cards or just talk. We had company constantly. Nicola was a very gregarious person and loved to be with friends. Since I had regained my job we were able to pay off some of the bills and save a few dollars and it was at this time I realized that I would become a mother. That was a sweet moment because I wanted a child very badly. Nicola wasn't told right away because I wanted to be very sure first. I was very happy with my secret since I did not have morning sickness or the other disturbances that accompany pregnancy. I

wanted to taste every moment of it, holding my breath and waiting for a sign of life in me. When I told Nicola he was as happy as I was and began to urge me to quit work. He was concerned for the baby and me. The next few months were the happiest of my life. I was enjoying my pregnancy. When my baby arrived I was overjoyed. There with me now was a baby all of my own. Since I was the youngest of three brothers and a sister I had missed not having a younger brother or sister. That, plus not having any grandparents, had made me feel cheated while I was growing up.

My baby girl was beautiful. We named her after her grandmother on her father's side as was the custom of the times. We named her Carmela.

My life was full. I was a woman with a husband and a baby of my own. Nicola and I were both very happy. At the age of eighteen, I was a wife and mother and with all the responsibilities that those jobs entail.

Nicola decided to change his occupation to that of a moulder since he had some previous experience in that trade. It was hard work where hot liquid iron is poured into forms prepared during the day. He wanted to make more money for his family. Still we lived in the same house where the bathroom was outside and our living quarters consisted of only two rooms, but now we had water in our kitchen. We were quite content.

A letter arrived from my brother Luigi who lived in Batavia, New York. He asked us to come and live there. He was also a moulder with much experience and his letter promised that he would be able to get a job for my husband. I had my doubts about moving but Nicola liked the idea and quit his job. I was worried about our financial situation. If my husband did not get the job we did not have any security to fall back on. I had not seen my brother Luigi since he left Italy. I was only eight years old at the time. Now I began to look forward to a new environment and maybe a better way of life.

Nicola left to go and find that promised job and a new future. We corresponded daily. He did not get a job there but I was looking forward to joining him and seeing my brother and his family. However, there was a fly in the ointment. We did not have the money to move. Luigi was not able to help because he had six children, his wife and his mother-in-law to support.

After a month in Batavia, Nicola came back home. I had missed him as much as he had missed me. However, when he came back we had our first quarrel. I was disappointed because the whole trip had been useless and I had very much wanted to see my brother.

Conditions improved. Nicola went back to his job and life proceeded at the same level. My little baby was growing quite beautifully and our family was happy and content.

A few months later I realized I was with child again and this realization pleased me. I wanted a large family and it looked as if I was beginning it quite nicely. My second child was also a girl. She was born sixteen months after my first one. We named her Lucia after my mother. Nicola and I were quite proud of our growing family.

In 1914 World War I broke out. At first America was not involved, but later when President Wilson was elected for the second term his promise of keeping us out of the war did not hold. Due to circumstances and provocation our country entered the war.

Nicola was drafted. He was classified fourth class for having a family of four.

We moved to a better place, which had three rooms, running water and an inside bathroom. Each day we lived in fear and anxiety because the newspaper headlines about our involvement scared me. I prayed that a miracle would happen and that somehow the war would end.

A year later a pact was signed between Italy and the United States. This affected my husband since it was specified that every Italian man had to serve in the war in Italy or in America since Italy was now one of our allies. My brother, who owned property in Italy, decided to go there. He had already served in the Italian army. My brother urged Nicola to go, too, because his immediate family was there, but my husband declined. He felt he was needed in America and it was his obligation to serve here.

At this time I was carrying my third child and I was pleased that he had made this decision.

The war was a nightmare. More and more men were replacing the ones who had died in it. During these furious battles those classified in the third classification were called to serve. I had my third child then, a boy, but the fighting was depriving us of happiness. Then those who were classified as fourth were being called. I thought, for sure, my husband would have to serve. We were resigned to fulfilling our duty to this country.

Then one day, like a miracle, the sirens began to scream. People ran in the streets. It was the eleventh of November and the armistice had been signed!

World War I had caused shortages, which affected many people in the eastern part of the U.S. and possibly the whole country. The winter of 1917-1918 was a hard one. It produced snow in the early part of December and the snow lasted until late in March. Some of the coldest temperatures on record were recorded.

Coal was needed to keep our house warm, but due to a severe shortage it became necessary for the government to ration coal. My husband, who had suffered a severe burn on his foot at work, was home sick and we also had three small children. All of us could barely endure the sub-zero temperatures with the little coal we had. My baby had been born in January into a world of freezing temperatures. My coal supplies ran out and I would not get more. Something had to be done.

I decided to visit the office that controlled the fuel supply. It was nice and warm in the office. An employee asked me what I wanted and I answered, "Coal."

She said, "We have no coal here. Go to your supplier." I said, "I have. He said he was out of coal."

She said, "I cannot help."

I answered, "Yes you can. You have it nice and warm here. The prisoners are kept warm in jail. My three small children are freezing and one is a baby!"

I was very angry. I wanted to hit her with a chair so I could go to jail to protect my babies from the cold. Then a door opened and a man came out and said, "What's the trouble?"

I told him my predicament and he said, "Do you have the money to pay for the coal?"

I said I did. He said, "Go home. You'll have coal this afternoon." I left and went directly home. A truck with coal was already there. This sight was a relief to me.

The calamity was over but another one was soon to follow. This time it was the Spanish flu! The first casualty in my street was my next door neighbor, a father of five children. Exactly as the sirens were ushering in the good news of the signed armistice, his coffin was coming out the door. This malady hit like a fury. Many families lost one or more members.

Aunt Rafaela who had only been in this country three years became ill with the flu. One of her two sons had sent for her from Italy and she and I had become very close. Nicola forbade me to leave the house for fear of contacting the disease and infecting the children. However, I could not see my beloved aunt who was very devoted to me and very helpful, being abandoned without care or comfort. Her sons had already recovered from the sickness and returned to work. I used to call her my old aunt since I was twenty-one and she was sixty-three. That seemed very old to me. I disregarded Nicola's wishes, left the children with my landlady, and went to her apartment. She was alone and in bed. The room was cold and there was no fire in the stove. I started the fire, cleaned her room, washed her clothes, made some soup and left. My husband never knew that I had gone. He would have been furious because I could have caught the disease. However, I didn't, and neither did my family.

My brother Luigi was hit very hard too. His wife and mother-in-law landed in a hospital with the youngest child, a baby only ten months old. The whole family came down with the malady. I went to my brother's to help. I found clothes to be washed, ashes to be carted away, and food to be prepared. I took care of the immediate needs.

Two days later the baby died and was brought home from the hospital. My husband and I assisted in the preparation for the funeral and the burial. His mother-in-law was discharged from the hospital the day before the funeral.

The disease abated and a period of readjustment took place after the onslaught of the war and the flu.

I was becoming aware of American politics. Although I still read only an Italian newspaper I found myself understanding English words and phrases. I was becoming Americanized. There was a period of restlessness for me because I wanted a better life for us.

My husband quit his job and opened a vegetable and fruit store. We had three children. Orazio, the baby, was a year and a half old. After a few months of operation the new venture failed.

Nicola went back to work and we moved to a bigger place. We needed a bigger place for our growing family. I was pregnant with our fourth child. Life was monotonous for me.

My brother Joe (Guiseppe) had returned from serving in the Italian army. He suggested that I read some books. I told him I couldn't afford to buy any. He suggested that I go and borrow some from the library. I was unaware of this benefit. I thought a library was for reference only. I still didn't believe this so I said, "Guiseppe, are you kidding me? Can I check out books?" He assured me I could check out as many as I wanted to. I went to the library, where a library card was issued to me, and I brought some books home. I read many books, all in the Italian language. They kept me absorbed and provided interesting material for a young mother, 23 years old, with four young children.

Times were good. It was 1920 when Harding was elected our new president. I became more interested in politics as I found out that the Republican Party had taken over. To me Republicans stood for wealth and work and these two aspects of this political party were important for me at the very vital time of my growing family. We needed all the money we could get and there was the hope that maybe someday we would have even more.

A recession developed and lasted for the next two years. Life was not easy then. Because we had no modern conveniences, clothes had to be washed by hand in a tub with a washboard. They had to be boiled to make them safe and sanitary. Washing clothes was a typical day's duty. I did not mind it at all because I was very proud of my clean wash hanging outside on the line.

At the beginning of 1920 Nicola became sick with pneumonia. The attending doctor came every day. I asked him to vaccinate my three older children. Carmela was ready to enter school. In my ignorance I wanted both my daughters to start school together. Lucia started kindergarten and Carmela first grade. The vaccine did not work on the girls.

Orazio came down with a fever. I expected the fever to subside after a day or two but it persisted. Instead of the usual inflammation on the arm he developed a few blisters with dark blood in them, two of them on the upper lip. Nicola recovered and went back to work, but my son's fever persisted. With a small baby, two young girls and my sick son, life was very hard for me. I asked the doctor if possibly there was some medicine that would put a

stop to my son's fever. I felt that he was slipping away. He said there was one last medication he would try.

My son recovered. The DeVenezia family was happy again. My children were beautiful and healthy again.

Summer passed and fall came. My son Orazio came down with the fever once more. At first I didn't suspect anything since children are always developing colds and fevers, but Orazio's fever was not the usual one. The doctor kept giving him medication with no favorable results. It was a very sad time for my husband and me. Our son was failing. At the beginning of October he became worse and went into convulsions. In five days he was between life and death. Keeping the room dark was an instruction from the doctor. I followed his orders.

One night when Orazio was especially sick a cousin visited us and kept us company all night. Early in the morning she urged me to go and hang the clothes on the line, the clothes I had washed during the night.

When I came into the room the light was pouring in with the shutters opened. My cousin had done this. I looked at the bed and there laying next to my son was the crucifix. I knelt down and prayed, "God, if you want my son, please, God, don't let him die in a convulsion."

That night he had a good night's sleep. Next morning I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast when I heard a call from Orazio. "Mama, Mama."

I ran into the bedroom. Orazio said, "I am hungry." I was surprised and very happy because he had not eaten for five days. I brought him a bowl of warm milk and some crackers. He ate and asked for more. His appetite was a very encouraging sign for me so I was startled one morning when he called to me. He was seated on his bed as he said this, "Ma, I am going to die." He was only three years old. What did he know about death? I put my arms around him, kissed him and told him that he was getting well.

I believed that with my whole heart.

In a few days he was up and around playing with his baby brother and everything seemed to be going well. However at the end of November my oldest daughter contacted whooping cough and had to stay home from school. This was a new anxiety for me. Then Antonio the baby caught it, which made me very worried. On top of it Orazio started to cough. The doctor came and prescribed some medication but it did not work. Orazio lost his appetite, coughed, vomited and developed a noise in his chest. When the doctor diagnosed it as bronchitis I felt a black cloud hovering over me. My son was growing worse every passing day.

I couldn't help but think of an incident that had happened in the late part of the summer. I was crossing the street to buy some groceries when a stranger stopped me and said, "You have a sick child."

I said, "No, he is well now."

He responded, "if you don't do something soon, he is going to die."

I dismissed the whole incident as a prank and had forgotten all about it. Now in late December with three sick children and Orazio getting sicker I remembered what that man had told me and I became worried. The more I thought about it the more I felt worried. Then I decided to confide my worry to one of my cousins. She suggested I go to a fortuneteller. I thought the idea was absurd but seeing my son getting emaciated and suffering more and more every day I was willing to try anything. She took me to a woman who looked at my son and said, "It's too late, I cannot help him."

I went home very depressed about this experience. I called a new doctor to see if anything could be done to save my son. The doctor examined Orazio and told me there was a twenty per cent chance of his recovering because he had lasted ten months since the vaccination but he could not hope for the best.

New Year's Eve as the sirens were ushering in the New Year I was kneeling beside the bed asking God to help my son. Two days later two dark blisters appeared on Orazio's lips and on the fourth of January, my son died in my arms.

When Orazio died Nicola was out of work. Every morning he would go and look for work, any kind of work. This was 1921 and a recession had set in. When he would return home after a fruitless search he would always bring something for our son - a bar of candy, an ice cream cone or a piece of ripe fruit - something to entice Orazio to eat. That day when he came home with a nice juicy pear for his sick son he entered the room to find his son dead.

After the funeral I had to attend to the baby who was ten months old. During the wake he had developed a congestion in the chest and I was told by the doctor that he was on the verge of pneumonia. If this should happen it was extremely dangerous because children less than two years old could not survive with both whooping cough and pneumonia. My anguish had no end, and a great burden was lifted from me when my baby recovered. Now I was able to cry for my dead son.

At the beginning of 1921 times were hard. Nicola was out of work and we had bills to pay. A friend suggested that he go to Pennsylvania where there was foundry work at which he was skilled. He decided to give it a try. He found a job, but with his coming home on weekends and the expenses of traveling he decided it was too hard on him. He also did not like being separated from his family, so he decided to give up the new job. I wanted him to work there a little longer but he was too homesick to do so. A friend helped him get a new job. A few months later he developed a hernia, and the doctor recommended an operation. After the operation he developed pneumonia so his stay at the hospital was prolonged. When he came home his recuperation was slow due to a pain in his side and he could not resume work for three months. We needed money to live so I decided to go to work. It was a job at a baby rubber panty factory and was only one block away from

our home. During my lunch hour I would go home to nurse the baby. Nicola took over the role of wife and mother. He would take the children to the park, clean the house and even wash clothes. This latter chore I did not want him to do. He would boil the clothes to get them clean but would always wait for me to hang them on the clothesline. His manly pride was very strong in this area and he believed this job was part of woman's work. Besides if the neighbors saw him do it he would have been embarrassed.

Three months after his operation he had completely recuperated and started to look for work. Again, I was with child. I did not quit until one month before the baby was due, because that was when he finally found a job.

The baby arrived on the 20th of January, on the birthday of my dead son Orazio. Orazio would have been four years old. The baby was a very beautiful baby. We named her Irma. At the time I was reading a Russian novel and the heroine's name was Irma.

Two years later another daughter increased our household. We named the new baby Elena. Elena had beautiful black curly hair and dimples.

We loved our children. We had five living and Nicola had a steady job and was making good money. We had even saved some.

About that time we saw an advertisement in the newspaper concerning land for sale. It required a very small down payment and ten dollars a month on the balance. The whole price was \$1,600 for almost four acres of land. The price was reasonable and we decided to look at it. The agent took us to see the property in his car. This was the first time I had ridden in a car. I felt exhilarated and like a great lady. The land was located in Florham Park. We liked it because it was flat and near a main road. We decided to buy it. On the front part of the land there were two beautiful trees. I could envision a house, a green lawn, and the trees. It all seemed like a beautiful dream. It was what we were looking for - a nice big garden with lots of fresh vegetables, chickens for eggs, and fruit trees, plus a healthy environment in which to raise our children.

Every month I would travel from Newark to New York to make a \$10.00 payment on our precious land. At that time I was ignorant of the fact that payments could be made by other means. Meanwhile we lived a serene life. We had rented a larger house with five rooms. We needed that much for our five growing children. There was a bathroom all of our own. We did not have to share one with other tenants and although it did not have a bathtub it was a good feeling to have advanced that much in our style of living. There was a small lawn in front and a large back yard for the children. Most of all I loved the kitchen. The sun would penetrate through the leaves of Wisteria framing one of the kitchen windows and play on the kitchen table.

I still did not have utilities. The rooms were lit by gas lamps by turning a key and applying a match. We had a gas stove but the wash still had to be done with the washboard.

My children were growing and so was my thirst for learning. I was learning as they learned. Their first grade school books were easy for me. I was helping myself while I helped them with their homework. I would always find time to read. The time was usually during the night when my children were asleep. We lived about three years in this comfortable home.

My husband and I began making plans to be near our precious land. Then Edward, our sixth child, became sick with a respiratory illness diagnosed as bronchitis. This was the key factor, which hastened the decision to move. Nicola and I thought a new environment would be good for our sick child. At this time our family consisted of four girls and two boys. Nicola did find a house for rent but there were no utilities. It was a very old house and we had to get water from a well. The bathroom was outside and the stove would burn coal in the winter and wood in the summer. However, there was plenty of fertile land for a garden and a lot of room for our children to play. The day to move was set for March 25, 1926.

Edward came down with a fever and transportation to the house had to be made by bus. Nicola and Tony left early with the moving truck. I was to clean the house after the moving truck left. My next door neighbor babysat with the babies and Carmela and Lucy helped with the cleaning. While I was waiting for the bus, a strong March wind caused my baby to gasp. I was frightened, and I pulled the blanket over the baby's face and hugged the baby against my breast. As I boarded the bus I realized Edward was not moving. With five children staggering for a seat and a full bus, it was very difficult for me to forge to the back of the bus. Some good Samaritans made room for me and my young children. I was afraid to lift the blanket and look at my son's face. Then I felt a stir against my breast. I lifted the blanket. My little son was alive!

Upon our arrival the smell of food and a warm fire welcomed us. Nicola had put the stove together. It was very comforting for all of us to be together around the supper table but the children were not interested in the food. They began to run up and down inspecting every room, but tiredness soon wore them out and they were put to sleep.

This house had an attic, which my active children discovered. There was castaway furniture, old eating utensils, and other discarded interesting objects. There was also a pile of National Geographic magazines, novels and a large medical book. My daughter Carmela was eleven years old and she brought the book down to show me. I immediately became interested with the latter because it had explanations and illustrations of diseases. There were also many other magazines, something I had never read before. Since I was able to read fairly well in English, the features advertised delighted me.

I began to enter a world that I had never known before. My mind began to turn toward the house we would build on our land. My husband requested

a catalog from a mail order house and we selected the house we wanted to build from it. We proceeded to engage a meeting with a lawyer.

It took a few months before we could start with the cellar. Nicola decided to use horsepower to help excavate. What a mistake that was! We had to finish this very hard work by hand. We hired a man to help since my husband could only work on the weekends. This man produced very little. Our friends and relatives would help us too. This was the custom of the times. One would help another. Finally the foundation was laid and the walls of the basement began to take form, but it took many months before the house was finished. We had made many mistakes. First of all, the biggest one was our doing the work with the help of friends. We would feed them and give them gifts, which cost us more than paid laborers.

It was June, 1928, when we moved into our not quite complete home. The painting had to be done and the floors scraped and finished. We had run out of money and had to borrow some, but it was our home and it was beautiful. There were ten rooms in all, a bathroom with a gleaming white bathtub, heat and electricity and a gas stove in the kitchen. Our seven children and ourselves still had a lot of hard work. The seventh child, a girl, was born while we were getting ready for our beautiful house but now we had plenty of room.

We proceeded to plant a big garden planning to sell some of the produce. The rest would be canned and stored for the winter months.

Nicola built a chicken coop for many chicks. Everything was going beautifully during our hard work and we were very happy.

The children were doing very well in school as their report cards told us.

Then, suddenly, catastrophe struck us. It was 1929. That summer we had a very beautiful garden with plenty of potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce and eggplant. Nicola had planted rows of grapes. Everything was very promising and then the economy collapsed! At first we did not understand the seriousness of this disaster. Hadn't our new president promised us two chickens in every pot and a car in every garage? Our president had proven to be a very strong man with experience as a Republican and Republicans had money. This calamity would surely be a very temporary thing and everything would straighten out. We had a strong government that would take care of things. Did we not have a beautiful house and plenty of food in the garden and the chickens would soon be laying eggs. Nicola and I had a lot of confidence in our government. The president was a very good administrator who had done an excellent job during the war. This disaster was only a cloud in the sky, which would pass away.

It did not. Workers were losing their jobs. Gloom was descending on this beautiful land of ours. One night Nicola came home worried because his job was cut to four days, but surely there was no room for despair. Soon everything would be all right we were told. The main problem was that people were not laughing enough we were told. That winter was not too bad

for us because we had stored enough food and my husband worked four days a week. However, we had to economize. The chickens began to lay eggs, thus producing an abundance of eggs, but we could not sell them. We could not get the price that would cover the cost of feed. The price of eggs had dropped very low and the feed was still high.

The same thing was true of the chickens. We could not get our price for them and could not cover what it had cost us to raise them. The money for this venture had been borrowed and now we could not pay it back. This was the beginning of our downfall. No matter how hard I economized I could not make ends meet and I was getting discouraged.

However, there were rays of sunshine on those dark days. My children were receiving honors for their schoolwork. Lucy (Lucia) performed her recital on trees and Irma was honored for an essay on safety.

When we first arrived in Florham Park we were considered foreigners. There was a lot of discrimination against foreigners, especially those of Italian origin. Helen (Elena), my fifth child was not quite five when she entered school. She was put in the first grade since there was no kindergarten. On her first report card there was a note from the teacher saying Helen had not passed the intelligence test. I looked at Helen and said I didn't think she was a moron. She was a very shy child at that age.

She was accused of stealing a penny from one of her classmates. I made an appointment to talk to the teacher. The teacher really did not believe that Helen had taken it and after a second interrogation of the class it was discovered that my little daughter had not taken it after all. Somebody had played a prank.

On the third month of the school year Helen was on the super honor roll, and she remained on it until the seventh grade.

Irma was the darling of the teachers. Her behavior and schoolwork were excellent. She made many friends and had parts in many plays. All my children were singled out for plays. In most cases almost the whole town of Florham Park turned out for them.

Those were the days of the Great Depression and school entertainment was the only diversion we could afford. The depression deepened. I could not even afford a decent pair of shoes.

I received a note from Tony's teacher. (He will be called Tony henceforth to comply with his wishes). The teacher was concerned about his behavior in school. She wanted me to meet her at school, but, having two small children at home, it was impossible for me to go. We decided to have the conference in my home.

I made sure no children were around during our private meeting. Miss Lauton taught English to Tony's class. She came accompanied by Miss Wood. Miss Wood was a kind, understanding teacher who liked my children. One afternoon she had asked me what my daughter Carmela was going to do after she graduated from elementary school. I told her she would go to

high school and take some business courses. Then she would get a job after graduation. Miss Wood retorted that Carmela was too intelligent for that kind of future, and she advised me to send her to college. I said, "I have nine children with only my husband working. We cannot afford college."

She said, "I came from a poor family too and we could not afford college but here I am, a teacher. You will find a way."

That year Carmela was going to graduate from elementary school. When the subject of what courses to take in high school came up Miss Lauton was of the opinion that Carmela should not plan her courses toward attending college. She based her opinion on our religion and nationality. We are Catholics.

Therefore when I had the meeting with Miss Lauton I was glad to see that Miss Wood was with her. I felt I had a friend. Miss Lauton told me that Tony did not respond to discipline. He disturbed the class, answered questions out of turn, and one time had attacked one of the students. I said, "I have wanted to talk to you for a long time but was unable to since I have small children at home. Once you punished my son by putting him in a dark cloakroom. Then you complained because Tony had stepped on all the coats. What did you expect from a boy shut in a room without windows? How frustrated and scared he was! The reason he attacked one of his classmates was to protect me. During a lesson in geography about Italy the text stated that the women of Italy wear no shoes and carry loads on their heads. The boy in front of Tony turned and sneered at my son and said, 'Yeah, like Tony's mother.' Tony slammed him in the face and I was glad he did."

"Then there was the time you called him 'a little runt' in front of the whole class. I want you to know I resent that very much because Tony will have to stand among men but to his classmates he will always be 'a little runt' because Miss Lauton said so."

I could see that Miss Wood agreed with me and this feeling of support encouraged me to go on. Finally, before she left, Miss Lauton was apologizing to me.

Chapter VI

The depression was deepening and my husband had been cut to only three days of work a week. We were feeling the pinch. We were trying to sell all of our chickens so we were pleased when a man we knew slightly brought some people to buy some chickens. It seemed that he wanted to help us. The following week the same men came to buy more chickens. We treated them cordially because they had traveled from Newark to buy them. On the third week one of the men suggested to us that we should have some protection because we were in business during times that were hard. He told us that he had a very good watchdog that he would bring next week. I said, "I really do not need a dog."

"Yes, you do," he insisted.

The following week the dog came. He was a fierce looking animal and I did not want to keep him. When I told the men how I felt about this animal they gave me a mean look. One of the men said, "The dog costs \$100.00."

"I do not have that kind of money," I replied.

He said, "You can pay us with the chickens."

I still did not want the dog but my husband said to give it a try. The men left.

I turned to my husband and demanded, "Nicola, why did you say that? You know that business is bad and we do not need a dog to watch a bad business!"

"Maria," he said, "we had to take the dog. Those men meant to harm us if we didn't."

The following days were one big nightmare. The dog was huge and barked continuously. I was afraid to feed him because he would jump against a fence and growl at me. My children were afraid. I was afraid of him too. I contacted the men and told them we were all scared of the dog. He said, "You have to keep it. I have my men to feed."

I answered, "That is your problem, not mine. I have nine children to feed and not many chickens to sell because the business does not pay for the food they eat. If I cannot feed my children I surely can't feed the huge dog!"

They came and took the dog with them and we never saw them again.

Right after this incident I received a call from our lawyer and he asked me if we were thinking of selling our place. I told him I would let him know after I talked with my husband. Nicola and I reviewed the situation and decided that if we could get a good price we would sell. We loved this place very much. After all, it was our dream house and would be hard to part with but it was hard to meet the payments. Finally, we called the lawyer and told him we would sell our place if the price were right. Three men and two women came to see the place. They looked at the house, the land, and the chicken coop. Sitting on our chairs my husband and

I explained to them how fertile the land was. The grapes were bearing in abundance. They told us they were not interested in the fertility of the land. The fresh air was what they really liked. When they left we had the impression that they liked the place and were interested. At that point human nature played a trick on us. My husband and I really did not want to part with our property. The next day we had no word concerning the deal. In fact several days passed without hearing from the lawyer. Nicola and I were not experienced in real estate and we did not know how deals were made, but we decided to tell the lawyer, if he called, that we would sell for \$14,000. This was a fair price for a ten-room house with four acres of land. It also had 240 feet frontage and running city water.

Our lawyer did call and told us the people from Brooklyn were interested. The only drawback was that they would only pay \$12,000. My husband and I considered the offer as too low and told the lawyer we could not sell for that price. A couple of days later the lawyer called my husband at his place of work and wanted to meet him. He had gotten \$500 more from the people. It was still too low and we decided not to sell.

That night I could not sleep. I began to assess our situation. We still owed money for the chicken feed and we had no more chickens now. What my husband was bringing home was not sufficient to live on. My attachment to the beautiful house and precious land was strong but my common sense told me that the best thing to do was to sell. The next morning, after a sleepless night, I told Nicola about my fears and told him I thought it was best for us to take the people's offer. He seemed to agree with me and told me he would call the lawyer and tell him to close the deal. Although I did not know where we would live, I felt that we had made the right decision. That night Nicola came home late from work. The first thing I asked him was about the deal. He said that when he got to the lawyer's office he decided to ask for \$500 more. The lawyer said that his client would not pay more and that we would lose the place. I became worried about the decision he had made. I told him to rescind his decision and call the lawyer from the phone at the schoolhouse. He had taken a job there, which consisted of cleaning the two rooms and tending the furnace. This supplemented our income. I wanted him to call and tell the lawyer to proceed with the deal at his clients'

price but Nicola did not call. He thought we might manage to pull out of our difficulties even if we did not sell.

We later learned that there might have been some connection between the people that wanted to sell us protection and the people who wanted to buy our place. They wanted to install an alcoholic still in our chicken coop!

Chapter VII

I bore three children while I lived in Florham Park. One was born in the place we rented, a girl named Lee. She was born in 1927. My eighth child, a boy, was born in 1931. We named him Richard. My husband was overjoyed because we had five girls and two boys.

Also, two years before, I had suffered a miscarriage due to an accident while riding on a bus. Being ignorant of the laws, I didn't tell the bus driver about my pregnancy, mostly because of modesty. Reaching home I found out there were signs of a possible miscarriage, but I thought it would pass. I had symptoms for two weeks and then I lost my child - a boy. My recovery lasted for 60 days.

The doctor told me that I should contact the bus company. I did so and the company directed me to have an examination by their company doctor. After the examination the company asked me to see their lawyer. I stated my case truthfully but when the bus driver was questioned he said he could not remember the incident. I was too naive and inexperienced to hire my own lawyer.

Nicola was overjoyed when Richard was born because the doctor told me after the miscarriage that I could not carry another child.

My ninth child came in 1932, a year and a half after Richard. She was a girl we named Marie. In those days children were the hope of the future and they still are.

We had not hit the economic bottom yet. We had kept some chickens for our own use and we had plenty of eggs. Also, Nicola was working three days a week. However, we had to make every penny count.

School was to open the week after Marie's birth and due to my condition I was unable to go out and buy the necessities that the children needed for school's opening. My oldest daughter Carmela offered to do the shopping but I had my misgivings. She was too young at sixteen and inexperienced, but out of necessity we allowed her to do it. She left by bus. My husband was to meet her in Newark after she had finished shopping and they would come back in an old car that we owned. Somehow Carmela and her father ended up on different street corners. My husband started scouting the

streets because, after business hours, Market Street was deserted except for a few questionable characters. Meanwhile, my daughter had the good sense to call a relative and remain in their home until her father arrived.

Unable to find her, my husband came home hoping that she had taken the bus. When he arrived and told me what had happened I was completely distressed and suggested to him that we call the police. He thought we should wait awhile but I didn't want to. Then we could see, in semidarkness, a figure coming toward the house. A neighbor had received a call from Carmela (we had no phone) and she had sent the message that she was safe at our relative's home and she would come home the next day. I was so relieved that I embraced and kissed my neighbor and thanked her for bringing the good news. That was on Saturday.

Monday was Labor Day and I was expecting a lot of company because it was the custom to come with a gift and wish good luck to the new baby.

Anticipating a big crowd, I confided to my good friend and godmother to my baby, Susie De Angeles, that I was worried because I was unable to honor the occasion because of my condition and the financial situation I was in. She offered to help me. She had an oven in her back yard where she baked a week's supply of bread for her family. She offered to bake a double batch of bread - 24 loaves of Italian home-baked bread. Susie also reassured me that with all the eggplants, tomatoes, corn and other vegetables there would be plenty of food for the company. And so it was! The freshly baked bread was a real feast for the company!

Chapter VIII

Now my two older daughters were in high school. When Carmela graduated from grammar school I was floating on air. My happiness had reached a peak. Grammar school had seemed to me to be a great achievement because I had to quit school at the end of the third grade. Also, I had loved school but since I was an orphan I had to work for my living. I remember, sometimes when I had errands to do and I was passing a school, I would stop and listen to the students recite. Tears would come to my eyes. I wanted to be there.

That painful experience explains my ecstasy when I saw my daughter graduate.

While my daughters were in high school I was learning with them. They would come home with many books from the library since they were avid readers like myself. They attended Madison High.

Madison had a very fine library and had many books written in the Italian language and translated into English. I came to the conclusion that the books lost some of their appeal and charm in the process of translation.

As the depression deepened my older children helped to the best of their ability. My husband had decided to build a vegetable stand on the main road and obtained permission of the landowners. Our old car hauled the produce back and forth. Irma and Helen had to tend to the stand after school and the older girls took charge on weekends.

People didn't have money to buy, so the stand business was very meager.

Tony acquired a magazine route and was a caddy for a golf course on weekends. He helped as much as he could.

I canned tomatoes and vegetables and also stored potatoes and shelled dry beans to provide food for us during the winter.

My husband was now unemployed, except for the janitor job at school. He earned \$50.00 a month. With a family of eleven, that kind of money did not cover anything including the mortgage. When the full-time janitor suffered a heart attack and died, there was a vacancy. Nicola applied for the job and was confident about getting it because of his experience as part-time

janitor. There was another applicant. A meeting was held by the town officials and the job was awarded to the other man! Nicola was crushed. He could not see the justification because he had been a good, conscientious worker. I felt that discrimination played a large part in the decision. Even with this disappointment my husband was a good worker. He would do any job to help earn money for his family and he was happy when he was again called to his job in the foundry where he worked anywhere there was work to do.

Something happened that distressed us very much. A sudden drop of temperature into the teens caused a break in our furnace.

It had been warm enough that morning for Nicola to leave the house in light clothing. When the temperature dropped so much, he decided to stay in Newark with relatives for the night. His only means of transportation was by bus since the bus route to our town had been discontinued. That meant he had to walk three miles from the bus route to our house.

The following night when he returned he decided to burn some wood in the furnace to warm up the house. We had not ordered any coal yet since it was early in the season. Little did Nicola realize that the water had frozen in the furnace. He managed to start the fire, the furnace cracked, and warm water started to pour out on the cellar floor. The floor became covered with about two inches of water and the water froze solid.

That winter was a severe one. My children used the cellar floor for ice-skating and enjoyed skidding around with their friends. There were days when the water pipes would freeze and we had to warm up the pipes to be able to have any water. Sometimes the children would rub their faces with snow before going to school. This they would do when they could not wait for the water to start coming. They would miss the school bus if they waited too long.

One day Helen had a severe toothache with a swollen lump on the side of her face. She had to stay home and I kept her in bed to keep her warm. When I checked I discovered that the edge of the sheet by her mouth had icicles on it. They had been produced by the steam of her breathing!

Despite the hardships of that winter, not one of us developed a cold!

Gloom had settled over the whole country. Occasionally when I rode a bus I could see distress on people's faces. The whole country was in a deep depression.

A new election was due. Roosevelt ran opposite Hoover.

Roosevelt promised innovations if elected. Hoover tried to justify his policy and promised a recovery. After twelve years of Republican government and all the hardships suffered, people wanted a change. Roosevelt was elected our new president. A new era was to be ushered in. The promising words of our new president were inspiring and they suggested that hope was beginning to prevail.

We were hopeful too. My husband and I decided to try a comeback. We bought a young pig and 200 baby chicks. Those beautiful chirping chicks were our new hope. We figured that the pig would provide meat and fat and the chickens would provide eggs. Also from their sale we would get more meat.

No one could imagine my complete dismay when, one morning I opened the door of the coop and found not a single chick there! I looked in every corner. There was not a chirp - just complete silence. Where could they be? Could it be that someone had stolen them during the night? I closed the door and was desolate. My husband had gone to work and the older children had gone to school. I had no one to talk to. Then I had an idea and looked under the coop. There they were - all dead! During the night a weasel, or more than one, had entered the coop, sucked their blood and had carried them under the coop!

More misfortune was still to come. The pig ran away from the pen! We looked all over and asked the neighbors if they had seen the pig. No one had. The following night there was a knock at our door and a stranger asked us if we had lost a pig. I said, "Yes," and he told me if I paid him \$5.00 the pig would be returned. The pig was our only hope so we paid the money!

The first thing Roosevelt did when he took office was to urge people to not be afraid and he proceeded to reassure them that America was strong and would emerge from the temporary decline. First of all he wanted to assess the real condition of the banks so he declared a bank holiday and closed the banks for three days. People were losing their homes and tenants were not able to pay their rents. The whole country's system was disorganized and this led the country to despair.

Then something innovative was brought about. It was called welfare and was supposed to help starving people.

We managed not to go on welfare. Instead we plodded along on our own.

Youth camps were opened which took the young unemployed off the streets and provided jobs for them. They received good meals, lodging and training for useful jobs. The country benefited by their work.

Roosevelt's new program opened many new avenues for better roads and buildings. Conservation and reforestation invigorated our forests. The programs were organized to spread the work hours evenly and to rotate the unemployed.

The president encouraged the businessmen to hire their help back and little by little confidence was being restored.

We made a valiant effort to hold on.

Chapter IX

In 1934 Colette graduated from high school. (My daughter Carmela will henceforth be known as Colette, a name of her choice). There was no hope for us to send her to college.

She started to look for work but her search was in vain. My beautiful daughter was a great help to me by helping with the family, garden and many chores. Then a state junior college opened. Colette decided to enroll. She wanted to take night courses but the big problem was transportation. We had none. A student who owned an old car offered to bring her home at night for fifty cents a week. She and another student walked about four miles every day from Florham Park to Morristown to attend classes. In this way it was possible for Colette to attend college for that year.

Lucy (Lucia) graduated the following year and married after graduation.

It was 1935 and we had fallen behind on the mortgage payments. We were using every dollar that we could get our hands on trying to keep our home. My growing children needed many things, which they had to do without, thus causing them much humiliation.

Tony was a freshman in high school and Irma was in the eighth grade.

Graduation was a big event in Florham Park. There was always a play on that night followed by a speech from the valedictorian. Then prizes would be presented for the most outstanding work done by the students. Irma and her best girl friend were in line for top honors. My daughter had made valedictorian because she had one more A than her friend. However, Miss Lauton insisted that the honor should go to Natalie because of Irma's ethnic background. My daughter was badly hurt by discrimination. Miss Lauton, feeling guilty, offered to take Irma to New York to see a play the next day, but I refused to let her go.

Around this time I received a note from the principal of the school. She wanted me to have a conference with her about Edward. I went. She informed me about her intention to keep Edward back for the year because of his age and stature. She said he was immature for the sixth grade and because of his short height he would not fit in with the other boys. I told her

that I would think her suggestion over and let her know later after I had talked to my husband.

My husband felt that Edward should not be held back. This decision might discourage Edward from making good grades.

Chapter X

We had come to a crossroad. I gave a good hard look at our situation and realized it was not good for us to stay in Florham Park trying to hold on. We had no definite plans for our children's future. I explained it to my husband in this way. When anyone has a bad toothache he goes to the dentist and has his tooth pulled out. Now we had a big headache in Florham Park and the best thing for us to do was to leave.

My husband reluctantly agreed. I went to the bank and stated my predicament. The bank officer listened. We did not want to declare bankruptcy. We wanted to leave with clean credit. The officer was sympathetic and offered six months rent-free if we signed the title for our home to the bank. We accepted the terms and proceeded to gather and store supplies from our garden for the coming winter. We worked very hard and sold some of our produce and grapes at the stand.

My husband was now working a few days a week and without mortgage payments we were able to save money for our new move.

The frost came early that year and after the frost there wasn't much produce to preserve. I was well provided with canned tomatoes, pickled peppers, other vegetables and jellies.

Now we had to find a place to live. We did not want to go back and live in the city but that was the best alternative. The commuting expenses would practically be eliminated, especially for Colette. She had found a job in Newark and she required transportation. We decided to move back to the city since transportation would always be a problem with a fast growing family.

The best time for me to look for a place to live would be on Saturday because I still had two young ones at home and they could be cared for on that day.

In the last part of September I began the search. There were many vacant apartments but my family needed a big place so I looked at one family houses. There were not many of those available. When the landlords learned about the size of my family their answers were always a flat "No."

They would rather have the house empty than rent to a family as large as mine.

Weekend after weekend was the same. To go home without having found a place to live was always an ordeal for me. It was hard to see so many eyes saying, "What are we going to do now?" It was depressing.

Then a thought occurred to me. After all, the bank had not turned us out in the cold and we still had a roof over our heads. This optimistic thought gave me courage.

Every time I went to the city I found myself looking for a place where there were grass and trees. After living for ten years in the country the cement sidewalks and crowded houses did not appeal to me.

I found an ad in the paper about a rental apartment in suburban Irvington. It was across from Saint Leo's Church and there was a vacant apartment on the second floor. It was not big enough, but it had to do if I was able to get it.

The landlord rented it to me without asking about the size of my family. She told me to bring the deposit to a renting realtor and he gave me a receipt. Now I was not afraid to go home or to see the faces of my family.

My daughter Colette was home for the weekend and wanted to see the place. Colette, an extremely friendly person, inquired from the first floor tenant about the landlady. She was told the landlady did not live in the building. The woman invited my daughter in and began to ask questions about the family. Colette, not experienced with the ways of world, gave all the information the lady asked. She told me that the lady was very cordial.

After all this, I received a letter from the realtor saying the landlord failed to accept the deposit. It was only one week before the sixth month, which the bank had allotted to us, and we still did not have a place to go. I went to see the realtor who handed me my deposit back. I said to him, "What am I going to do? I only have one week left before we will be evicted."

He asked, "Would you be interested in a one family house?" I replied, "Yes, very much."

He drove me to see the house. An older man answered the door and told us that the house belonged to his sister-in-law and he could not take the deposit. He told us to go and see her son, a policeman on duty on Grove Street directing the traffic. The realtor drove to Grove Street where Mr. Brown was directing traffic at the school intersection. He was very busy with children crossing the street. I told him that I had seen his mother's house and would like to rent it. He took the deposit without asking any questions and said the house would be ready the first of the month. I told him we would move in on the second of November, a Saturday. That night I came home and told Colette to stay away from the house until we moved in! After the first experience, she did not even ask for the address!

The last week was very hectic. The children were between feelings of uncertainty and excitement. Helen did not want to move. She had been at

the head of her class since the first grade. Now she was in the eighth and she was very popular with her classmates and, almost unbelievably, Miss Lauton loved her.

Tony, in his second year of high school, had joined a cooking class with some of his friends and hated to give it up.

Lee was in the fourth grade and liked school.

Richard and Marie, the youngest, had not yet established attachments.

Lucy was married and living in Madison so she did not like to see us move.

Irma had started high school in Madison and had not yet established roots.

Edward, my sentimental one, gathered some small stones from the driveway as a remembrance of his Florham Park days.

Helen had the highest commendation on hers and the principal was quite impressed with what he saw.

The ones in grammar school had no trouble adjusting to the new curriculum and neither did the older ones in high school.

Colette found it hard to adjust at the beginning. She was 21 and had left an established way of life. Now she had to create a new life for herself.

Chapter XI

We left on the second day of November. On this date I was again leaving behind everything my husband and I had worked for, but we also were bringing with us untold treasures, our children, and a lot of hope for the future.

The house I had rented was ready for us to move into and so was the landlady. Mrs. Brown, a widow, lived with her married daughter. She asked me how many people were in the family. I told her there were eight children and my husband and myself. Immediately I saw her jaw fall but I assured her she should not worry because we would take good care of the house. She handed me the keys as she received the balance of the month's rent, but I could see she did not feel too sure about her new tenants.

I heaved a sigh of relief and happiness as I realized that our new landlady had accepted us. With that anxiety over we proceeded to start a fire in the furnace. The coal had just arrived since I had ordered it beforehand. Although it was unusually warm for November, the house needed to be heated.

My next chore was to shop for some groceries and to prepare our first meal in our new home. Hope was again restoring faith in the future and I felt a surge of confidence. We were all together in a warm house with food on the table, and for some unaccountable reason I felt happy.

The truck arrived with our furniture and the whole family pitched in to arrange the furniture. First the beds were placed in the bedrooms and then the kitchen table and chairs were brought in. Supper was ready and everyone took his place at the table to eat. With bowed heads we asked the Lord to lead us in our new transition.

On Monday I took Edward, Lee and Helen to the grammar school on Chancellor Ave. Mr. Stellhorn was the principal and I gave the children's report cards to him. Edward had a notation recommending the principal keep my son back. Mr. Stellhorn looked at my son and turned to me.

"I'll put him in the sixth grade and if he cannot do the work, he'll be put back," he said.

Chapter XII

Irvington was a good town in which to live. There was no discrimination and life was tranquil. We all had a very full rich life. Colette and my husband were working and the future looked very promising. Then something disturbed our tranquility. My husband had an attack of appendicitis and had to be operated on. He sustained two operations on the same day. The second operation was performed on a fistula that had bothered him for quite awhile. Luckily everything proceeded normally.

After his discharge from the hospital he had to take care of the fistula at home. He had to have a hot sitz bath every day until the fistula had healed. All of the money we had saved had gone for the care of my husband. By the time he had fully recovered we had no savings left, but at least he was well again.

During the period of Nicola's illness Colette's place of work had gone on strike. One day while my son Tony and I were walking home from grocery shopping he said, "Ma, this fall I am not going back to school."

I was shocked and said, "You will not do what?"

Timidly he replied, "I want to start working now. You need help and I want to help."

I replied, "Tony, you have to finish high school and then I hope you will go to college."

He said, "Ma, don't you worry. I'll do all right."

He was to enter his third year in high school and this was summer vacation.

I said, "Tony, your intentions are good. You are a good son. Go ahead. I give you my permission."

At that point I was desperate since my husband was at home recuperating and my daughter was on strike. We had a family of ten to feed.

Tony started to look for work, but with no experience he could not find anything decent. He ended up working for a fruit and vegetable store that paid very little for his work.

During that period of time the country was going through a convulsion trying to emerge from the worst depression the country had ever

experienced. The social order had suffered a hard blow and reconstruction was painful. Socialism was getting a foothold and the younger people were led easily in the belief that a change would make everything right.

At this time my husband had recovered and started to work, bringing Tony to work with him. Two weeks later the foundry went on strike.

My daughter Colette's place of work was still on strike so she decided to take a job near our home ironing and stretching curtains in a laundry. It was hard work for only \$8.00 a week.

I had no alternative but to try to get a job myself. I saw an ad in the paper for an experienced looper for sweaters. Even though I had worked on hosiery I was sure I could do the work. I applied for the job and was told to come back in a week. When I went back I was told they had not started producing yet.

At 40 I had many gray hairs and, at that time, people of my age were considered too old to be hired. I had to do something, so I asked if I weren't being hired because of my gray hair.

"Oh, no," the boss told me, "It's because we haven't started yet."

A week later I was called and started working. When the boss asked me how long I had been a looper I said, "Five years." Then he asked how long it had been since I had worked. I again said, "Five years." The truth of the matter was that it had been 25 years. Looping on stockings is very fine work and requires a lot of experience.

Since I had been absent for such a long period I was afraid I would not be very productive. However, I was confident that I could manage the work since the stitches were larger on sweaters. Although I wasn't fast the boss must have understood my need and predicament and kept me on.

After three months of work I was laid off because of lack of work.

My husband and son were working now. Working in a foundry did not appeal to Tony and he wanted to get started in work that he would like to do as his life work.

We had a conference. Tony wanted to quit his foundry job and do some war work. Work of that kind was in demand because the war had started in Europe. I disagreed with Tony since I knew work of that type would not be in demand after the war. I wanted him to learn a trade. My husband suggested a civil service job. Tony decided to apply for a job as letter carrier but the regulations did not permit him to take the test since he was 1/4" shorter than the height required. Then we decided he should try carpentry in the building business.

With the civil service work eliminated, Tony went to look for a job as a carpenter's apprentice. The starting salary was only \$12.00 for a 40-hour week. He learned quickly on the job and decided to learn more by going to night school. The courses on blue prints and estimates really helped him get a foothold in construction.

At the time, night school provided jobs for unemployed teachers. I read a brochure and singled out a course in citizenship. Although I could read English I could not write. I realized that reading meant someone had done the thinking and enabled the people to read, criticize and enjoy. Writing meant there was only you to do the thinking. I did want to learn to write and do my thinking. I registered and paid a small fee for a one-hour session. For a few winter months I learned to spell by following the teacher's suggestions. We wrote each given word ten times. I excelled in vocabulary and this surprised my teacher who wondered where I had learned all those words. Since I knew Italian, all the words that were related to Latin were easy for me. At the end of the school year I had learned to write some, but my punctuation left a lot to be desired.

Chapter XIII

My daughter Colette had become engaged, and at the end of 1938 she married.

Irma, Helen and Edward were still in high school. The two girls were very active in school activities. They worked on the school newspaper and were members of the dramatic club. Upon graduation Irma received the debating award and Helen the Thespian award, a dramatic award. I was very proud of their achievements.

Irma was to attend college and Helen still had one more year of high school. Irma decided to attend Montclair State Teacher's College and applied for the entrance examination. She had to write an essay on her life. She came to me and said she hadn't done anything worth writing about. She didn't know what to write. I said, "You have lived, haven't you?"

"Yes," she answered, "but I haven't done anything."

I gave her some suggestions. "You lived in Florham Park, you worked at the road stand, skated on ice in the basement and moved to Irvington where you went to a new school. Write about things you have done and the friends you have made. You have enough material to write a book."

Her essay was accepted as excellent and she passed the entrance examination, which permitted her to enroll in the school. The question now was money. I wasn't working. My husband's and Tony's salaries were just enough to live on.

Nicola suggested that Irma should get a job and not go to college. I still remembered Miss Wood's words, "Your daughters should go to college. They are intelligent and could do more than just settle for any kind of work."

If Irma were to go to college it meant I should get a job and pitch in. I applied for another job in the same line of work as I had done before and I was accepted. Luck would have it that I was able to earn enough money for the first semester. It amounted to \$100.00 tuition plus \$50.00 for books, \$10.00 for the registration fee and \$5.00 for a gym suit.

My work was seasonal and, although I did not lose my job, my work was ended.

Irma found a part-time job working Wednesday night and all day Saturday. She was able to pay for transportation and incidentals.

I went back to work when work resumed. I liked the extra money that I earned and I began to dream again about a place of our own. I have to give my children a lot of credit for the cooperation and work assistance they gave me in our constructive years. High school was divided into two sessions because of the large enrollment. That meant one or two of the older children would be home half the day. This included Lee who was now in high school. The two younger ones were in grammar school. The older children helped clean, iron and fix lunch for the two younger ones. That made it possible for me to work.

When Marie, my youngest, began kindergarten I felt lost and empty with no more young ones to care for. That intensified the desire to go back to work.

Also, I wanted a better living standard for my family. My children's cooperation made it easier for me to continue working.

Helen had no trouble entering Montclair State Teacher's College since she had maintained an average of 93 for the four years in high school.

Tony was progressing nicely in his carpenter's work and had gotten raises. He was making \$20.00 a week when his chance arose. A new type of garage door was being introduced in the construction industry. They were called overhead doors.

Tony's employer sent two of his most experienced men to do a job. After two days they were unable to figure out how to do the job. My son asked his boss if he could have a chance at it. The boss was uncertain because he still considered Tony an apprentice. Tony noticed his boss's hesitation and said, "I feel I can do it. Give me Nicky to help me."

Nicky also was young and new at the game of construction. The employer decided he didn't have much to lose and gave the boys a chance. In half a day the two boys had the garage door up. After this job the boss recognized that the boys were worth more and raised their salary to \$40.00 a week.

Chapter XIV

The war in Europe was intensifying and America was aiding the weaker nations within the international laws. The president was still assuring the nation that we were not going to enter the war but the feeling persisted that eventually we would be drawn in.

Tony decided to venture out on his own by contracting his own work with Nicky as a partner.

When Marie went to school I soon found out that she had a special talent. Her little papers that she brought home for me to see gave me the insight that she had something special. Her papers, at that young age, showed that she had an artistic tendency. The very first paper she handed me was a fingerprint of her hands and it was amazing the way every line and bone was delineated. There was a place on the wall where I would display my children's well-done work. Before starting school Marie would cut pictures from magazines and make a collection of puppies. One day she gave me a picture of a flower painted on glass. It was very delicately done.

Her scholarship was very outstanding. I was proud and pleased when I went to school to register for ration stamps. The teachers were registering the people for their quotas of stamps according to the size of the family. The teachers praised Richard and Marie for their behavior and scholarship.

There was the time when parents were invited to attend night class to observe their children at work. When I went I did not know what to expect so I sat on one of the back seats hoping that I would not be noticed. I was still conscious of my foreign accent.

The teacher started to explain her method of teaching and I was appalled when she pointed out that the children were divided into two groups - the bright and the slow. Then she proceeded to demonstrate the method by forming two groups. My son Richard was in the advanced group, but a little girl who lived on our street was with the slow group. I liked that little girl who played with Richard and Marie, as she was a very sweet child. Her aunt had come to the night class because her mother was dead. The teacher called on the slow group first explaining that their spelling words were easier than the advanced group. Then she gave the advanced group difficult words

to demonstrate their ability. My son failed on the word *curtains*. I thought that word was too difficult for a second grade child. Afterwards the teacher showed some of the children's work. I thought it was not necessary to expose the mothers of the slow children to an unnecessary embarrassment.

Chapter XV

Tony's first contract was for a one family house and he and his partner worked very hard on their first project. Their work was progressing satisfactorily when the draft was passed by Congress. Since he was twenty years old the law required him to be drafted. His partner, too, had received a draft notice so they applied for an extension of time to be able to finish their contract.

Meanwhile Tony did not want to be drafted in the Army because he was sure he would be put in the infantry because of his height. Before his allotted time was up Tony enlisted in the Coast Guard. That night I could not sleep. Here was my young brave boy leaving his home that he loved, to do his duty for his country. He seemed so alone.

I was hoping that maybe the war would end before we became involved. Had not the president assured us, before he was elected, that our country would not engage in the war. Surely drafting our boys was only a stand-by measure of security. Regardless of this assuring argument I was not able to sleep.

He had urged us not to get up the morning he was to leave because he had to leave at 4:30 a.m. and did not want to disturb our sleep.

At 4:00 a.m. I went downstairs and proceeded to prepare his breakfast. When he came downstairs he said, "Ma, what did you get up for?"

"I didn't want you to leave without breakfast," I said.

"But, Ma, I'm not hungry and I'm late!"

I was trying to hold my tears back. I wanted to be as brave as he was, urging him to eat some food. He asked, "Ma, aren't you going to eat?"

I replied, "It's too early for me."

He barely touched the food, took his clothes, kissed me and rushed out.

I closed the door after he had disappeared in the darkness of the early morning and threw myself on the sofa breaking into a torrent of tears.

There was a knock at the door. He was back. He said, "I have forgotten some papers that I must have," and he rushed to his room. On leaving he said, "Ma, don't cry. I will be all right," and he disappeared once again into the night darkness of early morning.

Then came Pearl Harbor. December 7, 1941, was labeled the day of infamy. Congress was summoned and America entered World War II.

After the New Year, more than ever, I wanted to have our own place for our children.

Irma and Helen were doing very well in college. Lee and Edward were doing well in high school and so were Richard and Marie in grammar school.

My desire for a house intensified, so I began to scan the newspapers for a house for sale. A house was advertised on Coolidge Street. I didn't know where Coolidge Street was, but Helen did. It was March 25, 1942, when Helen and I, braving a strong March wind, went to see the location of the house. There were other houses for sale on that street. Helen and I singled out two houses and we were so delighted we started to run home. We got home and told my husband that we had found a place that he would like. He did not want to go and see the house because he was concerned that with the war going on and the children in school it would turn out to be another disappointment. His wages had been frozen and he did not want another loan. Helen and I began to urge him just to come and see the house out of curiosity's sake. Unwillingly, he came. When he saw the house and especially the back yard where he knew he could have a nice garden, he said, "if you think we can manage we will go and see the realtor."

The realtor showed us the inside of the house. We asked him how much a month it would cost us to carry the mortgage and he figured it would cost us \$56.00 a month.

I said to my husband when we got home, "We are now paying \$45.00 a month. That would mean \$11.00 more a month and we surely are able to save that much for our old age."

We brought the ten per cent deposit to the realtor and told him to proceed with the purchase. The house was owned by the home loan, a government project to save homesteads. Payments had to go to the government through a bank. When the bank asked us to have a search, I said I was not going to have one because when the government took over the house there was a very extensive search and I felt I did not need one. By experience I knew how thorough the government was before taking over the property.

When we were trying to save our house in Florham Park I had applied for a home loan and was denied it on the grounds that we would not be able to meet the payments. Our family was too large and my husband was not working. I was crushed and that was when we decided to give up.

We closed the deal on our new house on the last day of April and took possession on June 1. Forty Coolidge Street became our home and a new start.

Chapter XVI

When Tony had enlisted in the Coast Guard I felt it would be months before I would see him again. I felt as though a cloud were darkening my sky.

On Sunday morning of the same week he had left, the sun shone warm and brilliantly in the living room. There was a knock on the door and when I opened it, there was Tony smiling in his brand new uniform. I could not believe my eyes. There stood my son smiling, happy and very young. The dark cloud had disappeared and the sun shone warm and comforting again.

"Tony," I exclaimed, "how come you were able to come back so soon? Tell me everything!"

He responded to my question, "I am stationed in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, New York. Because of my experience in carpentry, I received the rank of first class petty officer. Maybe I will be able to come home almost every weekend."

I was happy again.

We moved to our new home on the first of June. Tony helped move. In fact, the whole family helped. My married daughter cleaned the house, windows and all.

On his first furlough Tony immediately decided to change the kitchen. The kitchen was partitioned three ways. The main part contained the sink, stove and a place for a table. Attached on one side was a breakfast nook with a long table and a bench on each side. The other side had a pantry. Tony knocked down the partition that divided the nook and the pantry. The result was a big sunny kitchen. I was delighted with the result. Of course, the work took many of his weekends.

Once the kitchen was finished he started on the attic. Six rooms were not enough for my family so he turned the attic into one big beautiful room with four windows and a cedar closet.

When this room was finished he started on the basement.

When all his work was done the house was transformed into a beautiful home.

My husband had taken care of the outside and his work had produced a new green lawn. The following summer he planted a beautiful vegetable garden.

I took care of the inside furnishings.

Chapter XVII

Irma was my first child to graduate from college and become a teacher. Her graduation and teaching meant she could make a real contribution to this country that had become my own. I was happy for my daughter and my country.

Hope that the war would end soon did not materialize and we were asked to give more and more of our men and our resources. The country was bleeding and we were giving for a cause that had become our own. The feeling in America was that this was a war to end all wars. One thought prevailed. We were going to win the war!

Like many other boys, my son had met a girl and brought her home. We received her as our son's date and treated her very cordially. On weekends she would come to our home and watch Tony work at improving our new home. I liked her and enjoyed her visits.

On one particular weekend Tony was restless. He got up very early and told me he wanted to go to church early because he had things to do that day.

That afternoon I had to attend one of my niece's showers. I left for the occasion, but did not expect Tony to come and take me home since he had a date. I was pleased and surprised when I saw he had come for me, but I realized he was fidgeting. I asked him if something were wrong and he said, "No." I thought he had quarreled with his date, so I didn't want to push the subject. We were almost home when the bombshell fell. "Ma," he said, "I have something to tell you. Pa already knows and so does all the family."

"What is it?" I asked.

He answered, "I am married. I married Anne."

I was startled and stunned. I could not believe my ears. I thought he was joking, but he said he was not and that Anne was at the house.

I was muted and could not say another word. When we got home, all eyes were turned on me but I could not speak and burst into tears. I was crying for all the things I had wanted to do for him. He was a boy, only 22 years old, and now he was a married man with a war to fight. What was I to do? What could I do? I had urged him to save some money from his work

and government pay and I had made the deposits for him. I took the bankbook and gave it to him and said, "Give this to your wife. It is her responsibility now."

I was too frozen in my heart to open it to both of them. I needed a little time. I had not met her family, so that was my first concern. I invited my son's wife's family to meet us and liked them. Her mother was dead and her father was a real gentleman. The first thing he said was that both families should have met first and I agreed with him.

Chapter XVIII

Irma graduated college in January, 1943. She was a teacher now and I was very happy for her. She had worked hard and deserved her place in the world. Her first job was in Irvington High School, the school she had attended as a student.

1943 was an eventful year. Not only did Irma become a teacher but I became a grandmother for the sixth time. Tony and Anne had a beautiful baby girl, Carol.

Edward, at seventeen, had graduated high school, and, being under age for the draft, decided to work for a year. He could not find a decent paying job since he wasn't eighteen and wasn't permitted to work full time.

A year passed quickly and he was called for service. One month after his eighteenth birthday, he was off to serve his country. When it was time for him to leave, he tried to be strong and said he did not want anyone to see him off since he disliked emotionalism. We assured him we would only go as far as the draft board headquarters since his bus would leave from there. He gave in that much and said that would be all right. My two married daughters, Colette and Lucy, were at my house to wish him farewell. Irma drove us to the draft board headquarters but had to leave immediately for school. Edward was already on the bus. We waved good-bye and the bus left. My heart was leaving with him.

I said, "I'm going to the train station. I want to see him off there." Colette echoed me and so did Lucy. We boarded the first bus to the Pennsylvania Train Station in Newark. We were a little fearful of his reaction but I felt I had to be there.

When we reached the station, we asked if the train with the recruits had left. We were told that they had not and that they were in the waiting room. We entered the room and saw Eddie waiting, sitting on a bench with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. He was the picture of dejection. I put my hand gently on his shoulder. He raised his head and looked in my face and a smile like a ray of sunshine appeared on his face. I was happy that I had come. All four of us chatted happily until it was time for

him to leave on the train. We saw him seated and when the train left we waved good-by with no hysterics. I believed he left happy.

I had planned to go to work after seeing him off, but for the life of me I could not leave the bus at my place of work. My daughters said, "Aren't you getting off?"

I said, "No. I have to go home and cry."

When I arrived home I found my daughter-in-law Anne and a couple of friends waiting for us.

My daughter Colette had restrained her emotions but when she saw them she burst into tears and cried out, "I will never see Eddie again!"

I turned to her and said, "Don't you say that! Of course we will see Eddie. He will be all right."

After basic training Eddie was assigned to Niagara University where he took courses in engineering. Before starting school he came home on his furlough to tell us all about his experiences. We thought he looked very handsome in his army uniform.

Chapter XIX

Tony was rescheduled for overseas duty. His wife was with child again, and his leaving was very painful for his family. I was very much aware of the sacrifice they were asked to make. His whereabouts had to be strictly anonymous and his letters censored. We had only a number at the post office.

We fell into a routine. Anne would spend Sundays with us. We now enjoyed our daughter-in-law very much, and Carol was the image of Tony. Anne was like a daughter to me. In one of Tony's letters he asked me to look after the welfare of his wife and child. Soon after the shock of his announcement that he had married I had learned to accept the fact and had come to enjoy Anne. She endeared herself to me and we had become friends. She was part of our family now, and she found ways to be kind. She would bring tokens for purchasing coffee since her family did not use coffee. (Coffee was rationed and tokens entitled you to a certain amount). When I needed needles, she would somehow find and bring them to me. Her Sunday visits with my granddaughter were like having my son home. We were at ease, but my son wasn't. After receiving a letter from my son, I decided that he needed assurance. I answered his letter and told him that Anne did not need his concern in regard to our relationship. She was doing well for herself and we were good friends.

Mother's Day that year was a beautiful warm sunny day. I prepared a special Sunday meal because I felt, as a mother, I wanted to honor my family with the best I could offer. The doorbell rang, and when I opened the door there stood a man with a long box in his arms. I took the box and walked to the kitchen and sat on a chair in the sunlight and proceeded to open the box. The most beautiful roses had been sent to me by my son Tony who was overseas. By the card's message I realized he was in Africa. I sat on that chair with tears of love and happiness running down my cheeks for a long period of time. Those roses were the very first flowers I had ever received and had come from my son who was in Africa.

Time passed and it was a warm August day when I received a call from one of Anne's sisters informing me that Anne had entered the hospital for her

delivery. Everything proceeded normally and a beautiful baby boy was born. I took the rest of the afternoon off and went to the hospital. When I arrived at the hospital I was met by a nun who asked me who I was. When she found out I was the child's grandmother she told me to follow her since she wanted me to identify the baby. She showed me the little bracelet on his wrist. My heart went out to my grandson. His father was fighting a war and he was so small and helpless! He needed all the love and affection he could get.

Chapter XX

Eddie was now attending Niagara University in Niagara, New York. He came home for a weekend and told us enthusiastically about his courses and the friends he had made, but all this didn't last very long. The high command dismantled all special training in order to have manpower for the final push of the war.

Eddie belonged to the ninth army. He was given a few days leave and then shipped to Camp Carson in Colorado. He liked Colorado very much, but that did not last long either. From there he went to Fort Shelby in Mississippi. His letters from Mississippi were very discouraging because he simply did not like it there.

Then Eddie sent a letter that arrived like a thunderbolt. He said it was the last letter he was going to write because he had been alerted and was going to be shipped overseas. The very same night he appeared home and said, "I have gone AWOL to come to see you and I can only stay a few hours. I'll have to report before dawn."

I asked, "How did you manage that?"

He answered, "The guards kind of closed their eyes and let us go but we must report back before dawn. It is a secret but I will tell you I am at Camp Shanks in New York."

He left after he made us promise to write faithfully. All we had was a post office number and we knew that his letters and ours would be censored. My daughter Helen started to write to him the same day he left, because she wanted him to have letters the minute he arrived overseas. I, too, wrote many letters and so did his brothers and sisters.

We finally began to receive his letters. He told us about his voyage on the Queen Elizabeth and that he was well and we were not to worry about him. Also, he wanted news of his brother Tony. We kept writing. Helen kept writing every single day but he was not receiving our mail. We kept writing and he kept complaining about getting no letters. We had no way to tell him he was continuously in our thoughts. He started accusing us of abandoning him because we did not care for him or love him. These letters would tear

me apart but we were helpless. We had no other way to tell him how much we loved him and that he was not forgotten.

Finally a letter arrived from him full of apologies. He had received that morning a landslide of mail. Twenty-three letters in all had arrived, and, after that, he received some letters every day! When Eddie came home he brought a full suitcase of the letters we had written to him.

Chapter XXI

Now our country and the Allies were preparing for the big push. The ninth army was to fight the decisive battle in Bastogne. This was to become known as the Battle of the Bulge and was the battleground that crushed the enemy. My fear that my son was fighting in this battle robbed me of my peace of mind, but I had to keep cool for the morale of the family. Already the most ferocious battle had become a reality and full units of young men were engaged in the holocaust. Many had paid the highest price for their country, the loss of their lives. We lived in suspense listening to every report on the radio and reading the details in the newspaper. Our fears for Eddie mounted, due to the fact that no letters had arrived for the last ten days.

Thanksgiving was approaching and the usual Thanksgiving celebration posed a dilemma. The family wanted to know if we were going to celebrate. I said, "We will celebrate as usual. I am not anticipating any bad news. No news is good news. Bad news travels fast. I feel that my sons are all right."

I was busy in the kitchen when the mail arrived. There was a post card from Eddie. He said that he was in a hospital in England, that he was all right and that he would write more later! What did the card mean? Why didn't he write a letter? Was he really all right or was he wounded? Was he badly injured?

All kinds of disturbing thoughts were crossing my mind but I knew I had to set the mood for the family. I said, "Thank God he is all right. He says he is and I believe him. Maybe we will know more tomorrow."

All my pretense was not enough to dispel the gloom.

The next day I waited anxiously for the mail to arrive. This time a letter gave us all the information we were waiting for. We had already known that he was camped in the northern part of France. He had told us in his letters that the ground was wet and cold and that they had to sleep on the ground in their tents. Their food was from ration cans and they had no freshly cooked meals.

His letter told us that three days before going into battle he had come down with a fever. Upon examination his illness was diagnosed as pneumonia. He was sent to a hospital in England and he was much better

but he did not know when he would be released from the hospital. Subsequently he was moved to another hospital to convalesce. While he was there he learned that one of his friends from home was convalescing in a hospital not too far from where he was, so he decided to go and see him.

Billy was sitting in a wheel chair with his back to the door. Eddie came in and put his hand on Billy's shoulders. Billy turned, looked up and a smile of happiness lit his face. They spent a few hours together.

The war in Europe was won and the young men came back home.

Tony, too, came back but was rescheduled for service in the Pacific. After a short furlough home he was sent to North Carolina for reassignment. He was not happy with this turn of events because he wanted to start a full life with his wife and children. However, the country needed him and he would serve to the best of his ability.

While in North Carolina he met a fellow in the PX who said that he had been in service for three years and had never left the country. He wished that he would be assigned to foreign duty.

My son went to see his commanding officer and said to him, "I am not happy about leaving the country since I have a wife and two children and have already served on one front. Here is a fellow who has never left his country in three years of service and would like to serve overseas." The officer asked for the other man's name, everything was changed, and my son did not leave for the Pacific.

We were fighting Japan at the time, but Tony was assigned to duty in North Carolina where he rented a cottage for his family to live in.

Chapter XXII

My daughter Helen graduated from Montclair State Teacher's College at the age of nineteen. (She was twenty a month later). She had secured a teaching job in Union, New Jersey.

My daughter Lee decided to work after high school graduation and obtained a job in an office.

Now there were only the younger ones, Richard and Marie, still in school.

After his period of convalescence Edward was sent to Germany. Germany had already surrendered and he was part of the occupation force. He spent a few months there until he became ill with an attack of asthma. He was flown home for treatment and shortly thereafter he was discharged.

During the war period a campaign for those of foreign birth to become American citizens had been intensified. Aliens were looked upon with suspicion and my husband urged me to make application for citizenship. He had acquired his citizenship in 1926. At the time, the law required that the wife had to have her own citizenship papers. I never felt myself less of a citizen than he, but I was too busy raising a large family to take time out to get the necessary papers. Now it was different. With two sons fighting the war and still a large family at home, I had to find time. My husband felt our security was threatened if I didn't, so I made application. There was a period of waiting before I was called with two witnesses to come for the examination. The questions were easy and I was sure I had passed the test. I was waiting to be called to take the oath of allegiance when a letter arrived. I was denied the right to become an American citizen on the grounds that I had failed the test. I would be called later for another examination. When I appeared for the second time before the examiner I was told that whatever I said would be held against me. I was questioned about my sentiments toward this country. I was also asked how my two sons who were in service felt towards this country. On my first exam I had stated that I would decline to fight on Italian soil, but my sons did not have the same feeling since they were born here.

I was asked what I had done to help the war cause. I said that

I worked, bought some bonds, donated metal scraps, took care of my family and wrote to my boys to keep their morale up.

Then I was asked again if I had changed my mind about fighting on Italian soil. I answered, "No," and I was dismissed. I was told that I would receive a notice about the decision.

About a year later I received notification that I was to appear again. Meanwhile I was having a hard time at home. My husband insisted that I should concede the point and get my papers because it was a formality. He was afraid that I would be deported. The children sided with him and I was told that I was stubborn and everyone would suffer because of me.

I went through a period of introspection and turmoil and could not find a solution to the dilemma. Should I negate my principle and admit that I was wrong? Should I consent to fight on my native land's soil and live in peace at home or should I hold to my belief and be at peace with myself?

To go for another examination was like going into a den of lions, and I was very miserable. I had been investigated and when my neighbors wanted to know what was wrong it was hard to explain. I had done nothing wrong and felt humiliated but one thing was crystal clear to me - the injustice of such a demand.

The file of my questions and answers had grown very large. I could see the examiner was sorry for me and he stated that it was not he but the law that required such an admission.

I opened the door of my home to face the enemy, my own family. My daughter Helen was especially angry since she did not understand my scruples and thought I was a stubborn mule. I looked everyone squarely in the face and said, "No, I did not agree to fight." I had failed again and I burst into tears.

My husband said, "You will be deported."

I said, "So I will. I will take whatever comes my way. I want to live in peace with myself."

Later I was informed that I had the right to appeal and I did appeal. In 1948 I was called to appear in court. My odyssey had lasted five years and I was resigned to accept whatever was to come. My family did not hold much hope that I would be accepted into the American family. I had never been in court before.

I sat halfway down the aisle. On the first day of my appearance in court I was not called. I went home dispirited and tired. On the second day I sat quietly and listened to cases. I was appalled by the lies that were told. A woman working in a diner said she had never heard discussion about the war, and a banker's wife stated the war was never discussed at home or with friends. During that period nothing dominated every day living more than the war. The press and the news on the radio continuously reminded us that we were fighting a frightful war.

A lady sitting next to me said, "is there anyone here with you?"

I said, "No."

She said, "Do you have a lawyer?"

I said, "No, what do I need a lawyer for? I have done nothing wrong."

She said, "God help you."

I was contemplating her words when my name was called. I got up and walked down the aisle. The district attorney approached me and said, "You are going to be the first case after lunch. Be here in time."

Then he asked if I had a lawyer representing me and I said, "No."

He said, "You are entitled to a defense. If you want a lawyer the court will assign one but your case will not be disposed of today."

I wanted the whole process to be over and done with once and for all. I answered, "I don't see why I need a lawyer, I haven't done anything wrong."

He replied, "I have to bring the case against you."

I answered, "That's your duty."

After the noon recess I walked to my seat. Shortly afterwards my name was called. I walked down the aisle. The bailiff told me to put my right hand on the Bible and he administered the oath.

I was instructed to stand directly in front of the judge's bench and the district attorney was asked to present my case. The judge listened attentively and asked if it were all true. I said it was. He said, "You don't want to fight to defend this country?"

I said, "it is not like that. I love America."

Then he invited me to sit next to him facing the audience. Then he asked me how many children I had. I answered, "Nine."

"How many grandchildren do you have?"

I said, "Fourteen."

"Did you do anything to win the war?"

I repeated what I had said in the report. I was asked if my sons in service felt the same way I did, and I answered, "No, they don't have the same attachment I have. Your honor, I was born in Italy. My parents are buried there. The people are suffering. I cannot bring more misery upon them."

The judge turned to the district attorney and said, "You have misjudged this woman. She would not hurt an animal on the street." Then he proceeded to ask me, "if there was an army of women would you serve on Italian soil?"

I said, "Your honor, I am too old to fight."

He said, "That is not the point. The law requires that you go out and fight."

I said, "If, today, I am given my citizenship here and tomorrow I move to another country and was asked the same question should I deny this country? What a good citizen I would be today." Then he asked, "If this country was invaded by the Italians would you defend this country?"

Something in me arose at the possibility of an invasion. I said, "I would fight with all I have. I would fight even against my own brother."

I could see that the judge wanted me to have the privilege of being admitted to the American family, but that he had to uphold the law. He asked me if I would fight if we were at war with another country. I said, "Yes." When he asked if I would consider fighting with an army of women I again said, "Yes."

I returned to my seat and waited to take the Oath of Allegiance and become an American citizen.

While I was answering the judge, the courtroom was silent. There wasn't a sound as everyone bent to listen to the discussion between the judge and myself. I sat on my seat exhausted and drained of all strength. The woman next to me said, "You were magnificent."

I did not feel magnificent. I did not feel anything except defeat. After the ceremony the courtroom emptied, and, in the corridor, people that I had never known before congratulated me for my performance. I did not feel happy. I felt dismissed.

At home there was anxiety because this was the last chance. Either I would be a citizen or I would not be. My face showed my anguish because I had betrayed my beliefs. No one questioned me, but all understood that now I would not be deported.

Chapter XXIII

When Eddie returned home from service he did not like to see me continuing working and wanted me to quit my job. Everyone became dissatisfied. With three of my daughters working, they felt there was no need for me to work. However, I was happy with my work and my employer was very good to me and appreciated my work. My boss left up to me the hours I would be able to give, but, for the second time, I had to give in to the pressure of my family and quit my job.

The first few days after I quit I felt like a displaced person. In the afternoon when my housework was done I would go to the grocery store for some supplies that I needed. I felt that I did not belong walking the street in the early afternoon. After seven years of work I had to make another adjustment.

My daughter Irma married in 1946. Shortly after that, Nicola began to not feel well. Upon an examination by the doctor he was told that he had to quit his foundry work. His lungs couldn't tolerate the dust any more. He was only 57.

My son Tony wanted to go into business for himself. A corporation was formed with Tony, my husband, and my son Edward as members. Nicola was able to work outdoors since the fresh air was beneficial to his lungs. Edward was working part time because, when he was discharged from service, he decided to continue in college. With the help of the G.I. Bill of Rights he was able to manage to complete his education.

When one starts a business there is a lot to learn and it was hard in the beginning. We had to pool all of the family resources to stay above water. After a couple of years the business began to expand and sustain itself. There was a lot to learn in construction work and a lot to learn from mistakes.

In 1948, Lee also married and her husband Anthony joined the firm.

My husband still worked hard, but he was well now since being out of doors helped him.

Richard and Marie were both in high school. They both had part time jobs and earned their carfare and spending money.

Lee and Anthony lived with us for a short period of time due to the shortage of rentals after the war.

My oldest daughter, Colette, who now had four children, was being evicted. The house where she lived was sold and the new owner wanted her apartment to live in. She became very nervous because of her inability to find a place to live. Since she had four small children, no one wanted to rent to her.

My husband and I decided to change our house into two apartments, one for Colette and one for Lee. The arrangement we had was temporary and not ideal. I still had four of my children at home and Lee already had one child.

We owned a lot in Maplewood. We consulted with Tony and the other members of the corporation and decided to build a new house for us. The house we lived in would be turned into a two-family house and our two daughters would each have her own apartment.

On February 1, 1950, we moved into our new house. That year our son Eddie graduated Newark College of Engineering and received a Bachelor of Science Degree. He now was a mechanical engineer. I was a very happy person when I attended the ceremony.

Richard graduated high school and enrolled in Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

Marie enrolled in the Phoenix School of Design in New York City.

Helen did not like the change of residence from Irvington. In fact no one did. We had a beautiful new home in a very nice neighborhood, with all the modern conveniences and nice furnishings, and no one was satisfied. I was not happy because of the situation. After a few months I told the family that it was time to start enjoying our new home and stop sulking. Like magic the mood changed and harmony reigned again.

Our married children would usually visit us on Sundays.

My husband started the lawn that spring. He had an artistic nature, and under his magic fingers and hard work, shrubs, flowers, a beautiful green lawn, and garden came alive.

Chapter XXIV

My husband had left Italy in 1907 and had never returned for a visit. Circumstances had not permitted it. First was lack of money, then World War I and then the children kept coming. Next came the disappointment of the Great Depression where we lost everything. Following that were the problems of re-establishment and then came the most compelling necessity, the children's education. The Second World War was another impediment.

My husband's father and mother kept begging us to go for a visit. All this happiness was denied them and us. They both died with an unsatisfied desire.

When we finally could make the move they had passed away but my husband still had brothers and sisters that he longed to see. I had only a couple of cousins and a niece and a nephew. In 1951, we thought it was time for us to make that much desired visit.

Meanwhile, Helen had decided to take a job teaching in Venezuela, South America, with the Creole Oil Company. It paid more money and she also wanted the experience of seeing how other people lived.

My husband and I decided on the date we wanted to leave, but when I went to an agent to buy our passages I was told that all the ships leaving for Italy on that date were sold out.

We had chosen that date for a special reason. The agent said we could have passage on a later date. I told him how disappointed

I was and he suggested flying. My husband turned that down. Then he said, "There are two cancellations on an English ship if you are willing to go via France. You will be able to reach Italy on time."

We said we would be willing and bought a passage on the Queen Mary. We would return on the Queen Elizabeth.

On the sixth day of September my husband and I left for the land we had lived in as children. The excitement of all our children was very high. It started the night before with a party in our home

In order to look my best I had decided to have a home permanent before leaving. Helen was working on my hair. During the period of waiting to apply the neutralizer I began to clear the room. Absentmindedly I emptied

the neutralizer down the drain. Helen asked what I had done with the liquid. I said, "I don't know."

She replied "it was right here on the sink."

I said, "Oh, I emptied it down the drain."

She asked, "How am I going to finish your hair?"

I said, "I don't know. Just wash it."

"It will not be good." She shook her head in dismay.

"I need the neutralizer to complete your permanent."

By now I was annoyed and proceeded to wash my hair. I thought, "Even if the permanent doesn't look good I still have my hair."

I said to Helen, "I will do the best I can."

My husband and I didn't expect the whole family, even the very young grandchildren, to come to see us off and wish us bon voyage. However, we arrived at the pier escorted by most of the members of our family we were leaving behind. We went aboard and a retinue of our family came aboard to view the ship. When all of the visitors were asked to leave I felt desolate.

There, standing and waving on the docks was my whole life and I was going away from them. The siren's shrill sound pierced the air. The time for the ship to leave had arrived.

My grandson Teddy was terrified by the sound and was screaming and clutching the arms of his mother. The ship began to move and I began to cry as the ship pulled away. My husband reproached me and said, "Why are you crying? We have waited so long for this."

I gulped and said, "We may never see them anymore. We are going so far away. We don't know what may happen."

My husband said, "You silly fool. Of course we will see them again. In a month we will be back."

His words pulled me back to reality and we went inside to attend to the necessity of being assigned for a seat at a table. We wanted a table for two but my loitering on deck made us late in registering and we had to be satisfied to sit at a table for ten.

The Queen Mary was a magnificent ship. The service was very good and the food excellent. In the afternoon refreshments were served and at night there was entertainment.

My husband and I would usually see a movie and retire. During the day I would read and sit on the deck talking to other passengers. Sometimes we would go to the top deck of the ship and sit and meditate on the grandeur of the ocean and the smallness of the huge ship we were on.

The journey took a little over five days and then there was land again, a land we had not planned to see but were glad we did. Cherbourg, France, was the port in Normandy where we disembarked. The ship came close to the embankment, a ramp was attached to the ship, a door opened and the passengers filed out to firm land. Conveniently a train was waiting for the

passengers. We proceeded to board the train and eight hours later the train arrived at Paris.

The trains are different from ours. They are divided into compartments containing six seats. A corridor runs the length of the car.

Eight hours is a long time to be confined. The corridor with windows gave us the opportunity to stretch our legs and view the countryside. The time went fast with conversation with the other passengers.

We arrived in Paris in the early evening and sought some information. An American Expressman asked us where we were to go. We said, "Rome, Italy." He said, "Trains for Rome don't leave from here. You will have to go to Gara De Leon to take the train for Rome." A taxi took us to Gara De Leon. An American Expressman asked the ticket clerk for a schedule for Rome. There was a train that left for Rome that same night at 11:30 p.m. and would arrive in Rome two days later at 9:00 a.m. Another train would leave at 8:00 a.m. the next morning. We decided to take the morning train and arrive in Rome at 10:00 a.m., since the morning train was an express.

We checked our luggage at the station, and, without knowing a word of the French language, we walked out of the station and started to look for a place to eat. We did not want to venture too far from the railroad station because we did not want to lose our way back. We saw a place where people were seated at a table eating so we assumed it was a restaurant. We decided to enter. We were approached by a man who said something. I asked, "Do you speak English?" He shrugged his shoulders. I asked, "Do you speak Italian?" He motioned with his hands for us to wait and he went to a back room and came back with a waiter. The waiter, in broken English, asked us what we wanted. I said, "We want to eat."

He sat us at a table and brought a menu and then he left. The menu was in French. He came back and I said, "We don't understand the menu."

He said, "What do you want to eat?"

My husband ordered soup, steak, salad and wine.

After eating we had to look for lodging for the night. We saw a sign advertising the Hotel Modern. We entered and went to the desk. A woman asked us what we wanted in French. I said, "I don't understand. Do you speak English?" She shook her head. Then I asked her if she spoke Italian. She motioned for us to wait. Then she came back with a chambermaid. The chambermaid asked us in English if we were looking for a room. I said, "Yes."

She said, "Where is your luggage?" I showed her the stub for where we had checked our luggage. She said, "Do you have a passport?" I showed her the passports and then she told us to follow her. We were assigned a room on the second floor. The room was large and clean with a bathroom. I wanted to wash but there wasn't any soap or toilet paper. I called on the phone and waited for the maid to come. She asked what I wanted and I told her. She came back with the items requested.

The next morning we got up early since we had to have breakfast and go for the train. We found out that you could not buy a full breakfast, only coffee and a bun. We arrived at the station in plenty of time, redeemed our luggage and boarded the train.

We had been told to travel second class because first class was too expensive and third class unfit. On one of the cars we saw a Roman numeral two so we assumed it was second class car section. We seated ourselves, relaxed and the train started to move. We were the only two passengers in the whole compartment. The next compartment was overflowing and I said to my husband, "I like to be alone with only the two of us. We have privacy."

The seats were covered with red velvet cloth. You could pull a table down in front of you and write. I said, "Not bad!" and then I proceeded to relax and enjoy the countryside.

In due time the ticket collector came into the compartment and asked for our tickets. My husband handed them to him. He looked at the tickets and began to speak rapidly. We could not understand one word of what he was saying. Again we asked if he could speak English or Italian but he shook his head. We gave a helpless gesture with our hands. Then he rubbed his thumb with his index finger. This was an international language we understood.

He wanted more money because we were seated in the first class compartment. My husband took out the francs we had. It was money we had exchanged at the station and the collector took the difference owing on our fare. Then he escorted us to the second class compartment. Consequently, we did not have enough money to buy meals on the train. We had only enough French money to see us to Rome.

When we reached the frontier separating France and Italy there was a half-hour layover. This was for the purpose of inspecting the luggage to see that there weren't any taxable or non-allowable goods in it.

We decided that my husband would stay for the inspection and I would go and buy some food for us to eat. I was sure I could find what I wanted because the people spoke Italian. I saw a place that looked like a store so I entered and asked for bread. I was told I had to go to a bakery to buy bread since grocery stores did not carry bread. I bought some Swiss cheese and bananas and proceeded to find a bakery. The grocer told me to go down a little way and I would come to the place. The town consisted of only one long street at the foot of the Alps. I walked the whole length of the street and could not see any sign of a bakery. I decided to go back to the train because I was afraid the train would start and leave me behind.

When I got back I found that my husband had gone in search of me. He was afraid that I would not come back in time and had instructed the other passengers to throw the luggage out of the train if we did not make it in time. Fortunately he came back before the train started. He was angry at me for

taking so long and I was angry at him for leaving the train. The train started and our lunch consisted of Swiss cheese and bananas.

The next stop after leaving the frontier town was at the station of Torino, Italy, a major industrial city in northern Italy. The passengers that were to proceed on were not allowed to descend from the train. Vendors with pushcarts were offering vittles, big long sandwiches of Italian bread with meat or cheese, fruit cakes and other provisions. We bought two of the sandwiches, some fruits and mineral water. The Europeans are big consumers of mineral water.

More passengers got aboard and the train started again. Our next stop was Rome but it would be many hours before we reached Rome. After supper I walked the corridor many times back and forth, forth and back, hoping to be tired enough to be able to sleep. I tried to make myself as comfortable as I could and tried and tried to sleep. It was impossible. The train's noise kept reverberating in my brain. However, even a bad night comes to an end with the light of dawn and the promise that the train would soon stop.

I began to absorb the sweet delight of being on Italian soil, the country of my birth. I listened to the train conductor announcing the names of the cities at the stations we were passing. It gave me an idea of how far we still had to travel. I was fascinated by the beauty of the countryside and the last few hours passed on the wings of the wind.

Here I was now in Rome! As the train stopped I marveled that I had come all the way from America, passed over the Atlantic Ocean, gone through France and had seen the beautiful awesome Alps.

I had imagined the Alps to be a ridge of mountains and then you were on the other side of the ridge. However, once you passed a group there were many more. My imagination was staggered trying to absorb the reality of such majestic beauty. Wherever you looked there were peaks and valleys and a lake miles long. The peaks of the mountain were shining with snow and, in the sunshine, were reflected in the lake. A trickle of water from the melting snow found its way down the crevices of the mountains feeding the lake. People in bathing suits were bathing in the lake and relaxing in the sun. But here I was in Rome, the Eternal City!

We got off the train and proceeded to a bank in the station to exchange some money into Italian currency. Then my husband and I walked out of the station to look at the Eternal City, a city we were seeing for the first time. We also wanted to find a restaurant for a late breakfast since we had to go back again to the train for another three-hour trip to Naples. There we would take another train to Avellino, our hometown.

Finally the train trips were over and we arrived at our destination! We looked around trying to recapture the remembrances of my childhood. Forty-one years bring many changes in us without our realizing it. It also brings changes in the environment.

I had the feeling that I was there for the first time. I realized that when I left I was seeing with the eyes of a child and now I was an adult. Forty-one years was a long span of one's life to be away. There was one thing I could not do. I could not roll back the years and start where I had left.

After the first bewilderment, I began to be oriented. My husband suggested that we not go down the road to go to his family because he knew of a short cut that he had taken many times as a young boy and he wanted to retrace his steps. It was not a good choice because the terrain had briars and rocks. We arrived scratched, dusty and in a sweat.

My husband's brother lived in his father's house with wife and children and an unmarried sister. My husband had wanted to keep the day of our arrival a secret so he could surprise his family. However, they were on the lookout for us and when we were about one block in the distance from his house his brother saw us. Actually we were two strangers, a man and a woman, but he surmised who we were.

This brother of my husband was only three years old when he left Italy, but he came to meet us with tears shining in his eyes. He said, "You are Nicola and this is Maria," and he hugged us both. The three of us walked to the house chatting happily. There was so much to talk about. His wife and sister were hugging and kissing us, too.

After awhile he told us that the whole family had traveled from Milan to be there when we arrived. They had been there staying with in-laws for three days waiting for us to arrive. Everyone wanted to be first. The joy of the reunion is difficult to describe. They wanted to know everything about us and we had a lot to ask them. Actually we had to get acquainted.

The next few days were very busy. We had to go to several places. My husband wanted to visit his parents' graves. His father had requested that he be buried in an outside grave since he liked fresh air. He claimed that at night he would come out of his grave and go and eat the fruit on the farm! My brother-in-law had placed an electric light on his grave, a light that burned night and day so that he could find his way back from his night's forage.

I wanted to look the town over and visit the churches I had attended as a child. I wanted to visit my mother's grave. I also wanted to see the house I had lived in which was now occupied by the widow of my half brother. She had two children, a boy and a girl, and the boy had already married. When I had left, my half brother was a baby two years old.

When one arrives from America, the word gets around fast. The day we arrived, a lady, barefoot and poorly dressed, came to the house. The minute she saw me she threw her arms round me in an embrace and called me aunt. I was flabbergasted! I didn't have the slightest idea who she was since I didn't have a niece of her age in Italy. I said, "You must be mistaken. I am not your aunt."

Then she told me she lived in a nearby town and she gave me her name and the name of her brother in America. She said she was American born

but she could not come to America because her husband had fought in the Italian army and she was considered an Italian citizen. I felt sorry for the woman and told her I would do what I could when I returned to America. She asked me to get in touch with her brother and tell him to write. Because of the war she was destitute and she wanted him to help her. I told her to give me his address, and I would go and see him when I returned home. This I did upon my return.

The next day a beautiful young girl came and asked for me. The first thing she did was to call me aunt and embraced me. I responded to her embrace and felt a warm feeling in my body. She indeed was my niece who lived in my father's house with her mother. She said, "I came to invite you to our house."

I answered, "Yes, I intend to come today because your house was also mine when I lived in Italy and I did want to see you and your mother." I never had seen my sister-in-law. She was the wife of my half brother who was only two years old when I left Italy. One day was not enough. We needed more time to get acquainted and my sister-in-law insisted that we should come again the next day and have dinner with them. I could see that she was poor and had raised her children without her husband. My half brother had died in an accident. I reflected that when I did not know them they were just a name, but now that I had seen them they became part of my life, because of blood ties. They were loveable people, my people. My sister-in-law directed her daughter to make a gift for me with her own hands so I would have a remembrance of them. She was an expert in embroidery so she made a pillowcase for my sofa with an embroidered horse and bridle. I was very touched and promised to keep in touch.

I visited a cousin of mine who was a young man when I left. Now he was old and rejoiced that he had a very nice family. He had given a good education to his children and they had good positions.

Everyone was very wonderful to us. They made us feel like one of them and very much at home.

We visited a shrine that I would not have missed for anything, because of the rich memory of the past. As a child we had to walk, up the mountain, but now with modern transportation we reached the shrine by bus. One who has gone up a mountain by motorized means can appreciate the anxiety of the ride, but I would not have visited my town of birth without visiting the shrine. The devotion displayed by the pilgrims infused in me a new appreciation of my faith.

On the next day we visited a brother of my husband's barber. He had asked my husband to visit his mother, an 85-year-old woman, and his brother to ascertain if they needed help. His brother had asked for help claiming that a son of his was very ill and needed a lot of medical care. Those people lived in a nearby town. We went there and introduced ourselves. The brother was at work but his wife asked us to come in. She was very cordial

and asked for news about the relatives in America. We asked where the mother lived and she gave us directions. She offered us refreshments and then started to talk about her sick son. We did not tell her the real reason we were there. She thought we had come to deliver an envelope her brother-in-law had sent. She took us to see her son in the sick room. He was in bed, a beautiful young man of 23. His hand on the coverlet was transparent, his eyes were sunken, and there was a pallor on his face. We told him that his uncle had asked us to visit him. We left the room with a prayer on my lips for that beautiful young man.

Then we proceeded to find the old woman, who was living with an unmarried daughter. The daughter was running a small grocery store and making a very meager living for the two of them. The old woman was sitting in front of the store. We told her that her son had sent us to give her his regards. She called her daughter. I was startled when I saw her. I felt that I knew her but could not place her. She began to tell us how hard it was for her with her mother to care for and to make a living. She asked us to please tell her brother in America that she needed help to care for their mother.

When we were about to leave I asked her if she ever had lived in Atripalda. She said, "Why, yes!" She said that when she was very young she had lived with a brother that had a barber shop in Atripalda. I asked if she had attended school there. She said she had. Then I told her my maiden name and she remembered that we were in the same class. Of all the people I had seen she was the only link with my young years.

That same night we went to visit one more family. One of our best friends had asked us to do this. Our friend's mother, a 97-year-old woman, was living with a son of 79 in a town about ten miles away from the town I came from. Our dear friend, Sam DeAngelis, had given us an envelope to give to his mother.

We hired a taxicab for the trip. When we got there we asked where Sadie DeAngelis' house was located. We had the address and we were told where to go. When we got there we asked for Sadie. A very small, neat, almost fragile woman appeared and crisply asked us what we wanted. We told her that her son Sam from America had sent us. She invited us in. There were four of us - my husband, myself, my brother-in-law and the taxi driver. She put two of her fingers in her mouth and a shrill whistle brought young grandchildren to her command. She whispered in their ears and everyone disappeared.

She began to apologize for being caught unaware. My husband handed her the envelope her son had sent. Meanwhile more people were coming in and activity was apparent.

The fire was being started. We protested that we did not have time to stay because we were to leave early the next morning. She said, "What would my son think of me if I did not honor a visit from a friend of his? His friends are also friends of mine."

The table was set. I demonstrated that I did not want to cause her work. She said with asperity, "What would my son in America think of me if I had not done my duty?" Now I agreed with her and complimented her on her fine thinking. She was pleased and she busied herself supervising activities. She was setting the table with the finest tablecloth and napkins, beautiful crystal glasses and china dishes. The table was set fit for a king's banquet. Then platters of fine foods began to arrive, as well as freshly baked bread and fine wines. She motioned for us to sit at the table with many members of her family. After eating, a big tray of luscious fruits was served. Then came coffee and a huge tray of delicious pastries. I especially admired a pitcher of sparkling spring water. The crystal pitcher with the drops of water dripping on the side was the spirit of a 97-year-old woman with the mind of a youth.

There was more than one kind of wine. Good cheer pervaded the room. Then someone appeared with a musical instrument and a strain of sweet music joined the mood of the magical night. Induced by the music, our hostess raised her voice in a song. Her 79-year-old son joined her. It was a great pleasure to see these two people, both old, singing in unison to the strains of the music.

My brother-in-law and the taxi driver declared they had never spent a more enjoyable night. It was very late when we left that beautiful company and I never will forget the lovely 97-year-old lady that provided us with so much pleasure. On our way home we kept marveling at the spirit, the alertness and the grace of our hostess. We had met so many lovely people that night.

The next day we arose early, had breakfast and said good-by. My young niece from Atripalda came to see us leave. This was the hardest part of our trip. We were leaving for the second time people that meant so much to us. We stepped into the taxi, waved our hands, and the car started. Our relatives were wiping their eyes. My husband brought his index finger to the corner of his eyes. We sat sadly in our seats not noticing anything.

The driver asked us where we would stay in Naples. We said we had not made any reservations and asked if he had any suggestions. We left our luggage at the hotel he had taken us to and then asked the driver if he had time to drive us around to see the sights.

A mishap was about to happen. Like any other big city the traffic was dangerous. At the intersection the driver applied his brakes suddenly and my head hit the glass divider that separated the driver from the passengers. Blood began to gush down my face from a superficial cut on my forehead. The driver stopped the car in front of a drug store and asked the druggist to apply a dressing to my small wound. The druggist said he could not do that since it was against the law to give such service. He said I would have to go to the hospital for proper care.

The hospital grounds were fenced in and a gate would be opened by a guard to admit the patients. A group of curiosity seekers were near the gate.

Seeing me with blood on my face someone asked what had happened. A woman answered, "Her husband has hit her with a stick." I was amused by the woman's imagination.

I entered the emergency room where a nun took care of my little wound. She wanted to know what had happened. She listened and then said I could not be released because it was an accident. She said I would have to see an officer of the law and she instructed me where to go. I went to a room where a placard indicated there was a representative of the law. The driver did not like this because it would not look good on his record. I was asked where I lived and other information. The driver gave his license number and I was released.

We went back to the hotel and decided to rest for the balance of the afternoon.

The next day we visited the excavation at Pompeii where a guide told us about the various buildings and ruins. I needed to go back to the hotel for a good reason. I had contacted a virus and was in great discomfort, but the guide insisted on showing us the most interesting parts. Then he insisted on taking us to a store where all kinds of souvenirs were being sold.

The next day we visited Sorrento and had dinner at a beautiful restaurant high up on a hill. Tables were set outside overlooking the bay. It was a beautiful sight with the sun filtering through a canopy covering the patio. My husband ordered a sumptuous fish dinner while I had to content myself with boiled rice. I did not dare order rich food since I didn't want to aggravate my condition.

That same day, late in the afternoon, we left for Rome. When we descended from the train it was raining very hard. By the time we were able to hire a taxi, we were all wet. We found a hotel and approached the desk looking like fish pulled out of pond. I could see that the clerk was not willing to have us as guests but he could not deny us lodging without a sound reason. Begrudgingly he assigned a room to us.

The next morning we went on a tour of the city. We had arranged with my husband's brothers to meet us at the railroad station late in the afternoon so they could travel the 900 kilometers with us to Milan. The train was packed and a lot of passengers had to stand up. One of my sisters-in-law sat in the middle of the aisle on her suitcase.

While in Milan we stayed with my husband's brother and his sister's sons showed us around. They owned a car. My sister-in-law's husband accompanied us everywhere. He was a very outgoing, congenial person.

On Sunday we visited my husband's younger brother who lived in a nearby town. Everyone saw to it that we had a good time and we felt very welcome.

The Duomo, the famous Milan Cathedral, left a lasting impression with its famous artwork. Every carved stone, every column is unique. I asked

when that beautiful majestic piece of work had been produced and no one seemed to know.

In Milan we saw many interesting things. LaScala, the famous opera house, was one of our stops.

I was impressed by the cemetery of the rich with marble and bronze statues, the Tomb of Toscanini and other famous people.

I had noticed, in the home of my sister-in-law, that their windows were without screens and yet there were no flies. It was late summer so the windows were open. I asked my sister-in-law if they sprayed in the city, but she said that while people slept at night the city was washed down by pumps. My brother-in-law lived in a very comfortable apartment with all improvements. I took a bath and washed my hair for the first time after my ill-fated permanent. After my hair was washed I had the most beautiful head of hair, wavy and shining.

Finally came the time to leave. Again we had to say good-bye and everyone made us promise to write.

On the train, as we headed toward France, we were tired but very happy. Our visit had been very successful. Seated for another long train ride I was very much absorbed in my thoughts. I was sad because I had left so many loveable people behind. The old country with the magic charm of old memory, the deep roots of my ancestry, the beauty of the mountains and valleys, the blue sky, brooks, lakes, trees and grass - all this kept churning in my mind.

We had promised to come again when my husband retired. We wanted to go back for a whole year, to really relive our early years. But all this beautiful dream - would it ever come to pass? The future was not up to us to decide. We could only dream and hope. Two or three days with each family were not sufficient time to fill in all of the past years.

All these and other thoughts seemed to make the ride back shorter.

Back in Paris we had reserved five days for the last lap of our trip. We wanted to take a look at the capital of France.

The first thing to do was to look for lodging. We went to an agency and were given a few addresses. We selected a place that was convenient and at a price we could afford. Breakfast and dinner were offered with the plan.

After we unpacked we decided to go out and take a look around although we were tired. We wanted to be ready for the next day so we didn't venture far.

I noticed there were busses stopped in front of the railroad station and there were signs on the fronts of the busses telling where they were headed. Usually it was to a point of interest.

I also noticed a large map of the city of Paris. Paris, it seemed to me, was laid out like a huge spider web and the starting point was always where the railroad was. Then it opened into other centers down the line. That

information enabled us to travel by bus instead of a taxi, which we hardly could afford.

We chose the places we wanted to visit and usually we would tell the bus driver where we wanted to get off. It worked very well. We did hire a taxi if the route were complicated. We enjoyed most of the sights that tourists usually go abroad to see. I loved the Seine River with its trees and bridges and the Elysian Fields with their gardens, impressive statues, fountains, beautiful tall trees and flowerbeds and more flowers.

We would leave in the morning and return at dinnertime feeling tired. After dinner we would retire to rest.

I was amazed that gambling in Paris was done on the streets. We shopped in stores for souvenirs to bring home.

The five days went very fast but we did need that much time for ourselves. In Italy relatives and friends were always around us so we had no time for other things we might have done.

On the fifth day we got up early, paid our bill and left for the train and Cherbourg, France, where the Queen Elizabeth was scheduled to take us back home.

On the train I was musing about all of the things I had seen and done. I remembered all of the promises. Lots of them were never to be kept, because people asked for things you are in no position to satisfy.

Before we knew it the eight-hour train ride was over. I have pondered about how time flies when your mind is busy. I also came to the conclusion that when going on a trip one anticipates events beyond one's control, has anxiety for things one wants to do and the uncertainty of the unforeseen beckons.

Upon returning, one rests on an accomplished project.

It was dark when we reached the point of embarkation. The Queen Elizabeth was late in arriving and we had to meet the ship in mid water. We had to board motor boats to wait for the Queen to arrive. There were not enough seats for everyone, so we were packed in like sardines. I had a seat in the front, close to the rail projecting out, and I felt as though I were in the water. The night was chilly and damp but I was lucky to have a seat. My husband had to stand up three hours for Her Majesty to arrive. It was dark and we could see the lights on the shore. Finally, sailing down the channel, came the Queen bathed in streams of colorful lights. It was a beautiful sight, hard to forget. I was chilled to the bone but, at last, the bridge was lowered, the two vessels were connected, and the passengers, with a feeling of relief, walked into the majestic ship. The ship was very warm and the table was loaded with good food. The comfort we found cancelled the discomfort we had suffered.

Returning home took a day longer than going and the passage was uneventful except for one day.

We came back by the northern route. One night, while we sat at dinner, I noticed the crew barricading the portholes. I asked one of the crew members why he was doing that and he said there were rough seas ahead. My husband and I retired at the usual time. I awakened during the night because there was a loud banging on the outside wall of the ship. My husband also woke up. I said, "What's the noise?"

He answered, "High waters against the wall of the ship." I was in the upper berth and my husband was in the lower berth.

I said to him, "I have to hold on to the rails protecting the berth because I am rolling from side to side."

My husband replied, "Me, too!"

My ears were tuned to the loud noise of the ship when my husband said, "I am going to the men's room." When he came back, he said, "It's horrible. There are a lot of sick people and I am seasick too. I have already vomited."

After a couple of hours I decided to get up and get ready for breakfast. I dressed, washed and asked my husband if he wanted to come, too, but he said, "No, I am too sick to eat."

I left the cabin and in the corridor I had to hold on to the walls because of the ship's rocking. I started to climb up the stairs but felt like a rubber ball going up and down. I managed to reach the dining room and sat at a table. There was only one other person in the dining room sitting at a table. I joined the woman because I wanted some company. The waiter approached, took the order and served the food. As I looked at the food I became nauseated and left the room without touching the food. Somehow, I managed to reach our cabin. My husband said the steward had suggested he eat an apple and had given him one. It worked, so he suggested for me to do the same. I was too sick to take his advice and lay on my bunk for the balance of the day.

The next morning the sun was shining brightly and the sea was calm. The barricades were removed from the windows and people were moving around. Late in the afternoon we decided to go on the upper deck. The door was still closed but one could go out. There were ropes to hold onto. A gust of wind yanked my hand loose from the rope and swung me around. That was enough for me, so I stayed inside the rest of the day.

By now I was eager to get home. The morning of the day we were to arrive I woke up early, dressed and packed our suitcases.

Then we went to breakfast and to look for land. We were to arrive at noon.

At 10:00 a.m. I thought, "A couple more hours and we'll be home!"

I looked at the clock again and, to my dismay, the clock read 9:00 a.m. I had not thought about the lost hour. In order to adjust to our time the clock had been turned back one hour. I resented that last hour. I felt cheated.

Finally the coast began to appear. My spirits rose and I felt elated. What a sweet feeling! Here was the land that had become my land, the land

where I had planted roots. I ached to see my home and my family and to pick up life where I left it.

Finally we disembarked and had to go through customs to be released. After the inspection of our suitcases the first person I saw was my granddaughter Carol. She was with her father, my son Tony, who had come to meet us and help with our luggage.

Our daughter Irma and her husband, Danny, had also come to meet us. I rode in my son-in-law's car while my husband rode with Tony.

It was almost dusk when we left New York and a drizzling rain was falling. It was good to be home. The small houses with the green lawns, and the trees dripping with rain seemed to make it more intimate as we approached our home. We had left big cities with large buildings, a sharp contrast to these small suburban homes nestling privately on their lots, some with white picket fences. I loved every street and every house and then I reached my own. The other members of the family were waiting for us to arrive and to welcome us back with a feast. This was home. This was where we belonged, where we had matured and taken roots.

Chapter XXV

After our vacation I had one more adjustment to make. It's not easy to take over the schedule one has left, especially when changes have taken place.

Helen had left for Venezuela where she had secured a teaching position with the Creole Petroleum Corporation. After eight years of teaching in Union, N.J., her salary consisted of \$3,800. She had started working at a salary of \$1,300. In Venezuela, teaching children of Americans working for the company, her salary rose to \$6,000. There were many other benefits too.

Richard decided to enroll in Newark College of Engineering in Newark, N.J., to complete his education.

Edward had a job with a pharmaceutical company.

Marie was attending a school of design in New York City.

My family had indeed gotten small. I enjoyed the beauty of my new home and garden and occasional visits from my married children with the grandchildren.

In June, 1952, Edward married Alice, and Helen came home for a month's vacation.

Everything seemed serene on the surface.

We celebrated the holidays of 1952 with the love of our families around us. We were lucky indeed.

On New Year's Eve a light snow blanketed the ground. On the first of the year, 1953, the sun rose, shining in the sky, promising to melt the white beauty of the snow. We had been invited to share New Year's Day dinner with our son Tony and his family. My husband took the snow shovel and started to remove the snow. I protested that he did not need to do that since the sun would take care of it. I wanted him to get dressed, to attend the church service, and then go to Tony's house to spend a few hours with our grandchildren. He urged me to go on first and he would follow later. I did notice that part of his ear lobes were purplish. He arrived at our son's house all fatigued and said that he was unable to walk uphill straight. He had had to walk snakelike. He barely touched the food and right after he had eaten

he said he wanted to go home because he felt gaseous. He urged me to stay and said, "I will be okay." However I felt worried and asked Richard to take us home.

Two days earlier I had fallen and hurt my back badly. The day after New Year both my husband and I went to see our doctor. Dr. Spallone had only to look at my husband to know there was something serious. He was not at all concerned about my back. He must have thought that if I could walk, there couldn't be too much wrong.

He proceeded to examine my husband and very seriously said that he wanted a cardiogram taken because he suspected a heart attack.

He gave us instructions to have a cardiogram taken the following day and told us to report to him in two days. He then would give us instructions to follow.

While the tests were being taken and evaluated my husband was to do no work whatsoever, though he could sit and watch television. The next few days needed for the evaluation were the longest days of my life.

Finally, the doctor called and said, "I have the report. Your husband is a very sick man. He has suffered a heart attack, the kind that could kill him in less than five minutes. He has suffered a thrombosis."

He told me he wanted to examine him again to give him instructions to follow.

This news was too much for me. The thought of losing him suddenly overwhelmed me and I collapsed. Fortunately my daughter Lucy had come to see us and realizing the gravity of the situation, she called the doctor.

My husband was sitting in the living room when he noticed that I was not moving around. Lucy had to tell him that I was not feeling well. He came into the room and said to me, "Don't worry. I am not going to die. I am going to get well."

Lucy told him that she had called the doctor and that he would arrive soon. The doctor came and administered some sedatives. He assured me that with the medications we have today he would recover. The doctor's assuring words and the sedative produced the calm that I needed and I fell asleep.

When I awoke I felt much better, and I realized, that two days of waiting and the abrupt news of his serious condition had played a trick on me. Now I knew I had to be strong in order to nurse my husband back to health.

The doctor told us that my husband did not have to have bed rest, that he could sit up and read or watch television. He could walk inside the house but he was not to go out or do any work until he gave the word.

The medication, the diet and the rest had a good effect and my husband improved steadily. After six months of obeying doctor's orders he improved enough to resume some light work around the house and garden. That summer we spent two weeks at the shore. One week we were guests of our

son Tony and one week we were guests of our daughters Colette and Irma. Along with their husbands they owned a business at the shore.

My husband started to take long walks on the boardwalk. He would sit on a bench looking at the ocean and watching people bathing in the water.

An idea was germinating in his head. He wanted to start a small business at the shore and spend the whole summer enjoying the salubrious air. Perhaps it would enable us to make enough money to spend some time in Florida in the winter.

He concentrated his walks on finding a vacant lot to buy in order to build a place of work. In all of his years of work he had enjoyed a two-week vacation only twice and that was always at the shore.

He confided to me about his intentions and I thought it was a good idea. However, I didn't think we should look now since the shore was crowded with tourists and the realtors would have more time to give us after the season was over.

Meanwhile an idea was growing in my head. I wanted to give a party to celebrate our anniversary. I confided my idea to my daughter Colette and she discouraged me. She said papa would think I was giving the party because he was sick and that would harm him. I could not follow her reasoning, but I gave up the idea.

Our thoughts were now turned to acquiring some property at the shore. My fears were dissipated by my husband's improved health. I knew he could never work in construction again. My mind began to concentrate on the new idea. We would build the building, start the new venture and live at the shore from May until October. I was patient to start looking. My daughter suggested that the week of September 20-27 would be the best time to start looking. The weather was usually good then and the shore practically empty.

We returned to the shore on the weekend on the twentieth of September. It was hot with the temperatures in the nineties. Al, our son-in-law, would come with my daughter Colette and children and spend the following weekend at the shore with us. They would take us home.

We stayed at the place they owned. It was a laundromat with living quarters and was owned jointly by Al and Colette and Danny and Irma. That weekend was summer-like and the temperature reached 95 on Monday. My husband and I decided to enjoy the summer day since we had the whole week to look for a place.

Alas, almost unbelievably, the next day the temperature dropped into the fifties. A strong, blustery wind kept us indoors because we knew the cold and strong wind would be harmful to my husband. There were three days of cold weather. On Thursday the sun returned and the weather was summer-like again so we decided to start our search. Some places had signs "for sale" but there was no one to show us the place. My husband wanted a place in Seaside Park so we went to see a few realtors. Eventually we stopped at Sterling Realtors and asked if they had lots for sale. They told us

they had several and one of the salesmen showed us around. The prices varied. Then he asked us why we wanted to buy a lot. We told him our intentions and he said, "Why build? I have a place with all the equipment and the price is reasonable. It has an apartment for you to live in and it's right on the Boulevard."

We said, "We would like to see the place."

He showed us the place and we liked it. My husband and I had a private talk and decided to make an offer. We were able to scale him down only a few hundred dollars from the price he asked. The realtor contacted the owner and we signed a contract. In only two days we had accomplished what we had come to the shore for.

The next day was Saturday and my son-in-law and family joined us. We relaxed and told them about our experiences of the week.

The next day was Sunday and our anniversary. I told my daughter that I wanted to shop for a nice dinner. She said, "Why bother?" I said "Of course I want to cook a nice dinner for all of us. After all, it is Papa's and my anniversary!"

At the supermarket I began to fill the cart. I could see my daughter's dismay and I thought she didn't understand. She had discouraged me about the party I wanted to give. The least I could do was to have a nice dinner and a cake. The cake turned out to be a failure. The gas had been changed to natural gas and the stove had not been adjusted to the new fuel, so the cake burned before it even started to rise.

My daughter was against all this cooking. She said, "Let's finish what we have here since we may not come back this season."

However, I was adamant. I wanted my way. The meal was fine and we toasted a good health and many more good years. The dishes were washed and put away and the kitchen floor was cleaned. Now I was ready to go home. I wanted to see Richard and Marie and the garden.

I said, "Let's put the leftovers in bags and bring them home." Colette replied, "No Ma. Let's leave everything here because we may still come back for another weekend." I said, "Let's leave."

She answered, "It's such a beautiful day. Let's leave later." I was impatient, so my husband took \$2.00 out of his pocket and told me to go to the boardwalk and play Bingo. I took the \$2.00 and left. I knew \$2.00 wouldn't last very long and that I would end up playing much more.

Finally, they came. I had been lucky and had won a few times. Papa decided to redeem the coupons since it had been his idea for me to play!

We left for home. On the way Colette informed me that we would stop at her house first so she could change the children's clothes. They were going to visit Lucy after dropping us off at home. The children were in shorts and at night it would be colder.

I began to suspect that something was up. First there was her unwillingness to shop for a dinner at the shore. Then there was my

husband's generosity toward my playing Bingo when he was always opposed to it. Now there was her ruse that she had to dress the children to visit Lucy. After such a long day the children would normally go to bed early. Besides that, there was the fact that my son-in-law surely would not like to go visiting after he had driven from the shore.

Lucy lived in Madison and that would be a lot more driving. I decided to play their game. The only part that puzzled me was where my husband fitted in. He had to know something about it. It was dark already when we headed for home. When we arrived

I noticed a lot of cars parked across the street, but, conveniently, a parking place had been left in front of our garage. Al parked his car there. I continued to play their game.

Well, I got out of the car and smelled delicious cooking odors coming out of the house. I played dumb and proceeded to enter the house. The house was dark since Colette had called and told them we were coming. I switched on the light and a chorus of *Happy Anniversary* arose from every happy face. They were all lined up, the older ones in the back and the younger ones in the front. They were all very happy but my husband was the happiest of them all because he had played his part so well and had kept the secret from me.

Everyone contributed to the success of the party. Besides the family, a few close friends and relatives attended. Wishes and gifts were presented.

It was a memorable occasion and everyone was sure I had been surprised. I asked one of my daughters how come Papa knew about the party. She said, "We were afraid to spring a surprise on him because of his health."

He was all for the party because it was given for me. That explained his condescending contribution to my Bingo game. He was very proud of the part he had played and played well.

I felt everyone had played his part well and was an actor, including me. They wanted to know if I had been surprised. I said, "Yes, when I opened the door and saw all those shining faces I could not believe my own eyes."

I thanked them for the beautiful time they had given their father and me.

Chapter XXVI

When my husband had had his heart attack, Richard was in his second year of college, and Marie was in her last year in art school. It had happened at the beginning of the year. One morning, a couple of weeks after his father became ill, we were having breakfast. Richard, not being sure about his future schooling, asked me if he should leave school after the first term. I said, "Of course not."

He said, "Ma, I can finish at night school. Papa is sick and no one is working. It will be too much of a drain. I can work days and go to school nights."

I said, "Richard, I appreciate that you spoke like a man and want to help but Papa and I have already discussed your future. We don't want you to interrupt your education. Working days and going to school at night would take too long for you to graduate. Don't you worry. We will manage. Your work in the summer will help toward your tuition."

On November 20, 1953, we acquired the shore property. We informed our son Tony and the other partners that Papa was retiring from the firm upon completion of the work at hand. We received the sum of \$12,000 from the partnership. We used \$6,000 to buy the mortgage on the property at the shore and on November 20 we became owners of an empty store and an apartment at Seaside Park.

Almost a year had passed since Nicola had suffered a heart attack. Now he felt rested and much better and he began to take over a portion of the housework. I didn't want him to, but he kept proclaiming that he felt fine and able. I protested and told him that if he took over the household chores I would have to take an outside job. We enjoyed the winter together and our relationship deepened to a closer understanding.

My husband's membership in the corporation had been liquidated and we had a few thousand dollars in a savings account. We bought the seller's mortgage for the shore property at a very low interest rate and the place was half paid for. We were confident that our future was assured. With our work and some help from the children, if we needed it, we were sure to make a go of the project.

We had no experience in the grocery business. First we wanted to clean and freshen the store before we stocked it.

In the early part of spring, when the weather permitted, Richard would drive us to the shore with some other members of our family. My portion of the work consisted mainly of cooking and washing dishes and making pots of coffee. Then there would be more cups and dishes to wash. Everyone worked hard and helped us to make our life at the shore more pleasant and comfortable.

After the cleaning came the time to stock the store. A friend of our daughter Lucy, a grocery salesman, came to see us. We placed an order to be delivered at the end of the month of May.

My husband and I planned to move in by the twentieth of May so everything would be ready for Memorial Day weekend, the official opening for business at the shore.

Richard was about to graduate from college and Marie had already finished school. Richard had been deferred from service due to his schooling. Now he had been served a notice to appear before the draft board for reclassification.

On the last weekend before we were going to stay, there were a few things to be finished. My husband, Richard and Marie would go to the shore to attend to those details. I would stay to clean our home before leaving. That Sunday I had visitors and could not finish the work I had started. I felt it did not matter because there were still three more days before leaving for the store. The visitors were my husband's first cousin and his wife. They were about to leave when my husband returned and we urged them to stay for supper. My husband was very happy to see them because we had not seen them for a long time.

He told me he had not felt well in the morning so he had stopped working and dressed to attend Mass at the church. He said he was all right now but he could not control his shoulder and arm from shaking. I decided to call the doctor. Twenty-one years ago one could get in touch with the doctor at any time. The doctor suggested that my husband put his hand in very warm water. We did what the doctor suggested and then my husband decided to retire. When I went to bed he was fast asleep.

The next morning I got up and prepared breakfast and called him. He got up, dressed, and came to the table. I noticed that his speech was slurred, his mouth was pulled to one side and his eyes were bloodshot. His arm was still shaking. He refused to eat and went to bed. I called the doctor and told him he had to come over and examine my husband because there was something wrong. By now I was alone with him. The doctor arrived, went into the bedroom, looked at my husband and walked into the kitchen. He said, "Your husband has to be taken to the hospital. He has suffered a stroke."

I was paralyzed with fear but I had to act fast. I called my daughter-in-law Alice and asked her to call Edward at work and tell him to come to our house because he had to take his father to the hospital.

Nicola was resting in bed when Edward arrived. We helped him in the car. His admittance had already been arranged for by the doctor and a nurse took over at the hospital. He was assigned a bed in a semi-private room. I could see that he had worsened. The doctor came and left instructions with the nurse. I asked him about the outcome but he said he could not tell yet. It all depended upon when the bleeding stopped. Eddie and I went home very depressed. I prepared a little dinner for the three of us, Richard, Marie and myself. I had to keep busy.

The whole family came to the hospital during the nighttime visiting hours.

My husband's condition was critical. He was conscious but very much confused. The next day his condition deteriorated and the doctor told me to notify my daughter Helen in Venezuela. My husband was paralyzed on the right side and on the third day lost consciousness. Our daughter Irma came to the hospital with her husband to see her father. She was expecting her third child and her time was near. I told her it was not necessary to visit her father in her condition and it would be better for her to visit him when he felt better.

My husband entered the hospital on the seventeenth day of May and Irma delivered her child on the twenty-sixth.

I had spent many hours at my husband's bedside. After visiting hours I went to see Irma at the hospital where my daughter was confined. The personnel pointed out to me that visiting hours were over. I told them I could not come during visiting hours because her father was critically ill in another hospital. Besides, my daughter was in a private room and it would not cause discomfort for another patient. I was permitted to visit her. I assured her that her father's hemorrhage had stopped and there were signs of recovery. The nurse brought my new beautiful granddaughter into her room. I went home tired but happy for my daughter and her new child.

Helen arrived from Venezuela and was a great comfort to me. She and my son Richard assumed the responsibility of stocking and opening the store at the shore.

My husband recovered enough to be sent home. He was able to walk dragging his right leg. His right arm was paralyzed and he had to learn to eat with his left hand. In time he learned to dress by himself. The sad part of it all was that he had lost the power of comprehension. He would grasp a word now and then. His speech was very much slurred. The doctor gave him a set of exercises and he tried scrupulously to master them. Some improvement was attained. His personality had gone through a transformation. From a gentle, friendly nature he became abusive and

demanding. His wishes had to be satisfied no matter how unreasonable they might be.

Three days after he came home I had to go to the shore to change the bank account to my son's name. He needed money to stock the business. My daughter Lucy came with her husband Henry to care for her father.

I was very pleased with the way Helen and Richard had arranged the goods on the shelves. There was hardly any business in June because the vacationers usually arrive on the last weekend in June and stay until Labor Day. Richard decided to take a job in a supermarket, the Acme, as a clerk to cover his own expenses. Helen tended the store. I complimented them on being well organized.

I had been away from home for two days. When I got back I was dismayed that Nicola had given Lucy a hard time and she was glad to be relieved of the responsibility.

When our new home was built he had insisted on having a bathroom in the basement so that when he came home from work he could change his clothes and clean up before coming upstairs to eat. That one bathroom with a shower was his private one.

We had two more bathrooms, one on the first floor and one on the second floor. Our bedroom was on the first floor.

The doctor had told us that he should not climb stairs. Lucy told me that he wanted to go to the basement to his bathroom, but she insisted he use the one on the first floor because she was afraid he would fall. He got angry and hit her arm.

I could see that he relaxed when he saw me. In his sick mind he thought that I had disappeared and left him.

Lucy was glad to leave her charge and go home.

With me around he was more manageable and would eat his meals, rest and sleep. Improvement was taking place in his arm and leg but his mind was still in a fog.

I had intended to stay home all summer and care for him. Also he would be near the doctor. In July he must have grasped a glimpse of the situation and realized he was not at the shore. He began to try to communicate with me. Why weren't we at the shore? I realized that he wanted an explanation. I told him we were staying home because he had been sick and had to get strong. He didn't agree with me and tried to make a fist to show that he was strong. His try was futile and he could not close his hand. He got upset and began to scream and call me names, accusing me for keeping him home. I had learned to understand his tantrums even if I could not understand his words. It was pathetic but I gave in because I was afraid that if I did not take him to the shore he would have another stroke. On the road I could feel spasms in his legs and arms and I was worried.

He spent the whole summer at the shore. Helen was doing most of the work but I would help when it was busy around breakfast, lunch and

supper time. In midmorning and midafternoon it was very slow so I would clean the apartment, cook the meals, do the laundry and care for my husband during those times.

It was around the end of August and around 5:00 p.m., our busiest time, when Nicola started to call me very loudly to come back into the kitchen. There he was excitedly pointing to the radio and saying, "Mio, mio." Lowell Thomas was on the news. Nicola always liked to listen to the news and Lowell Thomas was his favorite commentator. For the first time since his illness he could identify the program. I put my arms around him and he clung to me. Repeating, "Mio, mio" he wanted to convey to me that it was the program he liked best.

He began to recognize his children. Sometimes he could not remember their names and I had to say each one in turn until the one was mentioned that he wanted to talk about.

Summer soon was over. Helen was joined by her husband John and she had to leave.

Richard was with us but soon was to leave for service.

Marie was working in New York City. She had a job in her field and had to commute. It was hard for her to be the only one left in a large house since there was little time for her to mow the lawn and maintain the grounds.

Upon consulting with my children we decided to sell the house in Maplewood and move back to Coolidge Street. We would take one of the apartments and my daughter Colette the other. My daughter Lee had bought a house and did not live at Coolidge Street any more. I gave the tenant notice that I needed the apartment and we made our plans to move.

The move seemed even more urgent because of an incident, which happened prior to leaving. One morning in the early dawn I was awakened by a loud thud. Startled I looked at the bed; Nicola wasn't there! I jumped out of bed and looked for him in the main floor bathroom but he wasn't there. I heard a moaning in the cellar so I ran down the stairs. He was in his private bathroom slumped on the toilet seat. He had taken advantage of seeing me asleep and decided to go down the cellar. Usually he would awaken me but he wanted to prove that he could manage by himself. He managed to go down the steps to the bathroom but when he reached it the door was closed. Instead of pushing the door open he walked into it and fell forward across the toilet. When I reached him he was in a sweat and fainting. I helped him to his feet and turned him toward the stairs but his knees gave in and he slumped on the steps. I screamed, "Marie, Marie, call the doctor!"

Poor Marie! There she was, a young girl awakened from her sleep and running down the stairs to help me! The two of us were not able to carry him upstairs again. I said loudly, "Marie, get the doctor."

The word "doctor" stirred a chord in his consciousness and he shook his head and said, "No, no doctor." He seemed to regain a little of his strength and that helped us to get him upstairs and into bed.

That cellar bathroom must not be available to him so I was glad when we moved back to Coolidge Street on the first of November. Moving back was a happy occasion.

My daughter Colette took the second floor apartment and we lived in the first floor apartment. There was a bathroom in the basement there, too, but we had another built on the first floor so it would be more available.

Chapter XXVII

Our son Richard had been drafted but had not yet been called to serve. He realized it would be hard to get a job because of the draft, so he went to see the board and asked to be processed. He wanted to serve so he could get settled.

I tried to have him exempted because he was needed at home, but my plea was rejected. He had to go and do his duty. It was ironic that at the end of World War II he was only fourteen, and I had thought that I had at least one son who had been spared and wouldn't have to fight. The war in Korea was over but we maintained troops in many parts of the world.

Richard was sent to Fort Dix for basic training and then to Maryland. Eventually he went to Japan.

While at Fort Dix he contracted a heavy chest cold. He didn't report his illness because he was at the end of his training period and he didn't want to repeat the training for another six weeks with a new unit.

On the last of training at Fort Dix he had to pass a physical examination. He was running a fever as he stood in line with the other recruits, his knees could not hold him any more and he collapsed.

He was scheduled to come home before leaving for Maryland. He spent those two weeks in bed in our home under the care of our family doctor. The day he was to report he was still sick. He was sent to the hospital at Fort Monmouth where he spent a full month before being shipped to Maryland.

While he was in the camp in Maryland our doorbell rang one morning. I went to open the door and there was a policeman looking for my son. He said he had a summons for him because he had neglected to pay a parking ticket.

I said, "He is not here. He is in Maryland in the service."

Then, said the policeman, "Your husband should appear on his behalf."

I told him that my husband was a sick man and that he couldn't possibly appear. He told me someone would have to answer the summons so I decided to go myself. The next day I went to the Newark post office where a clerk was collecting the fines. I handed him the summons and he told me it would be \$25.00. I was shocked and said, "Why \$25.00?"

He answered, "There is a penalty for not having paid on time." I said, "But I am answering for my son who is in service."

He said, "Go and see the man over there," and he pointed to a higher counter where a man was sitting in an imposing chair. He asked me what the trouble was and I repeated my tale.

He said, "I can't lower the fine. You'll have to appear in court." I said, "I don't have \$25.00." He shrugged his shoulders, and I asked when I would have to appear. He said, "Tonight."

At the courtroom that night I sat and waited for my call. The courtroom was a very large room with benches to sit on. The cases were mainly traffic violations and the offenders were very young. When my name was called I rose and went in front of the judge. He asked me the reason I was refusing to pay the fine. I said, "I am here in place of my son as he is in service in Maryland. I didn't know about this ticket until the policeman came to the door."

"Why didn't your son pay the ticket?" the judge asked.

I replied, "My son came home sick from Fort Dix. I had to nurse him for two weeks and then he spent another month in the hospital camp in Fort Monmouth. From there he was sent to Maryland. I am here to honor his ticket. Twenty-five dollars is too much of a punishment for something that could not be helped."

The judge turned to the attendant and said, "Let her pay the original \$5.00 fine." The attendant accompanied me to the collecting clerk. I paid the \$5.00 and went home.

Chapter XXVIII

My husband's progress was very slow. He wanted very much to be able to write because he disliked signing his name with a cross. He would patiently practice in order to be able to hold the pen in his fingers. He had forgotten the alphabet. I started to coach him, first with numbers and then with letters. It was a hard task for him but he kept practicing. I would print his name in large letters and tell him to look at the letters and try to copy them. He worked hard but wasn't able to master the task.

Spring brought thoughts of a garden. He had been a master at it, and, under his fingers, everything he planted flourished. I talked to the doctor about it and he said he could do a little work but nothing heavy. He was not to bend, only squat. He was very happy at the thought of being occupied and wanted to plow the garden. I told him that he wasn't able to do that and he should let one of the boys do the plowing. He could do the planting and the caring for it.

He insisted that he was able to do it. He would do a little every day and then he would be ready.

I said, "It is too early. We may still get frost."

He was disappointed but understood my argument. Our boys came out and turned the soil while my husband protested and said that he wanted to do it himself. The boys assured him they were only helping a little and he could plant and care for the garden.

Easter, as always, was a very happy occasion. The whole family came over to wish us a Happy Easter and everyone had a good time, especially the grandchildren. Our household was relatively serene.

The first thing Nicola would do in the morning was to go outside and look at the garden, which was now planted. He enjoyed the work of his hands. By the end of May the garden was on its way and we were preparing for the shore.

Marie would drive us on weekends to help with the work at the shore and our other children helped too. By the fifteenth of June the store was ready for the influx of customers.

My husband would sit either in the back yard or the front of the store. Occasionally I would walk with him on the boardwalk and sit on the bench to look at the ocean and people bathing.

One day I suggested, after resting on the bench, that we should walk a little further and look at the games on the boardwalk. At first he did not want to go and I did not press him.

Then one day he suggested we try it. We went and I suggested he take his chance at a wheel by placing a dime on the board. He said, "No, no." He did like to play the wheels, but he was self-conscious about his condition. I encouraged him, the hand stopped on his number for the choice of the stand, and he was very happy to get a gift for me!

Summer is too short for business at the shore. Before we knew it Labor Day had arrived and summer was over. In the middle of September we would pack everything and go home. This was 1955.

Back in Irvington the days were filled with daily chores, writing to Richard in Japan, and enjoying my grandchildren who lived upstairs. At times I accompanied my husband to the barbershop. He protested that he did not need me to go along but I had noticed there was a very busy street to cross. He would look only one way if cars were approaching and it never occurred to him to look both ways.

After the holidays he became very restless and would walk back and forth in the apartment. Frequently he would suffer headaches. Sometimes I would find him at the window of the bedroom facing toward our church with his hands joined together in a prayer.

It was the first of May, a sunny mild day, when our son Tony came before lunch to see his father. Tony very cheerfully asked how he was feeling and he answered, "Fine." He showed him the work he had done the day before in the garden and told Tony he wanted to go back to work. Tony kidded him and asked him when he would like to start.

He said, "Now."

Tony replied, "You will have to wait a few days until we start a new job."

Tony left and Nicola was very happy at the prospect of going back to work. I said to him, "You will not be able to eat your lunch here with me. I would have to pack a lunch for you."

He said, "Sure, sure."

Then I said, "You will bring the pay to me again."

He again said, "Sure, sure."

He rested for awhile after lunch and then he began to walk the floor again. About 3:00 p.m. he said he was going to take a short walk on the playground across the street. From the house I could see where he was.

I was doing some ironing when I heard the voice of my grandson Alan calling, "Grandma! Grandma! Grandpa is falling!" I ran outside. My grandson was holding his grandfather with one arm and carrying his schoolbooks with the other. I took hold of his other arm and the two of us

managed to bring him inside to the bed. My first thought was to call my daughter Colette. A friend had invited her for lunch but she had left her friend's phone number in case I needed her. I called and told her her father was very sick. Then I called the doctor but since it was after office hours the answering service said they would try to locate him. I told her it was an emergency. She called back and said the doctor was not home or at the office, he was on the road. My husband was in a profuse sweat, very pale and losing consciousness.

I called Irvington General Hospital and told them to send help because my husband's condition was very grave. The attendant suggested a heart specialist and I said, "Yes, make it quick." The doctor arrived at the same time my daughter arrived. The doctor looked at my husband and said he had to go to the hospital because he had suffered heart failure. The doctor instructed the hospital to send an ambulance and have a bed ready for him. At the hospital he was given oxygen.

At night, during visiting hours, he was much improved and wanted to know why he was in the hospital. I told him he had not felt well and he would have to stay in the hospital for a few days. The hospital personnel had given him a bed in the ward and he told me three days later he did not like to be there because it was too noisy. I went to the admittance office to make a request for a private room. The admitting officer, a woman, was in the hall. I made my request and she turned to me belligerently and said, "You haven't paid your bill yet and you want a private room for your husband!"

I was embarrassed by the unjustified insult since there were a number of people around. I said, "My husband has been here only three days. I haven't yet received a bill."

I went to the financial office and requested the bill and a private room for my husband. I was told there were none available at the moment but he could be transferred to a semi-private room. The next day he was in the semi-private room. He was attended by a cardiologist and hovered between improvement and regression. I would go in the afternoon to stay with him until suppertime. Then I would go home. I would return for nighttime visiting hours and Marie would go with me. The other children came often.

One afternoon a nurse stopped me at the door and said, "You cannot go in. The doctor is with him. Your husband has suffered a setback."

For the first time I became afraid. The doctor came out and said, "You can go in and see him now."

I said, "What happened?"

The doctor answered, "The heart is unpredictable. One minute you can be well and the next minute you can be dying." I went into the room. He was under the oxygen tent and looked exhausted. He wanted to talk to me. I urged him to be quiet in order to regain his strength and I sat by him holding his hand.

Before I left he said, "I want to come home."

The next day I asked the doctor when my husband would be able to come home. He said, "I don't know. It all depends. If he improves enough I will discharge him."

The improvement I was waiting for was not materializing. My husband was begging me to take him home. Then he became hostile and accused me of not wanting him home. The doctor said, "If you take him out of the hospital he may die on the way. I will not discharge him. You will have to sign him out."

My husband asked again and I said, "I will take you home but you will have to sign your discharge because the doctor will not discharge you."

He said, "You do it."

I said, "When you get better I will, but not now."

I could see that he was discouraged and I had another talk with the doctor. It was Tuesday and he said I could take him home on Friday.

I told him the good news. He joined his hands together and put them on the side of his face and closed his eyes, a motion indicating he would be dead by Friday.

It had been a long illness with spells of hope and spells of doubt. The phone would ring at night and the hospital would tell me he was under oxygen again which meant he was in danger. I would go to the hospital and at the turn of the corridor my knees would grow weak. I was afraid of what I would find.

On Thursday night my husband was critical. All the children came to the hospital. He urged me to stay on. The children did not want to leave but wanted to stay with Marie and me. The nurse came and said, "What are all of you doing here? Why don't you go home?"

My husband did not want them to stay. He said to me, "Only you stay."

I said, "Marie too?" and he nodded his head in assent. I went into the hall and told everyone to leave but they refused. I went back into the room where my husband had fallen asleep - so I left with them.

At home Marie came to lie in bed alongside me. I was cold and trembling and having her alongside me was a great comfort. Neither she nor I could relax enough to sleep.

It was a quarter of one on Friday morning, the eighth of June, when the phone rang. Marie and I both jumped out of bed to answer it. It was the doctor calling from the hospital to tell me that my husband had just expired.

To write about this moment is very painful. I knew that eventually it would come but somehow I wanted to put it off and not let it happen. When it came it was such a shock that it shook every fiber of my body. Marie called all her brothers and sisters and, in less than an hour, everyone was with us. We watched together a sad dawn lighting the sky.

The doctor told me not to contact the undertaker until morning. The undertaker suggested that we go to the chapel to choose a coffin and help to

make the arrangements for the funeral. It was a very sad task. I walked like a robot. I was in a fog. My son Tony and my daughter Colette were with me.

A couple of weeks before my husband died the doctor suggested I appeal to the Red Cross for help in having my son Richard come home from Japan. He arrived and visited his father at the hospital. Nicola was pleased to see him but it never occurred to him why Richard was home.

Since it was June again Richard had offered to go to the shore and begin setting up the store for another season. I was relieved, because up to now I had not given a thought to the store.

Richard came home from the shore to join the rest of the family in mourning.

We first viewed the body of my husband in the afternoon of the day after he died. I had left my husband alive in the hospital and now he was gone. Only his body was left for me to view. We all went together as one. The pain of seeing him cold and still numbed me. My conscience kept telling me I should have stayed at the hospital when he wanted me to stay. I left him asleep and now he would never awaken again. I sat in the place reserved for me close to him. For the next two days friends and relatives came to express their sympathy. I was neither hearing nor seeing. I was with him living our life together, every hope and disappointment. The life we had lived together was unrolling before my mind, his suffering and his plea about wanting to come home. How I wished I had listened to him! What good did all the precautions taken to bring him home well and alive do? Now he was dead and I could never bring him home again.

My son Richard would come and sit next to me and hold my hand and whisper, "Ma, don't worry. I will take care of you." He was a great comfort to me.

Marie would sit on the other side. They were now my whole family. Papa was gone. The others had their own families to care for.

On Monday morning we had to go to the chapel early for the last goodbye to a husband and a father, a loving human being. The last minutes before the lid came down were the hardest of all. It was the end of till death do us part.

After the Mass at the church came the internment at the cemetery. Back home the rooms filled with people. One by one they said their good-bys and told me to take care of myself. My sister stayed until nighttime. Rose Conforti, my son-in-law's mother and her two daughters Ceil and Jo prepared a meal for the whole family and guests.

Night came and everyone left. Marie, Richard and I were exhausted. They urged me to retire and they did likewise. Fatigue took hold of me and I fell asleep.

I awoke in the morning and the sun was streaming into the kitchen. I proceeded to make coffee and the aroma of coffee brewing awakened Marie and Richard.

We sat at the kitchen table in silence. The apartment felt empty. Finally Richard spoke. "Ma, tomorrow morning I am going to the store. There is a lot to do and I want to get it all done before I return to the service." His statement broke the sadness of the moment.

There was a lot to do in the next few days. Bills for the hospital, the doctor and the funeral had to be paid. With Marie's help we acknowledged all of the courtesies, concerns and gifts of relatives and friends.

On the weekend Marie and I joined Richard at the shore. A surprise was waiting for me. Richard had undertaken the task of redecorating the apartment and when I opened the door, Al, my son-in-law, was helping Richard with the last sheet of wallpaper. I couldn't believe my eyes! For the last two years I had lived with the colors I had found there and did not like. This was the sixteenth of June and customers were already arriving.

Richard had obtained a month's leave from the army and had asked for an extension of time. He was allowed two more weeks and had to report back in the middle of July.

My daughter Colette was to stay with me for awhile. Having my daughter and grandchildren with me and the responsibility of the business kept my mind occupied. We worked very hard.

In the month of August Marie replaced Colette. She had asked for a month off from work to help me.

One of my sons would come every weekend to help us.

Richard had returned to service and he was sent to California to be transported to Japan. The order was rescinded on the grounds that he had only six months of service left and he should complete his service here.

There is an episode worth telling about. He was assigned to take a plane at a given time, but he decided instead to take a different plane. Being very close to Las Vegas, Nevada, he wanted to try the gambling casinos. As fate decreed, the plane he did not take collided in midair with another plane and all of the passengers were killed. This tragedy took place in the summer of 1956 in California.

Chapter XXIX

Helen, living in Venezuela, was not able to come to her father's funeral because she was expecting her second child. She was very unhappy about being away from all of us at a time when a family is unified under a common sorrow, and she longed to have me with her to share our loss.

Her birthday was in September and her baby was due in October. She wondered if I could come to celebrate both occasions. However, her child arrived prematurely by one month and I made plans to visit my two grandchildren and their parents. I contacted a travel agency to arrange a booking. I had intended to go by boat but I found out the price was much higher by water than by air so I decided to fly. I had never been in a plane but that did not deter me from taking the trip. I was looking forward to the trip and the plane would take me there in only a few hours. Irma and her husband came with me to the airport first stopping to pick up Marie in Brooklyn, New York. She was sharing an apartment with a friend.

At Idlewild Airport we found we had plenty of time since the plane was late in arriving. Danny suggested we have a cup of coffee. Irma insisted that we have a drink, a sandwich and coffee. By the time we finished eating it was time to board the plane. My luggage had already been checked and I had a seat assigned. We kissed good-bye and I boarded the plane. When the plane's engine hummed and started to rise I still could see them waving to me.

As the plane roared I made the sign of the cross and prayed to the Lord. I said, "I am not afraid. I am in your hands. Take care of me."

It was after one o'clock when the plane left the airport. It was dark outside and nothing could be seen. I decided to try and get some sleep. The drink I had taken contributed to my drowsiness. When I awoke I saw lightning in the sky. I thought of a storm and tensed myself but we passed the storm without discomfort.

Next came the most beautiful sight I had ever seen at any time. Miami, at night, bathed in the splendor of the color of millions of lights, was a scene I shall never forget. The stewardess announced we had reached Miami, and the plane slowed and came to a stop. The passengers began to descend in

the early dawn of morning. There was a long wait before the plane would leave for Maracaibo, Venezuela.

Prior to the trip there were many details to be taken care of. I had to have a visa from the Venezuela Consulate in New York, a vaccination certificate signed by a doctor and a picture taken for the passport and the visa. All this I had to attend to before September 15. I spent a whole afternoon at the consulate to obtain the visa. I wondered why it was taking so long and I was getting worried about leaving New York for Seaside Park, since the 6:00 p.m. bus would be the last one out.

Finally, about 5:00 p.m. I was interviewed and granted the visa. I had twenty minutes to get to the terminal to board the bus. I decided to hire a taxi for the short ride from Fiftieth Street to Forty-Second Street and Eighth Avenue. I could not afford to miss the one bus because the morning hours are very important in the grocery business. The traffic was heavy and the streets of New York looked like a solid bed of cars. I decided to get out of the taxi and walk the balance of the way. In fact I ran the rest of the way and I reached the terminal as the conductor was closing the bus door ready to leave. Fortunately there was a vacant seat. I was exhausted from the last minute rush but at least I had achieved what I had come for.

I dozed on the bus, relaxed by the thought that now I only had to wait for the departure. The two weeks before I left were very busy as I proceeded with the chore of closing the business for the winter months.

But here I was now in the airport in Miami! I sent a telegram to my daughter Irma. She had insisted that I should do so in order to assure her that I was all right. Then I walked outside to see a little of the city. I could see that it had rained explaining the lightning I had seen on the plane. There wasn't much to see so I went inside and bought a meager breakfast.

At 9:00 a.m. the plane taking the people to Venezuela ascended into the sky. The plane had just stabilized when it hit an air pocket. The stewardess was just handing me my breakfast when the coffee cup banged on the tray and spilled into the eggs. I never would have eaten at the airport if I had realized we would be served on the plane.

Before I even knew what was happening, the plane had passed the air pocket and I felt as if I were sitting in my living room. I wanted to observe all that I could during my first trip on a plane. However, the plane was flying over water and there wasn't much to see. From the altitude of the plane the Atlantic Ocean looked like an immense hole and I even imagined I could see the bottom. Most of all, the sky attracted my attention. The blue of the clear sky reflecting in the water gave the water a clear color of blue. The clouds were so interesting! At times they looked like fragile lace and then at times they would appear as solid as white cotton. Then they would change to a steel color and solidify, maybe because they contained rain.

All considered the trip was very instructive and interesting. The first plane stop was at Montego Bay where the passengers were allowed to

descend from the plane. The airport was very primitive with a store selling liquor and ladies' bags. I felt that it was very hot.

Our next stop was in Colombia to refuel the plane. We had enough time to stretch our legs.

At 3:00 p.m. I arrived at the airport in Maracaibo where my son-in-law John was waiting for the plane to arrive. After leaving the plane I had to walk over a path of burlap saturated with some liquid to disinfect my shoes.

Then I had to go through customs so they could check for possible violations. Helen had asked me to buy clothes and shoes for the children. The clothes had to be washed and not ironed so they would look used. The shoes had to be scuffed looking.

The bundle containing the clothes and shoes was emptied on a table and examined. The inspector looked at me and said sarcastically, "You have a lot of shoes and clothing."

I said, "Yes, I have many grandchildren." He pushed everything back into the bag and dismissed me.

My son-in-law took hold of the bundle and carried it to the car parked nearby. John had to stop at a Sears Roebuck Department store to buy some hardware and a toy for his daughter Linda. We had some refreshments and left for home.

To get to his home we had to cross Lake Maracaibo on a ferry. I had never seen an oil well before and there were many wells dotting the lake. They had a perpetual motion of up and down, up and down like a seesaw.

John pointed to an island in the lake and said, "That is where a leprosy colony is."

On the other side of the lake, the ferry stopped. John waited for his car, which had also been transported on the ferry, and we resumed the trip home.

I was anxious to see Helen and my two granddaughters for the first time. Linda was seventeen months old and Kathy ten days old.

We passed many houses and by the looks of them one could assume the people living in them were poor. Some of the houses consisted of only one room with a door in the front and one in the back. John teased me that their house was like that but I did not believe him because I knew Helen would not live like that.

Finally we arrived. Helen embraced and kissed me and asked me about my trip. She took me to my room to freshen up. The room was a large one with a bathroom and shower. I was grateful for the chance to freshen up, since I felt dusty and tired. I had not changed my clothes since the day before.

When I emerged she introduced Linda, a beautiful chubby child with a head full of blonde curly hair. I extended my arms to her and invited her to come to me but she refused flatly to come. Helen said, "Linda, go to your grandmother," but she backed away and would not have any part of me.

I said, "Helen, don't push her. I am a stranger to her and she will have to get used to me. She's too young to understand." Then I asked about Kathy. She said, "Kathy is asleep. I've had a hard time with her formula and she cries a lot."

She wanted to know everything about everyone. Then she said to me, "Ma, you should go to bed. You must be exhausted."

I said, "You, too, with a small baby to care for. You need your sleep."

I awakened the next morning to the sound of gushing water. I got up, dressed, and walked out of my room. Helen was already preparing breakfast. I said, "The sound of water woke me up."

She said, "Lena comes early and uses the water hose to freshen the patio."

I asked, "Who is Lena?" She replied, "Lena is the woman who comes every day to do my wash and help with the housework. She's a Venezuelan."

After breakfast I started to wash the dishes, but Helen said, "No, Ma. Lena will do that."

I said, "Don't you want me to do anything?"

She replied, "How about taking Linda for a walk in the stroller? I can take care of the baby then."

I went to pick up Linda to place her in the stroller and she wouldn't let me touch her. Lena came and put her in the stroller and she smiled at Lena. I started to push the stroller and she turned and looked at me distrustingly, as if to say, "Don't you dare touch me."

As I was walking I noticed oil wells in the back yards of people. The streets were very wide and the houses were freshly painted. The lawns were well attended and there were flowers in front of the houses. Lagunillas was a pleasant settlement provided by and cared for by the oil company John was working for.

Helen had four very pleasant rooms with an open porch. Linda had a plastic pool on the patio and she spent many hours playing in the water. I would sit outside watching her playing. I decided, after many attempts to become her friend, to leave her alone. At first she was puzzled. Then she would look at me from under her eyelids to see if I were still there reading a book or a newspaper. I could see that she liked to see me sitting there watching her play. She felt as though she had company. I continued to walk her in the stroller and every morning she liked to antagonize me by standing up in the stroller while I was pushing. I knew that she could fall on her face and get hurt.

After many attempts to seat her, I shook her by the shoulders and told her in no gentle terms that she had to stay seated or I would not take her out any more.

The mornings were pleasant until about 10:00 a.m. Then you had to go in because it got very hot. Helen had an overhead fan in the living room and

I would sit under the fan and feel quite comfortable usually reading or chatting with Helen.

After a few days of not seeking her attention, Linda decided that I was harmless and not an intruder in her family circle. Nor did I seem to be a menace to her. After all, in the short period of ten days two strangers had come to disturb her tranquil life. First of all there was the baby that took all of her mother's time, and secondly there was a new stranger, supposedly her grandmother.

She was happy just the way she was and she did not need them. Why had they come to disturb her happiness? However, it was better to be friends with at least one of them, the least harmless, and that happened to be me. She decided to make a peace offer of her most cherished toy, a Teddy bear, her own friend in bed when she went to sleep at night. Grandma was quietly reading under the fan when Linda came and quietly put her beloved Teddy bear on her lap. Grandma smiled and patted Linda on her head. Later I told Helen, "Linda and I are good friends now. She offered me her bear."

Now the tension was broken and she would be more able to accept her baby sister.

Kathy was very small. It even was hard to hold her. She cried a lot because the formula did not agree with her. After different formulas, finally one of them agreed with her and she began to gain weight and adjust to her routine.

John took a day off from work to show me around Maracaibo, the second largest city in Venezuela. First he showed me where he worked with the oil company. I saw how oil was processed before it was shipped out. I have only a hazy remembrance of many pipes of all different sizes carrying the crude product to be processed and shipped out. It was an immense operation with huge furnaces.

Then we proceeded to Maracaibo. I saw the old part of the city and the way the Indians lived. Sometimes their homes were nothing but straight canvas over four posts. They cooked in the open over stones. The old part of the city was very crowded with buildings close together and the streets were paved with cobblestone.

Then he showed me the new part of the city, which is beautiful. I did notice that they liked to be colorful in their buildings, as many were painted in bright colors.

Between the old and the new section was the very poor section. Streets were not paved and when a car passed there would rise a cloud of dust. Homes had windows but no panes. They were protected by iron bars. I couldn't figure out what there was to protect.

Then John drove to the Hotel del Lago to have our dinner. The hotel was a very beautiful, modern structure with a cocktail lounge. After dinner we decided to walk the beautifully landscaped grounds overlooking the lake.

We sat under the palm trees facing the lake. The outline of the land surrounding the city on the other side of the lake was fascinating.

It was late afternoon when we left the city and started for home. On the way the sky started to cloud up and we hoped to reach home before it started to rain.

On the road near nowhere was a lady standing near her car and signaling. John stopped his car and asked her if she needed help and she said that she had a flat tire and she was afraid she was going to miss the last ferry to Maracaibo. John took the tools out of his car and started to work on the lady's tire. The clouds had grown darker and very menacing and it had started to thunder and lightning. John kept working imperturbably on the lady's car. I thought that rain was imminent and that he would be soaked, but as if by magic, the ugly cloud blew away and not a drop of rain reached the ground. When we got home there were puddles of water, the testimony of a heavy shower. John said, "if I had not helped that lady, she would have missed the ferry and been stranded."

Invariably, every day while I stayed there the heat of the day reached the highest point in the late afternoon. Then it would cloud over and a half-hour shower would cool the air. The nights were balmy and refreshing enough to sleep.

After two weeks I told Helen I was ready to go home. She said, "You already want to go home! You just got here."

I said, "Helen, I have been here two weeks."

She replied, "Ma, when relatives come here, they often stay at least three months."

I said, "Helen, I need to go home."

She could not understand why I wanted to go so fast. She said, "Richard is in service and Marie lives in New York. There is no reason for you to go."

She could not understand my reason and I would not tell her. I had to go home because I needed to cry and cry for the loss of my husband. After his burial I had to rush to the store, and after closing the store I came to Venezuela. The tears were still bottled up in me. We compromised and I stayed one more week.

I asked John to get a reservation on the plane for me for Saturday. At night when he came home he informed me that there were no planes leaving for New York on Saturday and that I would have to leave on Sunday. I was skeptical and couldn't understand why there were no planes on Saturday. I told him I wanted to visit Caracas for about three days before leaving for New York and that he should make reservations accordingly. Thus it was arranged that I would leave Maracaibo on Thursday and leave for home from Caracas on Sunday.

On Thursday Helen left the children with Lena and she and John came to the airport to see me off. Helen gave me instructions about what to do

when I reached Caracas. She had spent a month there studying the Spanish language, a requirement to fill when she accepted the teaching job. A reservation had been placed for me at the newest and best motel.

Helen took a lot of pictures in front of the airport, which was beautifully landscaped with flowers and palm trees and tropical plants.

A plane came in, a very noisy one. I said to Helen, "I hope I won't go on this one. It looks as though it's coming apart."

She said, "No, you will go on the other one being warmed up." My name was not called when the plane took off and I became apprehensive. I still thought the last plane that came in was not in good repair or it wouldn't have been so noisy. There were no other planes departing, and, sure enough, my name was called for the noisy one.

Helen had told me that I would arrive in Caracas about 12:15 p.m. The plane was a little rough taking off but inside it was a beautiful new plane. It was aquamarine in color and very soothing for upset nerves. The ride itself was very smooth but it was a little rough as it descended. I was very confused. The clock at the airport showed it to be 11:00 a.m. and I had no wrist watch to check the time. How could that be? Helen said I would arrive at 12:15 p.m. and it was only 11:00 a.m. Oh well, maybe she was mistaken. It wasn't until later that I found out I had been on a jet plane, one of the fastest planes of the times!

A taxi took me to the hotel. It had picked up and discharged some other passengers on the way, and because of that, I had a good look at the city. When the taxi stopped at my hotel I was puzzled. I had been told by my son-in-law that the hotel was the newest and finest in Caracas with beautifully landscaped grounds. When I stopped at the hotel it did not seem new or beautiful but mediocre. There were only a few plants around the building and no grounds to speak of. When I presented my reservation at the desk I was told I was in the wrong place. The name I had given the driver of the taxi sounded like this one but it was not the hotel where I had a reservation. I was asked by the clerk if I wanted to stay or go. I decided to stay since I didn't want to take the chance of getting lost in a city that was strange to me and where I could not speak the language. A telephone call canceled the reservation.

I was assigned to a room where I showered and changed my clothes. Then I decided to look around since I intended to stay three days. I wanted to get acquainted with the surroundings.

Upon my return around 6:00 p.m. I entered the dining room. There were many tables beautifully set but not one person was dining. I was approached by a waiter and I asked him how come the dining room was empty. He said it was too early but if I wished to eat they would accommodate me. I said, "Yes," and he brought me a menu. I chose my dinner and had a long wait before I was served. It was embarrassing for me to sit at a table alone with three waiters at my command. The water in my

glass was always full to the brim. I consumed my dinner and sat in the lobby. People began to arrive and most of them were headed for the upper floor. I had noticed a sign and I became curious. I wanted to find out where those people were going. I read the sign and it indicated that on the roof there was entertainment, games of Bingo, and refreshments so I followed the crowd. The roof of the hotel was fenced in by a low wall. The edge was covered overhead and tables were set to accommodate customers. Music began to play and couples danced. Then the music stopped and a couple of games of Bingo were played.

A couple sat at my table with me. They were Americans and the husband was an industrialist who was in Venezuela to set up a new plant. He would translate Bingo numbers for me when they were called. Although the numbers were in Spanish I was able to understand most of them, even without his help.

It was wonderful to sit there under the star-studded sky listening to the tempo of the music. Below us the lights of the beautiful city were a lovely sight. The city seemed to open up like a rose with a low center encircled by high hills. There seemed to be magic in the sight when one looked up and saw the dome of the sky studded with golden shining stars and then looked down to see the beauty of the city.

The next day I shopped for gifts and somehow I managed to be understood. I took long walks and enjoyed the poinsettias of red and white gracing the fronts of the houses in the hills.

Three days passed quickly and I was back at the airport waiting for the plane to take me home. It was a nine hour non-stop flight to New York City and I reached there around 6:00 p.m. My son Richard was waiting for me. The first thing he said was, "How come you were not here last night?"

I said, "There weren't any flights coming here."

He said, "Practically everyone was here to meet you and a plane arrived and you weren't on it." Then he remarked, "How come you came on the president's plane?" I didn't understand what he meant but that explained the lushness I had experienced on the plane. The food was the most exquisite I had ever eaten. There was a bottle of champagne with every meal and the most delicious pastries and liqueur with the coffee. I had never seen such extravagance in my life.

Then it dawned on me that when my son-in-law had tried to make a reservation for me on the Saturday flight, he was told there was no deluxe flight at the time. Mine had been a deluxe flight and that explained the luxuries.

The whole trip was a new experience for me and was very enjoyable and very instructive.

Chapter XXX

Richard was discharged from service at the end of December and secured a job as a chemical engineer in the line of work he had trained for.

In April my oldest grandson Johnny married, and Richard and Marie were in the wedding party. Richard ushered a lovely girl, Ann, who later became his wife.

I continued to work in our business at the shore until 1960. I was 64 at the time. I began to realize that working every summer from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. was not for me any more. I had worked hard all of my life and I was still able to work at the store but I didn't like to work so many hours, seven days a week. I felt my children were all settled and Marie was doing well in her chosen field. Now I would like to have the freedom to enjoy life. If the hours were reasonable and I had my Sundays to worship and rest, I would have continued to work for a few more years.

An idea was born out of my rationalizations. I would turn the store into apartments. Because of the size of the building I could have two two-bedroom apartments and one apartment with one bedroom. I would keep that one for me to stay in and rent the others. I loved the salubrious air of the shore and enjoyed the beach and the boardwalk. I would still be occupied but I would have the choice of doing what I really wanted to.

I spoke to my sons about this and Tony offered to do the work with his brothers on weekends. I told him that wasn't what I had in mind and wanted to contract the work. He and the rest would not hear of it. The whole group offered to work: my three sons, two sons-in-law Danny and Anthony, and my oldest grandson Johnny who was already working in construction.

They decided to begin the work after New Year's, but we had a great surprise when we went to start the job. The week between Christmas and the New Year was very cold and it had been followed by a big snowfall. The kitchen door was blocked half way by the snow and the water pipes had frozen. With the first heat in the rooms many of them burst and the toilet cracked. On the first day I had to melt snow to have water.

The work lasted ten weekends with everyone cooperating. The wives had to endure hardships because their husbands weren't home during the

weekends. Finally, all the work was done and I had to furnish the apartments. I was low in finances because I had paid for the materials while they furnished the work. I also had to pay the plumber and the electrician for their work.

I began to canvas stores for sales, and everything was taken care of in time for the season to open.

For the first time at the shore I felt like a lady of leisure. I could get up when I felt like it, have a leisurely breakfast, go on the beach or play Bingo in the afternoon when the sun was hot. I was 64 when all of this luxury came to me.

About the middle of August, Lucy and I decided to visit Helen who was now living in Springfield, Missouri. We went by airplane. Lucy was visiting for one week since she had a family to care for, but I decided to stay longer and return by bus so that I could see the countryside.

It was a beautiful day when I left for home. It was a five hour ride to Saint Louis and we arrived there around 6:00 p.m. I had dinner at the terminal and waited two hours for the next bus. We rode on the next bus non-stop all night. I tried to sleep but could not make myself comfortable and did not sleep all night long. About 6:00 a.m. the bus stopped for a rest room and coffee. I had my eyes closed trying to sleep. I was so tired I was not able to open my lids and I had to use my fingers to pry them open. I walked down the steps like a zombie and lined up with the other passengers for a container of coffee, but as I reached for the coffee I felt nauseated and left for the bus. Later, when the bus stopped for breakfast, I was again not able to eat. We reached Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, late in the afternoon, where there was a four-hour wait for the next bus to leave. Four hours can be very tiresome and boring in a terminal, especially if it is raining and one cannot go for a walk. Those four hours disrupted my time of arrival at home.

Marie had gone to the terminal at the scheduled time, and, after waiting for a long time, had decided to inquire about the bus. She was told there would not be another bus from Pittsburgh until morning. It was 3:30 a.m. when the bus finally arrived in Newark. I surmised what had happened and decided to go to Irvington by taxi. Marie was fast asleep when I rang the bell. She came to the door. Before opening it, she asked who was there. I said, "It's me."

"Ma," she said, "I was at the station and they said there would be no more busses tonight."

I will never forget that miserable trip home!

Chapter XXXI

Marie was living at home again. After Richard married, she decided to come back to live with me. I said to her, "Marie, I am happy that you want to come back but I have gotten used to living alone. We will have to be not like mother and daughter, but two adult individuals living under the same roof, both completely free." It has worked very well. We have a lot of love and concern for each other without interfering in each other's plans.

Time has a way of going on. Winter followed by summer and vice versa. Lucy and I decided to take a bus trip to Canada with a church group. We visited Niagara Falls, The Thousand Islands, and we went on an all day trip to Montreal. We visited Our Lady of the Cape, Quebec, and Saint Anne's Shrine. On the way home we visited Lake George.

The following year Marie and I went overseas via Paris, the Riviera, Monaco, The Monte Carlo Casino and on into Italy. We enjoyed Genoa, Milan, Lake Como, Lake Maggiore and the beautiful island in the lake. We traveled to Venice and enjoyed the experience of riding on the gondola. From there we went to Florence to view all the art treasures and on to Rome with its history of Christianity.

Naples with the beautiful Bay of Naples in the background and the volcano Mount Vesuvius interested us greatly.

We appreciated Pompeii, a city with mysteries of the past, as well as Sorrento and the olive groves.

We were charmed by Capri, the Blue Grotto and the bizarre transfer from the steamboat to the rowboat to enter the Grotto. From there we climbed to a terrace with an ivy-covered canopy. The beautiful warm sunlight playing through the green leaves made patterns on the beautifully set tables of the restaurant where we dined. The surroundings were heavenly. The beautiful blue waters were below and there were still more heights to climb. The beauty of the Isle of Capri cradled between sky and water has etched an indelible groove in my mind.

I made a visit in Naples that Marie was not aware of. She wanted to visit Pompeii and Amalfi and I wanted to visit my nephew in Naples. It was a nephew I had never seen, because when I left Italy his father, my half

brother, was only two and a half years old. I told Marie that I was tired and wanted to rest. She said, "Ma, I will stay too."

I said, "No, you go on. I have already seen Pompeii and I will be fine."

No sooner had she left than I dressed and went to visit my nephew. We had such a good time and that night we went riding with him and his wife in a buggy. Marie held the reins and directed the horse. The Bay of Naples is very beautiful at night, especially when viewed from a buggy.

We had visited our relatives in Milan, warm and loveable people. From Naples we went to Avellino, my birthplace, and there were more relatives and more warm welcomes.

On our trip back home we visited Zurich, Switzerland, a clean beautiful city surrounded by mountains.

From there we went to England. We arrived there late at night and placed reservations for a tour at the desk. We slept late the next morning, so a private tour was arranged for us. We visited the London Towers, viewed the changing of the guards and admired the statue of Queen Victoria on the square in front of Buckingham Palace. I admired the historic treasures of the past while visiting Westminster Abbey Cathedral. It encompassed the burial grounds of famous people including the tomb of Queen Elizabeth the First. We saw Big Ben and the building where Parliament met.

We went back to the hotel for another night's sleep and the next day, after a shower and breakfast, we made ready for our trip back home. We boarded the plane at 11:30 a.m. and arrived in New York about 3:00 p.m. Allowing for the difference in time it was a seven-hour trip.

Eddie and Irma were waiting for us at the terminal and we arrived home around 5:30 p.m. The year was 1962.

Chapter XXXII

Now we were back home and adjusting to the routine of everyday life. I enjoyed life fully. Every day was a new venture for me. I would wake up in the morning, go into the kitchen, pull the curtains apart and look at the new beautiful day and thank God for being able to live in this beautiful world of ours that he had provided. The sun would stream into my kitchen and the sun plus the smell of coffee gave the promise of another God given good day.

The holidays were upon us again. I would welcome the joy of my family around me. There would be my children, my grandchildren and the dates of the older grandchildren. My apartment, which was comfortable for two, would have standing room only and even that would be crowded. I enjoyed every minute of it. Late at night I was exhausted but very happy.

The Christmas of 1962 Tony asked me if I wanted to go to Florida for a vacation with Anne, himself, and two of their six children. At first I did not know if I should go. I felt I would be intruding on their privacy, but they assured me I was welcome. I accepted their generous offer and that started the custom of spending a couple of weeks in winter in the warmth of the sunshine state. I loved Florida. The difference in climate in the winter months between Florida and New Jersey was incredible. I spent a few winters with my son Tony, Anne and children in Florida. Then one year Marie, my daughter Lucy and her husband Henry, decided to have a vacation in Florida. Tony and his wife Anne would vacation elsewhere - possibly Puerto Rico, Europe or Bermuda.

In 1972 Lee decided to join us with her husband Anthony and their two young daughters. During that year we were a very large group. My son Tony was there with his wife and young children who were now teenagers. All in all we were a caravan of twelve traveling together. What a lot of fun!

The year before Lucy and her husband had decided to buy some lots on the western coast of Florida. Lee and Anthony were going to visit an uncle in Coldwater. Something unfortunate happened the morning we were gathering at my house to start by car towards Florida for our long cherished vacation. Six o'clock was the scheduled time to start from my house. Lucy and Henry

were usually on time in arriving but this morning we were all waiting for them when the phone rang. Lucy's son wanted to talk to her. I said, "They are not here yet. Is there anything wrong?"

He said, "Yes, that's why I'm calling."

I asked him what was wrong and he told me his father's brother had died an hour ago. I was disturbed but said that I would tell them when they arrived. About five minutes later they arrived with faces aglow, anticipating a happy trip together. After the first greeting I said, "Lucy, the plans have changed."

Her face fell and she said, "Why?"

I said, "Junior called and wanted to speak to you." She asked, "What did he want?"

I said, "Your brother-in-law died this morning."

She conveyed the information to her husband and decided to go back home, but they assured us they would join us after the funeral.

A sad note settled on all of us as we started on our trip. The trip lasted two days before we reached Coldwater where we stopped to visit Anthony's uncle. That night we had trouble finding lodging because of the campaign for the presidential nomination of 1972. Lindsay and all of his entourage were in Coldwater to make a bid for the nomination.

The next day we started early for Lehigh Acres, a new planned community fifteen miles east of Fort Myers. This was the place where Lucy and her husband had made a commitment to buy land.

My daughter Marie had instructed me that if there were a good business lot I should buy it for her. I didn't like the responsibility of this decision but decided to inquire about one when I was with Lucy at the business office of the corporation. Lucy's commitment was based on their approval for one year before the final contract was signed. We looked at the location of the land returned to the office, and Lucy and Henry confirmed their purchase.

I asked if they had business property for sale. I was told they were not selling any of the business lots but would build and rent. They were looking for homesteaders. On the impulse of the moment I asked if there were a lot for sale near my daughter. I was told the tract was sold out but there were nice lots not too far away. I said to not bother but the salesman insisted that he would like to show us the place on a blueprint map. He was gone only a few minutes, but when he reappeared he had a big smile on his face. He said, "You won't believe it because I can't believe it myself. There was a cancellation during the Christmas holidays on the lot next to your daughter."

I said, "I'll take it."

He said, "For you?" I said, "Yes."

He asked, "How old are you?" I answered, "Seventy five." He said, "What do you want a lot for?"

I answered, "To have a stake in the sun."

Tony, Lucy and Henry were in the room. I required money. I did not have to bind the sale, but, having seen the property, I needed a percentage of the total sale. I said, "I can give you \$50.00 and will send the rest when I return home."

He said he couldn't do that, and I felt he wanted to clinch the sale while I was there in case I might change my mind. Tony offered to advance the down payment of ten per cent of the sale.

When I returned home Marie wanted to buy the lot herself but I decided to keep it because it was not what she really wanted.

I promptly discharged my obligation to Tony and the final agreement was for me to pay for the lot in five years in monthly installments. The deal was concluded on the Wednesday.

We had one more day before we would proceed to Hollywood where we had reservations, so we decided to visit Naples on the west coast. It is a beautiful resort town where every street leads to the Gulf of Mexico. Its beauty is very hard to describe. One will have to see it to believe it. We spent the night in Naples and left early the next morning for Hollywood and the rest of our vacation.

That was in 1972.

I have visited the place of my old age dreams twice since then, the dream that may never materialize because of two complications. One of them alone might not have deterred me.

I had an accident in the summer of 1970. I suffered a fall in a supermarket parking lot and it left me with a broken hip. It mended, but one leg was shorter than the other and I walked with a cane.

The other complication occurred because age began to work on me and my heart suffered a slight setback. The doctor did not think it would be wise for me, at my age, to live alone. I love the warm climate of Florida in the winter months but my dream is like that of Moses and the Promised Land. I love it but will probably not live there in my old age.

I haven't any reason to complain. I live in a beautiful home. Marie is very good to me. Eddie and Lee are only a short distance away and all the other children only an hour or so away. Lucy visits practically every Tuesday, her day off from work. Irma is also not too far away and she takes me to visit the shore when she has time off from her teaching in the winter. I am a very fortunate person indeed.

Chapter XXXIII

At the end of the summer of 1976 a new experience was in store for me. Since I had had the accident that broke my hip I always had to close the doors of the apartments at the shore promptly on Labor Day and return home. I would have had to live alone at the shore, since everybody had to return to their jobs. I protested that it was all right for me to stay a little longer with two good neighbors on each side and there was nothing to fear, but the children declared it might be okay for me but not for them. They would worry about me, so promptly on Labor Day I returned home. If weather permitted we would usually go to the shore on weekends. That means Marie and I and Irma and her family. Irma always occupied one of the apartments the last two weeks of the season, and when it was possible she would take advantage of the good weekends. After the season was over we would do enjoyable things together.

This was 1976. I did not plan to return to the shore the weekend following Labor Day because Tony was planning a big celebration at his farm for that weekend. He had established a custom of having a harvest festival during the month of September. Approximately 200 people would attend, including members of the Serra Club, relatives and friends. Sometimes it was cold at the end of September, so the festival was planned for the second week of September.

The festivities started with a Mass celebrated by the pastor of the church and this was held on the terrace in front of the house. Tony had chosen a spot with a beautiful view, so the Mass was always inspiring to us. The beauty always touched me to the core and there, in front of my son's home, we felt the full majesty of the Lord's creation. There was a harmony of the physical with the spiritual as we viewed the flowers in bloom, the foliage of the trees and the corn ripe with their luscious kernels. The dogs roaming around and sniffing at us, the cows peering over the corral fence and the horses prancing on their own added to the serenity of the place.

We would all kneel together as the Mass started, humble and grateful to the Lord who had brought us all together to enjoy the splendor and majesty of the hour. As we worshipped, our hearts were full of thankfulness for his

love for us. Then every one would line up to receive Holy Communion and the moment was a mystical blend of the terrestrial and heavenly. One felt the presence of the spiritual in the air and there was the knowledge that the spirit of good would remain.

Following the Mass we would have a splendid picnic prepared by my daughter-in-law and her children. All of this I would not have missed for anything.

So in September, 1976, when the decision had to be made as to whether I'd spend another weekend at the shore or go to the harvest celebration, the choice was easy to make.

I was surprised when, toward the end of the festival, Irma called me from the shore. She wanted me to go to the shore that very same night. I told her she must be kidding and she answered that I must come because I had won a contest!

"What contest?" I inquired. "I haven't entered any contest." She said, "The committee has tried to get in touch with you all day. A trophy is going to be awarded tomorrow and if you are not here it will be given to the runner up." I still didn't understand and asked for more details. She told me that Seaside Heights had run a beauty contest for senior citizens. They were looking for the most beautiful grandmother, for the grandmother with the most grandchildren, and the oldest grandmother. I asked her who had entered my name and she said Debra, my son Richard's daughter. She had forgotten to tell me about it. I had been chosen the grandmother with the most grandchildren and the trophy was to be presented by the town mayor.

I said to Marie, "We have to go to the shore tonight." She said, "Ma, you don't really mean that!"

I said, "Yes, I do. If you can't go I will ask one of my grandsons to drive me." She couldn't understand why I wanted to go the same night so I told her what Irma had told me.

She said, "We will go home for a couple of hours to rest and then I will take you."

We excused ourselves and left. We reached Seaside Park at midnight.

The awards were to be made the next day, Sunday, at 3:00 p.m. My daughter had to furnish all of the names of my grandchildren and their parents. I was anticipating the pleasure of my new experience and I wanted the whole world to know how proud I was of my progeny, especially when there is such a trend to the suppression of life. My grandson Henry Jr., Lucy's son, was also at the shore and helped clarify the situation with the committee. The same afternoon I was to attend a wedding shower for my granddaughter Mary Jane, my daughter Lee's daughter. Therefore, I requested that the presentation of the trophy to the grandmother with the most grandchildren be awarded first.

A decorated platform had been set up and a band was seated on it playing loud music for the pleasure of the young.

Irma was with me and I climbed a few steps and sat at a table with my back toward the beautiful ocean. The sound of the waves and the pure fresh breeze coming from the ocean was like brandy inebriating me. What pure joy it was to be alive on this glorious Sunday afternoon! The blue sky and warm sun were doing their share to make this day memorable. Others were beginning to arrive waiting to hear the decisions of the judges who were seated at a long table. The mayor was to present each winner with a trophy and present.

My name was the first one to be called. I went to the microphone and it was announced that I was the winner of the grandmother with the most grandchildren category, since I had 40 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren. The spectators clapped, and I was asked to speak. I was not prepared, but I thanked the committee for the honor I had received because I felt very proud of my grandchildren and great grandchildren. Then the mayor presented me with a trophy and an envelope that contained \$75.00. A picture was taken for the newspaper. I left the stage and while walking to my daughter's car, a woman said, "I didn't have any chance with my fourteen grandchildren."

I said, "No, you didn't."

On the way home Marie and I reviewed with pleasure the past 24 hours and at my granddaughter's shower they made a fuss over me because of the honor I had received.

Chapter XXXIV

It was the fall of 1976 and my eightieth birthday was approaching. I felt an atmosphere of mystery in the air and I knew that preparations were being made for this milestone. I felt that when one reaches the epitome of one's life there should be a celebration commemorating the years of experience in every step of life and the wisdom acquired through those experiences. Furthermore, seeing all of my loved ones at this celebration would mean a well-earned reward.

The time was getting close and I wasn't noticing any indications of preparations. I asked Marie if she knew anything and she said, "No comment." I began to suggest that I should start to make preparations to celebrate my birthday as usual at home. Marie said, "Ma, don't worry about it."

I said, "You know they will come and I won't have anything to offer."

She said, "Don't worry. There will be something." I wanted her to tell me what it was but she would not. I knew that when Marie would not talk, she just would not talk.

A telephone call came from Helen the day before my birthday to tell us she planned to arrive in Newark at a certain time that day. Now that really convinced me something was going on! If Helen planned to come from Missouri to celebrate my eightieth birthday, it was bound to be a good one. Now I would have the pleasure of not only having a nice birthday but the joy of seeing Helen, too.

Why should I be so expectant about this birthday? For me it was the coronation of my life lived as best I could and enjoyed fully.

Helen arrived and Marie and I went to the airport to meet her. She said, "You didn't have to come. I could have taken a taxi to your home."

I said, "I knew you could but we didn't want to miss one minute of your company. You came all the way from Missouri for my birthday and you can only stay for the weekend. I want to be with you every minute."

We chatted all the way home because there was so much to say. At home we continued our conversation and I said, "Helen, I really did not expect you to come."

She said, "I really had not planned to come since I couldn't stay any longer than a weekend because of my job, but at the last minute I just couldn't resist it, so I picked up the telephone, made the reservations and here I am."

I said, "God bless you for it."

Marie's voice broke up our reverie as she said, "Ma, you have to get dressed and it's getting late. I want you to look especially nice."

I answered, "How can I look nice with this patch over my eye?" She said, "Everybody knows you had an eye operation."

Helen said, "I didn't bring a long dress."

I said, "You brought yourself and that's enough."

Finally we were on our way and Marie kept driving. I said, "Where are we going?"

She said, "You'll see in a short while."

It was a country like atmosphere when she stopped the car. When I asked where we were going she said, "Right there," and she pointed to a sumptuous building. She said, "The DeVenezia Construction Company had just finished building it."

I said, "You mean you took me here to see what the boys have built! They have built many nice places."

She replied, "Just follow me."

I did that and when she opened the front door it was dark inside. Then there were thunderous shouts of *Happy Birthday* and the music began and the lights went on. I was blinded by the brilliance of the many lights and then arms were grabbing me and people were kissing me.

When I was finally able to collect myself and open my eyes I saw all of the faces I loved and many more. There were friends from long ago and a few relatives. I was overjoyed. I was asked if I were surprised. What could I say! My cup was full to the brim and I was inebriated.

I did not eat any of the delicious food or partake of the drinks because I was continuously busy with my well wishers. Everyone was having a good time. Coffee and a piece of my birthday cake were served. I was asked to cut the first piece of cake while the musicians played the "Happy Birthday" melody and the people sang in a chorus.

When I finally sat at my place of honor with a beautiful centerpiece in front of me my oldest grandson Johnny, 41, and my youngest David, six, presented me with my favorite flowers, a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses. They also handed me a Bingo card drawn by my grandson Teddy and urged me to open the envelope that came with the card. There was the sum of \$350.00 to enjoy my favorite pastime Bingo, the gift of my 40 grandchildren.

I felt blessed by the Lord for having given me the most precious of all gifts, the trust of such a large family.

The celebration did not end there. My children had conceived the idea of giving me the best testimonial of their love by each writing a short essay

entitled "I Remember Mama." Each, in turn, went to the microphone and read his or her essay starting from Colette, my first born, to Marie, my youngest.

Everyone was very composed as he read his composition. Many of their remembrances are in this tale. I listened full of restrained emotion. Their stories were our stories, the stories of a family living a life of harmony with one another. What more could one wish out of life? The love, peace and understanding of one's family is where the joy of living begins.

I felt as though I were on a stage and in a way I was. It was my birthday, music was playing and couples were dancing. Each of my sons requested a dance with me and so did my sons-in-law. I felt like a bride instead of an old woman. Even the personnel and management of the Birchwood Manor joined in the merriment and vowed they had never had a better time. When we got home late that night I felt it couldn't have happened to me. I must have been dreaming. However, all the gifts and the "I Remember Mama" book put together (so artistically) by Marie was not a dream.

I had wanted to be with my children and their children on my eightieth birthday, but the demonstration of their affections overwhelmed me. More than anything else I appreciate the affection and concern they have for me. I believe Nicola is very pleased in Heaven for the good children he fathered.

I thought on my birthday that I would retire and live a peaceful life, but it was not to be. The next day my two daughters Helen and Marie made me promise to write this narrative, and a new leaf had begun on my eightieth birthday.

First of all I want to thank God for the strength he has given me in enabling me to write this tale. It has not been easy to live again some painful facets of my life, but the bad is always mingled with the good. My share of good has been very large. Having had the chance to live in this country has brought the challenge to grow. I feel I owe a lot to my country of adoption for housing the future of my descendants. My closing words are "God bless America."

Appendix to the Narrative

I would like to make a few observations I have acquired in the course of my long life.

One does not need a lot of money to have a happy, fruitful life. Happiness and fulfillment are all around us. Our minds must be open to grasp the real and not to chase a mirage that leads to nowhere. Hope without faith is an empty shell. I have seen events unravel like a picture on the screen, the screen of my life. I feel immense progress has been registered in the passing of time but there has also been regression in some areas. We are standing at the edge of a precipice, and either we look back at our mistakes and mend them or face the painful consequences. The world needs us and we need the world. Let's unite in the common cause, peace. When the world came to be there were no barriers. We raised them. Let's bring them down and start anew. I came to America when I was very young, grew and matured here. I feel this is my country but let no one forget where I first saw the light of day. There are opportunities unlimited here, but evil forces are at work to cripple the due process of growth. Let all Americans march as one, armed with the torch of light, truth, kindness and compassion, not only for a few, but for all of mankind.