

Prologue

This is the story of my childhood from birth to the age of ten when my family immigrated to America. The story beginning with my reminiscing on the airplane during the journey to my hometown of Jonadi in Calabria Italy, for the first time in over sixty years. It was those memories of my childhood that always bubbled inside me, that forced me to write. Memories of a country I was just beginning to know and love, when I was uprooted and moved, never again to feel those roots cultivated to full form. It left me always longing and wondering what might have been.

When my mother, siblings, and I first arrived in America on July 4, 1958, to join my father who had gone before us two years earlier, I decided to discard all memorabilia I had brought with me as testament to my commitment to learn American ways. I even started resenting my father singing words from Italian operas, or watching Italian programs on TV, thinking that Italian was useless now in America, as it contradicted that commitment to learn the new culture and language. At first we all spoke in the Calabrian dialect, and eventually switched to English among us children, but not with Mom and Dad. Often I wondered if they could have become more Americanized if we had spoken English to them and not just thought of them as settled in their ways.

Writing this book has allowed me to search inside for answers to questions from where they originated, not simply about where I came from, but deeper, soul-searching questions to embarrassments I tucked inside myself while growing up. Inhibitions I wanted to misplace every time I felt the shyness press on my soul. Such as the type of hang ups that suddenly strangled me when it was time to give an oral book report in front of the class. During such a moment I became conflicted because I could not decide if the people looking at me were with me or against me, and the doubt forced a real internal conflict. The battle, like a racket ball bouncing back and forth, showed in my voice as I tried to speak. My palms began to sweat and my heart raced, I wanted to hide but I was in plain sight. In fear I bowed my head in shame and walked away in despair. In Italy my natural turf and desire to succeed could, in spite of that fear of strangers, help me avoid such an awkward moment, but in America, it became too complicated.

We settled in Long Island, New York and, to my surprise, we did not live in an Italian community. I liked it because it enabled me to mix with the American kids and learn from them at a better pace. In Italy I realized how much I craved an education. I loved the smell of new books and diving inside them to read and study new things. There, compulsory education was only to fifth grade. I was thrilled to discover that now in America, I could get a complete education. However, my father insisted on the Italian tradition for graduation, but I rebelled against his plan for me to drop out of school at the age of sixteen.

From an ad I found in a comic book, at thirteen years old, I enrolled in an animation art correspondence course at Continental Schools, Inc. in Los Angeles, Ca. I was able to make the monthly payments of seven dollars by doing odd jobs. In June 1965 I received my diploma. Because two of my sisters dropped out of school at sixteen, I was able to graduate high school. Scholarships paid for my first year of film school at the School of Visual Arts, in New York City. For the second year I exhausted my savings and then received a

Fellowship from the school for the third and final year. My student films garnered awards and recognition which rewarded me immediately with finding a job in the film animation industry.

The success that came from my having gone to college precluded me from working in construction as my father had done. Yet it did not stop him from wishing I had fulfilled his hope of my forming a landscaping company which would have enabled him to leave his construction job. I had hoped to make it big so he would not have to work anymore at all.