

THE OLIVE TREE A VESCIO FAMILY STORY

By Chaplain Paul Vescio 2009



1.

The Olive Tree

By Chaplain Paul D. Vescio 2009 rewrite 2018

Morning light reaches over a rugged mountain range as the cool air rushes down to chill the desert floor below.

A rolling freight train moves slowly on by. With simple ease the Santa Fa engine pulls a long line of box cars down its lonely tracks, powerful and seemingly without effort it glides along. From where I sit they look like little blue, and orange colored matchbooks.

A distant highway runs along the track, cars and trucks drive by on their way to places that I for now can only dream about.

Overhead white billowy clouds float amidst a blue sky. On the ground below a field mouse feeds on some scattered seeds it had found, little does it know this meal will be its last for just overhead is a white-tailed hawk. Then suddenly the hawk goes into a dive and in less than three seconds one life ends so another could live, such as it is with life in the desert, especially in here.

Announcements sound out breaking the morning silence, "A C U check, chows now open for the south yard, one hour! Pod porters get your chemicals!!!" It's 4:30 AM, I need to be up for class by 6:00. I guess I could go to breakfast, but honestly, I'd rather sit here and tell you this story, besides I have pop tarts and bread in my locker anyway. O ya I'm writing this story about our family while serving has an inmate here at Kingman State Prison in Kingman Az.

I'm here serving a two-year sentence for, well that's another story. I will say this, coming to Kingman Prison has been a true blessing in my life, God has blessed me with the ability of writing and the wisdom of His word. I would have never been able to sit down and write this story without our Lord's help. I give all of the praise, glory, and honor to You O Lord...in Christ Yeshua's name I pray Amen...

2.

Chapter One America Our New Beginning

A whisper of a breeze skips along the ocean waves, it touches the shore line with a gentle kiss then glides across rolling hillsides. Seagulls dance about in a whirlwind of God's creation. Fishing boats dot the shoreline as captains order their crews to pull in their nets, the rocky shore line gives way to rolling hills of green grass. The ocean breeze finally reaches the olive trees, their leaves begin to rustle about telling a story that goes back two thousand years or more.

Little stone houses rise up from the ground, history is everywhere, old ruins mixed with quaint little houses, brick buildings with a splash of color are everywhere. People are going about their day, an artist paints, stores are open, horses and carts move slowly through the village square peddlers shout out their goods for sale, the sun is shining, a worried wife calls out to her husband to be back soon, a mother tells her children to come in to mangia, such as it is in Calabria Italy on a cool spring day in 1910.

My Grandfather's name was Pasquale Vescio, a shoe cobbler by trade, he was by all accounts a very kind man who loved his family very much. And being that he was a shoe cobbler I would have to conclude that he must have had a deep love for people as well. From the only picture that I have of my Grandfather and from what my Father has told me, he had a mustache, wore glasses, stood about five feet eight inches tall and he worked very hard to provide for his family. My Father told me that his Father walked to and from work every day which was at least two miles each way.

Pasquale was married to Angelina De Rosa who was from Rome, She was a kind loving woman with a soft heart, always with a kind word and the voice of reason. She stood a little taller than her husband. Pasquale was on the thin side , Angelina was a little on the heavy side. She had a sad smile about her countenance, all one has to do is to look at her pictures and then think back to all of the hard challenges and struggles our family has had to endure through over the years to understand why.

3.

Now Peter was their oldest son, he was about ten years old. Next was Anna she was seven and then finally at that time was Pauline who was five years old. The family lived in a small stone house not too far from the shore. Taxes were high, the laws were very oppressive, money was in short supply so the family set their sights and hopes on America.

America where they would have the freedom to be able to achieve whatever their God given talents afforded them without restriction from their government. Our Family was now more than ever, ready to set sail to fulfill their destiny and claim a piece of the American dream.

This one bold act of faith would affect many generations to come.

(Two days before leaving for America)

Pasquale works late into the night, he wants to finish all of his customers orders by tomorrow. He sits alone in his work shop, the smells of leather and shoe polish linger in the air, and as he sits with brush and shammy in hand he begins to sing, “ America, America may God shed His a grace on thee and crown thy good with a brotherhood from sea to a shining sea... Ah America, home of a the brave and land of a the free, that's a good enough for me”...

11:00 pm Pasquale finishes his last pair of shoes. He puts his tools away, sweeps up a little and then heads up the stairs for bed saying, “Ten pair in one a day, God willing in two days we will be on our way.”

The next morning Angelina is in the kitchen making breakfast for the family. The smells of fresh baked bread along with prosciutto ham, eggs, coffee and oatmeal fill the house with a warm comforting filling of love. The sunshine beams through the kitchen windows, a soft breeze blows through flowery curtains of colorful lace. Covering the table is a tablecloth of light blue with yellow trim around the edges. Pots and spoons of all shapes and sizes hang from the ceiling. A spice rack hangs with a sense of warm pride, a small ice box in the corner of the room sits quietly, meat and cheese hang from a shelf off to the side.

A wood cutting board with a set of sharp knives await to be called upon for the creation of the next meal. There are hard boiled eggs in a bowl on the table along with a half full jug of red table wine.

4.

Two more jugs of wine sit on the floor beside the table. Angelina sets a plate of grapes and cheese with hard crusty bread on the table and says, “COME A COME A MANGIA, FAMILY COMEA EAT!!!!

Pasquale enters through the door carrying a bag of fresh fruit that he had just brought from the man outside. The fruit and vegetable man pulls his cart behind him as he moves through the village, he walks slowly as he yells out, “FRESH FRUIT, FRESH VEGETABLES, COMEA COMEA!!!! I WON'T BE BACK UNTIL TUESDAY!!!”

Peter, Anna, and Pauline join Mama at the table.

“Papa what will the boat be like?” asks Anna. “Papa what will the schools be like?” Asks Peter. Papa how long will it take for us to sail to America?” Asks Pauline.

“Now leave your Papa alone children, let him eat his food in peace.”

“No, No, it's a ok.” Says Papa to Angelina, “Ok Ok children, I'll a tell you once again the story of America.”

Ah America, America; America the beautiful, home of the brave and the land of the free. They say that her streets are paved with gold, America is a country where money grows on a trees and silver coins fall from the sky like rain.” America is a place where if your set your mind to it, play by the rules and try real hard you can grow up to be anything you want to be, and who knows maybe one of your own a children grow up to be president of America, now wouldn't that be a something to see.”

“Papa such silliness, it's not good to fill the children's hearts with such false hope.”

“Mama all things started with a dream.”

Then Papa said, “The ship will take us all the way across the ocean, I think one or two weeks depending on the weather. Then there she will be, the most beautiful statue in all the world and when she welcomes us to America we will all stand on the deck of the great ship and give thanks to God for His blessings in bringing us safely to her shores.”

“Who is this beautiful woman Papa”

“Ah, she is Lady Liberty, the statue of freedom who welcomes us to America”

5.

“First we make a short stop on Ellis Island to be registered then we go to the main land New Yorka city, and from there we go to Stamford Conn. We find a house to live in, I go to work, you children go to school, you grow up free, make a family of you own. Live free, happy and proud, you make something of you life and always remember, you family is all you got. Now mangia you food we leave for America in just two days HURRAAA!!!!!!”

Chapter 2 A Ship Of Faith

Two days later on a warm spring day the family stands out front of their house, they’ve said all of their goodbyes.

A jolly heavy-set man sits holding the reins of a gray mare, the cart that she pulls has the Vescio family belongings piled on it. He calls out, “OK everybody a set?” “Climb up let’s go you got a ship to catch America awaits you.”

The children sit with Mama on the cart as Papa walks along side. The coast is less than a mile away and the ships are about a half mile down the coast. The gray mare pulls the cart behind her. They make their way down narrow cobble stone roads, her horseshoes clip clop, clip clop as they move slowly along. The children sing a song as they travel through the village square. Cheese, bread, fruit and vegetable stands line the streets. Two hundred pigeons take to flight as the great fountain in the center of the square comes to life and sprays water into the air.

The Vescio Family reaches the shoreline, a sudden burst of ocean spray gives them a good taste of the salt air as hungry seagulls are heard squawking and can be seen flying all about. Suddenly a man yells out, “Hey Pasquale good luck in America, we will be praying for you and you family, CHOW PIZZON”!!!!!!!

At the docks people hurry by, fish of all kinds are packed and sold to market. The fishermen’s dogs are all about, some are barking still others can be seen chasing after cats and yes rats. Suddenly a hungry sea gull swoops in close to steal a snack startling Anna. The Vescio children watch in amazement as barrels of olive oil, and vino roll by, crates of goods seem to be stacked to the sky as ropes and nets continue to dance and sway in the afternoon breeze. Ships are being loaded and unloaded, carts, trucks, and

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trains are being loaded and unloaded all the day long. Smaller fishing boats cast off for sea and still others can be seen coming to shore. Fishermen are seen all about tending to their boats, cleaning their nets, cleaning fish, hauling their catch and readying it for market.

Still others set up shop right on the docks selling their catch and giving thanks to God for His bountiful blessings.

The Vescio Family looks for the ship with the same name that's written on their papers. The Sea Illeone. The family pulls up next to the ship. Rude men check their papers and unload the cart with their belongings. Papa reaches into his pockets and takes out some coins and then he gives the money to the men for helping to unload the cart. Papa smiles and says, "Geratci."

The Vescio family walk up the long wooden ramp and board The Sea Illeone, their hopes are high, and their faith is strong but they know all too well that they're not home yet.

The Sea Illeone had 12 decks, 3 huge smokestacks, a crew of over 260 and a passenger list of over a thousand. The great ship stood on the sea like a mighty whale. The Vescio Family's room was on deck 7 room 193 which was a one room suit with no bathroom and only one bed. Papa and Peter took turns sleeping on the floor.

"Thank God we are not in a steerage." Says Papa. Steerage was far below deck in the rear of the ship near the engines. There was little food, stale air, it was noisy, people became sick, the people on board ships like these suffered greatly in coming to America. In most cases families spent all of their money on a ticket. They would arrive in a new land with nothing more than faith, hope and lots of love, which when you get right down to it, is everything.

Day 2 at sea. Calm waters allow The Sea Illeone to glide across the water, the sky is a blue gray, white billowy clouds float across the horizon. The sunshine is like a warm hug on a cold rainy day. Sea birds follow the great ship grabbing a free snack from the passenger's whenever they could. Life seems still for the moment, off in the distance another ship blows its horn saying hello.

7.

Three whales swim alongside the ship then slowly swim away to far off waters in search of food. All is well, they say that the calm before every storm is always the most peaceful...Amen

Day 10 at sea.

Two days out from New York City America.

On the morning of April 15th the Vescio Family was awoken by the sounds of thunder. A storm had rolled into the path of The Sea Illeone, waves crashed, lighting flashed, the ship lifted up and down on sixty-foot waves. The wind blew with forced gales as lights on board the ship began to flicker on and off. "Mama are we going to sink"? The children ask. "Now, now" says Mama "Where's your faith?" "God is in control, we will be fine, your Papa went to the upper deck to check on things. Don't worry it will be Ok."

"Squuzee Sir, my family is worried about a storm, this a ship make it through ok, right?" says Papa.

"Get back to your room, we have everything under control. Now go before you get hurt!!!!" "Dumb wop guinea." "Yeah the ship's full of emm." The crew men say to each other.

Papa returns back to the room, he tells his family that everything is going to be ok but he knows all too well that that could change. Papa Vescio comes from a family of fishermen, he's lived through many storms in his life, and he's cried many times with the families of fishermen who didn't make it back home.

Mama holds Pauline in her arms as Anna holds onto Mama, Peter hugs Papa as he comes back in the room. Papa smiles and says, "I talked to the Captain of a the ship and he said it's a going to be fine, he told me that this a ship has seen worse. Now let's play some cards what do you say?" Papa looks at the children and asks, "Hey what do you say we eat a couple of those apples that Mama brought for us?"

The storm lasts through the night and at one point a hundred-foot wave crashed alongside of the ship rocking her so that people screamed as they fell to the floor.

8.

The children prayed as they hung onto Mama and Papa. Mama sang a soft lullaby to try to calm them down.

At about 5am the next day the ship moved out of the path of the storm and into the light of day. The storm actually put the ship ahead of schedule they were now about fourteen hours away from New York City. (behind every storm there is a silver lining. Amen) At about 10am Papa and Peter go up on deck. Papa says to Peter, “Son one day our family will be happy, we are going to America for you kids so you can have a good life. One day you will have a family of your own, son someday you make a something of a you life in America, son this dream Mama and Papa has is for you and you sisters, understand?”

“Yes Papa I will make our family proud, I promise Papa.” says Peter.

“I love you very much Peter, you good a son, now let’s go back to our room.” says Papa.

The night before their arrival in New York Mama and Papa, Peter, Anna and Pauline sat on the upper deck together. A man played a guitar as another played a violin, still others played harmonicas and told stories. One man had puppets and put on a show. There was a man and a woman doing magic tricks for everyone to see. The sea was calm the breeze cool it was a night filled with faith, hope, laughter, and joy.

People sang songs, they danced in what little room they had on deck. They talked and they told stories about their dreams and about the great riches that await them on the shores ahead. It was the best night of their voyage at sea. Sunrise tomorrow will be the dawn of a new day in a new country starting a new life, a life of hope and happiness in a place we call America.

9.

Chapter 3 Ellis Island New York

The next morning everyone stood on the deck of the ship, there was barely enough room to move around let alone stand.

All eyes were fixed on the great statue that stood before them in the clouded distance. As the ship moved in closer people started to sing America the beautiful, people cried and wave, all were filled with hope and joy.

Now the words on Lady Liberty reads as follows,

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these the homeless, tempest- tossed to me,

I lift up my lamp beside the golden door.

By Emma Lazarus

As The Sea Illeone passed the Statue of Liberty everyone cheered, people hugged and cried, life was good.

The ship moved on and docked at Ellis Island, People were slowly moved off of the ship and directed into buildings to be registered and tested for sickness and diseases. They were herded like cattle in long lines having to stand for hours at a time. Then they were sent to housing buildings much like the dorms in this prison.

“Papa where is Anna? She was right behind me.”

says Mama. “Peter, Pauline where is Anna?” Papa asks.

“She was walking right besides us.” They both say.

The family looks around, there are many people walking in the same direction and their forced to keep moving forward. Papa tells Mama, “It’s a gonna be ok we’re on a island she can’t go too far. We go now and get our beds then we go look for her, ok?”

The Vescio Family is given four cots to sleep on but because Anna wasn’t there she will have to sleep with Pauline. “Pauline wait right here with Mama I take Peter and we go look for Anna, Peter lets a go now.”

They begin asking people who speak Italian if they have seen Anna, the Port Authority on the island are of little help.

10.

There are thousands of people moving through Ellis Island, people are coming and going the ship they were on dropped off over eight hundred people alone, there was three ships docked with a half a dozen more out at sea on the way.

“What is your name? Come on come on what is it? Look, how can we help you find your mama and papa if you don’t tell us your name?” The officer keeps trying to find out Anna’s name with no luck. Then a kind woman who was from Italy sees what’s happening and walks over and begins asking Anna her name in Italian, finally a frightened little voice says, “My name is Anna Vescio.” “Hello my name is Norma, how old are you Anna?” Anna looks at the kind woman and says, “I am 7 years old I am from Calabria. Can you please take me to Mama and Papa?”

The officer places a name tag on Anna then tells the women that he will handle it from here. He grabs Anna’s hand and begins walking away. Norma calls out to him,

“Anna does not speak english do you want me to come with you?”

“NO NO!!!!!! we deal with these things all the time.” The officer pulls Anna by her hand and says without looking at her, “ You should have stayed with your family, now you will be punished for causing all of this trouble and leaving me to deal with you. Now come along with me guinea brat!!!!!!”

The officer takes Anna to a small room and without a word pushes her in, closes the door, locks it and walks away.

Anna sits on a cot and cries as she looks out a small window.

She sees a tugboat go by then says, “I’m sorry Mama and Papa please come find me soon.” For three days Mama and Papa search for Anna, they asked people, officers, workers, nothing. The officer that put Anna in the room was off for the weekend. Anna was feed and cared for barely but could not speak English, so she just sat there and waited, prayed, and cried. A tiny mouse kept Anna company; she named the little mouse silly. “Silly mouse come eat some bread, here silly mouse.”

Finally, on the third day the woman who helped Anna heard Papa say, “Vescio.” “Sir I know where the officer put Anna, she is in that building over there, hurry and go find her!!!!!!”

11.

Papa and Peter run, they hurry thru the door and confront the officer in charge, “Sir Sir you have little girl name Anna, Please where is a she?”

“Ok ok settle down, I’ll check the rooms in the back.” The officer shakes his head as he’s walking down the hallway saying to himself, The whole country’s going to hell because of these guinea wop trash.”

Anna sees the door knob move the door opens and the officer walks over to her and checks her name tag then says in a stern voice, “Ok little wop lets go.”

Anna puts silly in her pocket then puts on her coat and runs to Papa.

“Papa!!!! Papa!!!!!! I’m sorry!!!! I’m sorry Papa!!!!!!

“It’s a ok you safe now, Anna we never loose you again.

Now let’s go to Mama, Papa and Mama love you very much Anna, It’s a ok. Everything gonna be ok.”

Mama sees Papa and Peter with Anna and she runs over to them with Pauline. They all hug each other than Mama says, “Anna you never leave us like that again, you safe now, we all love you very much Anna. Thank a God you ok”

Chapter 4 Our Family Home

Sunrise over the Hudson, her waters shimmer like so many diamonds cast amid a blue velvet cloth. In the morning light Manhattan seems to rise up out of earth like so many castles of sand. New York City is a place where hopes and dreams seem to rise and fall daily and like that old Francis Albert Sinatra song goes, “New York is a city that never sleeps at night.”

As the waters of the Hudson river move down stream boats of all sizes and colors are seen floating on by. Powerful tugboats show off their muscle as they pull ships ten times their own size. Fishing boats head out to sea as hungry sea gulls cry from overhead. All hands-on deck are busy, everyone one out trying to catch a dream.

Here in New York City we see everything happening all at once and with all that there is in this world and with all that this life has to offer us I ask you, do we ever really take the time to tell our Lord how much we love Him and do we thank Him daily for the life that He has given us? John 3:16

12.

It's another busy day in New York City and after a week on Ellis Island our family boards the ferry that will take them across the bay to Manhattan Island so that they could finally be on their way.

The Vescio Family stays with family and friends at first then eventually settles in Stamford Conn. by Cove Island. Mama and Papa buy a one story two-bedroom house at 539 Cove Rd. Their house has a nice yard and is within walking distance to the beach. The area has many Italian families and is a very good place to raise a family. The Vescio children are enrolled at KT Murphy Elementary School right down the street from their home.

Papa sets up shop in a red brick three story building about two miles from home, he walks to and from work every day. Mama and Papa were blessed with three more children in the years that followed Yolonda was born in 1915 then around 1923 Marie known as Gloria and finally on Aug. 12th 1925 my father Paul David Vescio was born. My father was born in the Vescio Family home on Cove Rd he was the youngest of six children, his brother Pete was 25 years older than him. My father grew up during the depression and WW11 but through it all the Vescio Family kept strong through their faith, hope and love.

The road from our family home leads right to Cove Island Beach, I can imagine my father and his family walking to the beach on a cool spring day and having a picnic and casting their lines into the water with a prayer for God's blessing in helping them to catch a big fish for dinner. In my mind I reach back in time and see them all sitting together on park benches looking out on Long Island Sound and watching as a full moon seems to rise from sea in the night sky. I can hear them telling stories of family adventures long past and of their dreams yet to come true. Even now I can see the glistening waters of the Long Island Sound. In the morning light it looks like so many precious jewels cast amidst the face of the waters.

My father was a free-spirited person who loved life just as much as he loved his family. He also loved people and adventure, just being around the man made one feel loved. This is only but one of the many stories I was told growing up as his son. I call this story,

13.

A Slay Ride On Four Wheels

Connecticut in winter is a magical wonderland of beautiful sights. One can see rolling hillsides with untouched snow, It's a virtual blanket of white velvet with a splash of evergreen.

Roof tops covered in snow while the fireplaces of Cape Cod family homes are all a glow. Trees line the roadways their leaves all but gone now as we see branches all covered in white. Ice sickles glisten in the morning sun light which makes the warmth of home seem even more special. Fireplaces are all a glow now, as smiling snowmen look through the windows and give thanks to God for His gift of the winter's snows.

On one cold winter's day Dad had an idea to go slay riding Vescio style. Now down by the cove there is a park called Cummings Park, on one side where the beach is there is a baseball field with a hill that slopes up on one side and has a steep incline on the other. At the bottom of the hill is a road that travels around Cummings Park and on the other side of that road is a small pond called cove pond. "Ok take it from here Dad,"

"Hey Tony come on let's go, get in!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Hey Paul, how are you? What you up to?"

"Come on let's have a little fun I'm going on a sleigh ride."

"Hey Paul, a I don't see any sleds in the car."

"Come on, come on, get in, the car is the sled, don't worry about it, get in."

"Ok yeah sure but let me ask you sompin, you been drinking?"

"Na if I was drinking I would have gone by myself."

"Alright Paul you're the boss lets go."

Well Dad drove around to the other side of the hill because it's easier to get to the top from there. He dropped Tony off by the road so he could lookout for cars coming.

"HEY, TONY, READY HERE GOES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

14.

Well Dad released the break of that old model T automobile and he started to slide down that snow-covered hillside. The Model T slid down the hill and couldn't stop, it slid down the hill and across the road and onto the pond which was iced over at the time....

“WOOOOOO EEEEEEEE, HEY TONY WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THAT?”

“A Paul I hate to break it to you like this my friend, but I think the ice is cracking.”

CRACK, CRACK CRASH SPLASH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dad's car broke through the ice and sank halfway in the pond and well needless to say that old Model T had to be towed out of the pond and this story went down in Vescio Family history.

Thank you, Dad, for being you, we all love you and miss you and Mom and all of our family members who have now passed on...Amen John 14:27

Love Paulie

