

Gina Iafrate
Italian Immigrant
Andrea Doria
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Limosano P. Campobasso,
October 11, 1952.

It was a late fall evening we were gathered around the fireplace the six of us, my grandmother

Giovina, my grandfather Angelo Bozza, my mom Elvira, my dad Igino, my sister Giovanna and myself. We had just engaged in our ritual prayer of the evening before retiring, my grandmother was the caller with the beads in her hands. The skies had opened up that night, the thunder



was rattling our windows and lightening was flashing, rain was hitting our roof pouring profusely. All of a sudden, we were startled by a strong knock on the door. We looked at each other, "Who could be out there on this stormy night"?

My dad made his way to the door reluctantly. He opened it. A man was standing there in the rain holding a black umbrella wearing a trench coat rubber boots and he had a pouch under his arm. Dad courteously invited him in "Si accomodi". Once the man stepped in, he said "I am a messenger", speaking to my dad. "Your brother, Peppino Del Gobbo has sent me to deliver these papers to you with a message and it is urgent". My uncle, was employed by the labour board in the office of our province Campobasso, the message for my dad was: there were job openings in Canada to work on the railroad. It was offered by the government. It consisted of a two-year contract with conditions. He needed to accept or decline fast because there were only one or two openings left.



The travel expenses would be paid for, and he needed to fulfill the duration of the contract. Should he not be able to abide by these stipulations, he would have to repay back the money plus a penalty for breaking the contract. He asked dad if he would like to go, but he needed to make up his mind fast. With a smile on his face dad looked at us for approval. We were all delighted. He could read it on our faces. He accepted the offer with no reservation. He had wanted to emigrate for such a long time. Now it was finally happening, like a miracle, he could not believe it. He invited the man to sit down and filled the papers to register at once.

Dad thought this was his opportunity to seek and provide a better future for his family, and pursue the American dream, in Europe we looked at Canada as North America.

Although my mom, my sister, and myself

would remain behind, soon after the papers were signed and send in, we were notified to travel to Naples where we had to subject ourselves to extensive medical check ups. An investigation was also launched to make sure we had no criminal record. All these prerequisites were needed in order for my dad to emigrate. After clearing all the red tape dad eagerly took his long voyage heading to his new destination.

He was stationed in Edmonton Alberta where his two-year government employment began. His travel expenses had been paid. My father was well aware of what he had signed up for and his duties and obligations.

When he arrived in Edmonton the city seemed well populated and lively. Unfortunately after a day or so from hotel accommodation, the authorities took him with other workers out of city boundaries; way out in the forest. Here they were to live and remain to construct a railroad to connect Alberta to other provinces.

It was hard for my father to cope with the extreme temperatures of below zero. Here he was in the wilderness of Western Canada stationed a long distance from the city, and living in wagon trains. The mail and news



from the family was delivered only once a month and only received if you were lucky to be at the post of delivery. He always told us stories how you did not dare to venture out at night after dark because the bears would be there hunting for food and attack humans.

He felt trapped in a situation; the money was poor, a family was left behind to support, a contract to fulfill, life at this point had gone from bad to worse. Not quite what he had anticipated. The North American dream was a very hard one to fulfill under these circumstances.

Dad was ambitious and a hard worker. He continued his dutiful duty although the hardship on the railroad was discouraging, plus the reality of getting the family over as originally planned was nil.

After a long period of time he made contact with his younger brother Antonio Bozza who lived in Niagara Falls Ontario. My father managed to get a pass to go visit his younger brother.

Once in Niagara, although jobs were scarce, he could see that maybe this part of Canada offered some hope. With the help of his brother and some cousins, he never returned to the wilderness of Alberta and the railroad.

His new decision had its consequences. Of course he needed to repay back all he was given in order to be a free man.

This was going to put him back monetarily to reach his goal. He needed a job badly to survive. He was intelligent and determined to take on any challenge. Although he had engineer qualification, it did not mean anything in 1953. You worked at what was offered to you if you were lucky enough to find a job, plus no knowledge of the language did not get you far.

In order to endure the hardship and longing he felt for the family left behind, my father took on any kind of work offered to him. Mostly hard labour, and never refused a days work regardless of the difficulty. At the same time he would attend night school to learn English.

Now he had been in Canada for three years. He had repaid his debts to the government, and to his brother. It was time to think and plan for the family in Limosano P. Campobasso, Italy.

Decisions needed to be made. My sister and I were growing up therefore we needed a father figure, plus it was not my parents' intentions to be separated. We were very close and family-oriented, something needed to be done.

In the meantime my dad knew that my sister and I would not like uprooting and coming to Canada because I was by now at the age of fifteen and well set on my studies. The custom here was much different from our cities back home, plus the weather, especially the winter even in Niagara is very long.

We lived in the meridian part of Italy with fairer climate plus we had lots of cousins and grandparents therefore difficult to leave behind.



Against all odds we sold our home back in Campobasso. My grandparents helped pay the trip and here we were in Naples to get on board the Andrea Doria that was suppose to take us to our destination, Canada.

We had never traveled such a distance in our lives

before and we were very concerned with crossing the Atlantic Ocean. It was such a long trip to our destination. A lot of our relatives accompanied us to Naples for our embarkation. After long good-byes and hugs and tears we left our loved ones for our new destiny.

Once on the Andrea Doria I thought, “What was my concern all about! This ship is the most luxurious, and state-of-the-art creation ever imagined”. I indulged on this voyage, and loved everything it offered, never got sea sick, unlike my mother and my sister I was very lucky. I said to myself, “This is a floating city in itself. Shame on me for having had such adverse thoughts”. I would often find a quiet corner on deck and indulge in my favorite pastime writing. The vastness of the ocean, and sky, with no land in sight, put me in bliss with the universe. To my disbelief this same ocean liner did end up at the bottom of the ocean only a couple of trips afterwards: the famous sinking of the Andrea Doria.

We were heading for New York. I did not know why. Here we would be catching the train to Canada. We did not know a word of English, although I knew a couple of phrases. My mother had always been shy, never one to fend for herself, very dependent. She expected me to be the leader and communicate using those couple of phrases.

We finally made it to this little town, of Meritton in Niagara Region, Ontario on January 11, 1956 in the dead of winter. My dad and some of our relatives came to greet us. My first impression was that I thought the whole appearance was strange, the small detached homes, back yards and the streets. At first I had many reservations. The first thing I felt was an extreme cold penetrating deep inside me, snow was everywhere. But I was so glad to see my dad. He had managed to buy a house for us to live in. It was together with my uncle's family. This is what you did back then because of the mortgage debt. At least we were together as a family. My dad had enrolled us in a Catholic school taught by nuns and priests. Although I was put back, I liked my teachers, and loved the learning.

We lived in an English zone of town which it turned out to be very good for me. We were forced to speak English. We immersed ourselves in the Canadian custom. My dad with his dedication and hard work continued to better himself. Later in life he successful employed one hundred and seventy five people as the owner of Darte Industries. With his engineering mentality and two partners he created a steel plant. They built airplane parts and engines and molds for all kinds of machineries. They supplied other companies world wide. This gave him the opportunity to travel extensively with my mom to attend conventions, share his knowledge, and acquire wisdom. He was honored with merits by the community and organizations he had helped along the way. He sold Darte Industries on his retirement to enjoy the fruit of his labor in Florida, and Canada.

For myself; I met a local young man and married quite young. He also had immigrated to Canada for more opportunity. We worked together as a team, my husband, Mario, and two lovely daughters, Delia and Sandra. Not unlike my parents, we also dedicated ourselves to hard work with determination. As a result from humble beginnings and hard work, we became very successful in creating many businesses.

We developed our commercial and industrial real estate business in the Niagara area, involving our daughters along the way. Mario never ceased to stop initiating new projects. At last for the love of golf, he developed an executive golf course in Niagara "Eagle Valley Golf Course", with a driving range and a club house. It contains surrounding land to be developed, and will be continued by our daughter, Delia. We are lucky enough to have our first daughter to take over where we left off. Sandra is a journalist, and an artist, we are very proud of her talents. Our hard work has benefited many other people, besides ourselves. My daughters were brought up to become high achievers. We passed on to them the same habits and drive that were given to us.

Although in life nothing comes easy. With our unity, we were able to endure the hurdles of climbing the hills and valleys of life. With courage, we managed to always find the sunshine at the end of the dark tunnel, and the rainbow at the end of the storm. Our success has been very rewarding, and has given us a good life. All this has taken place in this land of ours called Canada.

Since I always had a hard time enduring the cold, we have been fortunate to be able to spend the winter months in the warm climate of South Florida, U. S. A.

My desire for learning never stopped. I continued to take courses all my life to contribute to my education. Finally at this stage in my life, I have the pleasure to indulge in my old passion writing.

My advice to anyone is; hard work and perseverance will make all your dreams come true. Plus once in Canada preserve your heritage, but most important adapt to the Canadian mores, and become a real Canadian to follow and respect its laws.

Every beginning has its draw backs. Never get discouraged. By applying and keeping committed, you will never fail. I am very grateful to this land of ours. Yes, Canada is a great place to live. My family and I feel very privileged to be Canadians.