

As told by Jennie Ridulph Mancuso Eglund

My mother, Giuseppina Vivona was born on October 20, 1888 in Calatafimi, a province of Trapani, Sicily, Italy. When she was in her teenage years, her father, Silvester Vivona, born December 31, 1859, wanted to move to Tunis Africa, to see if he could get a job to make a better living for his family, since in Sicily, they only had farmland and they made just enough to get along. At that time, the only way to get to Tunis was by boat. So, one day they took the boat to Tunis. The next day, my grandfather Silvester got a job in a flourmill. He was a very good worker and after working in the mill for just a short time, they promoted him to a foreman's job and he made a good living for his family.

My mother had four younger brothers but she was the only girl. Since she was their only daughter, naturally she was their pride and joy. When my mother was fifteen years old, my father, Michael Ridulph (Michele Ridulfo), born March 30, 1881, also decided to go to Tunis. At that time he lived and farmed in Corleone Sicily with his parents. They had property there that bordered property with a neighbor, whom they didn't get along well with. One day my father rode in to the farm on a horse and saw his father and the neighbor arguing. The neighbor raised his arm and was ready to strike his father with a garden hoe. My father told the neighbor to stop and when he didn't, he shot the neighbor in the leg to protect his father. About this same time my father was also supposed to report for duty in the army, but because of the shooting incident, he ran away to Tunis located in Tunisia, a country in northeast Africa bordering on the Mediterranean.

In those days, many people from Sicily went to Tunis looking for work, and it turned out that my father got a job working in the same flourmill that my mother's father worked in, however they did not know each other at that time.

One Sunday, my mother's father asked my dad if he would like to come to their house for dinner, since he knew that my father was single and that he lived alone. My father told him that he would like that very much. So, on Sunday he went to my mom's house for dinner and had a delicious dinner of spaghetti and meatballs with all the trimmings. My mom sat across from my dad at the dinner table. He said she was beautiful and he just couldn't keep his eyes off of her. When I was sixteen, my dad told me that if my mom had looked anything like me when she was sixteen, he wouldn't even have

looked at her because when I was sixteen, I looked like I was about twelve years old -- skinny and flat-chested.

My dad was invited to my mom's house many times after that, and the more he saw of my mother, the more beautiful she looked to him and he soon fell in love with her. He asked her father if he could marry my mom. My mom's father told him that he would like very much to have him as his son-in-law, but first he would have to have a written letter from my father's dad who lived in Italy, saying that it would be okay for him to marry. But my father didn't want to wait that long, since the mail was very slow in those days, and also he knew that he was still wanted for the shooting incident and for going A.W.O.L. from the army. Well, because my father would not write to his father in Italy for permission to marry my mom, my mother's father said no, and would not let her marry my father.

However, the next Sunday when my father was invited to my mom's home for dinner, after dinner they were outside walking around the yard, and my father and mom decided to elope to get married. When my grandfather found out they had left, he went after them, but it didn't do any good, as my father had gotten my mom into his little house before my grandfather arrived and had locked the doors. The next day they were married, September 8, 1904.

In Italy, if anyone found out that a girl was alone in a house with a man, no other young man would want her for a wife. She would have to marry some old man or else become a nun, or just stay home with her parents and take care of them when they got old.

However, after they were married, my grandfather had a big party for them and they soon left to make their home in Corleone, Sicily. Even though they knew no one else in this new city, they soon settled in and began their new life together. After returning to Italy, my father decided to turn himself in to the authorities for his earlier actions and was sent to prison for two years. While my father was in prison, my mom lived with her in-laws and they treated her very badly while she was staying with them. When she was in labor giving birth to my oldest brother Michael, Jr., who was born July 30, 1905, her mother-in-law would not help her and just let her lie on the floor in pain. My mother was just sixteen years old at the time. During my father's absence, his parents gave Mike away and the baby was not

returned to my mother until two years after my father was out of prison. Also, when my father returned from prison, he learned that his father, mother and brother had died, each within a few months of each other.

My father decided at that time that he would like to come to beautiful America to make some money and then return to Italy to be with his wife and five children. He left Italy in 1912 and came to New York. He then moved on to DeKalb, Illinois since he knew some people that had also come to DeKalb from Italy. He got a job on the railroad there. It was very hard work, but it was good to be making that much money. He could really save money because there were no bills to pay, only his food, since he lived in a caboose car on the railroad. My father would send money to my mother so she could buy some land in Italy, which she did. But the next time he sent her money she put it in the bank. She saved the money he sent her until she had enough to buy tickets for herself and her five children to come to America. My father kept writing to her telling her that he was coming back to Italy, but by this time he had been in America for two years. My mother never wrote to tell my father that she was coming to America. She purchased tickets for all of us and in 1914 we left Italy to come to America. We made the long trip by boat. There was my mom, my two older brothers, Michael and Joseph (born 2/20/07), myself Vincenza, (born 2/20/09), Giuseppina (born 11/10/10) and my baby sister Brazeda (Bessie, born in 1912).

When we arrived at Ellis Island and saw the Statue Of Liberty, it was beautiful. We had to be checked out medically to be sure that we did not bring any diseases into the country and my mother was worried that my sister Giuseppina (Josephine) would not pass the exam because her eyes were bad. When Josephine was a little girl in Italy, she was scared by a runaway horse in the streets and as a result of this, her blood was upset and caused sores on her face and in her ears and eyes. When she reached puberty, the illness finally went away, but left her scarred. Luckily, we all passed the entry exam in good health.

When we got to New York, my mother sent my father a telegram telling him to meet us in Chicago, but there were two railroad stations in Chicago that my mother didn't know about. So when we got to Chicago, there was no one to meet us. So, my mom took a cab, which in those days was a carriage

with two horses. My mom had the address of her friends from Italy, so we went to their house.

When my father came from DeKalb to the station in Chicago and didn't find us there, he also went to the same friends' house and found us. My father was so happy to see all of us, there was sure a lot of loving that day and every day after, as my father was so happy that we had arrived in America when we did. It wasn't long after that, that there was a big war in Europe and we would not have been able to leave Italy to come to America. We traveled from Chicago to DeKalb on the train and during the trip, the conductor came and sat by me and taught me how to count to ten in English before we arrived in DeKalb.

I have always been so proud of my mother. It took a lot of courage for her to come to a strange country at the age of 26 with five small children and she didn't even know how to speak English. She was a wonderful mother; she had a lot of love for all of her family and all of her wonderful neighbors. Our home was always open to all of our neighbors, day or night. While we lived in DeKalb, my mom gave birth to my youngest sister, Mary who was born November 5, 1917. My mother also had baby Silvia who died at about age three (my mom also had two other babies that she named Silvia who died). She wanted one of her girls to be named Silvia after her father who was named Silvester. The entire family received their U.S. Citizenship on June 23, 1921.

It was a sad day for the family when my mother died of a hearth attack at the age of 68. She died around 9:30 pm on Saturday, March 2, 1957. We have many wonderful memories of her; how she always had a lot of love for everyone and taught us how to love. I am so proud to have been her daughter!

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