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La Mamma

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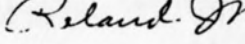
EDITORS' NOTE: The *Journal of the Western Slope* would like to thank Frank Keller for his continued patience and expertise. We also wish to thank Pyramid Printing, especially Rita Frank and Deanna Taggart, for their kindness and assistance.

THE COVER: Michael White is married to Paula Marasco, niece of Roland Marasco. Michael is also a self-trained artist, and a retired finish carpenter.

To my mother, a woman endowed with strength,
determination and boundless energy.



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Acknowledgements

There is no greater gift for one generation to leave another than to write down their family heritage. Everyone needs to know where they come from, and how their predecessors lived and overcame the struggles of their day. In this way they can draw strength, hope, and understanding for their present role in this world. To this end, I would like to thank all the authors who have written down their family and immigrant stories. They inspired Dr. Roland and me to leave this legacy to others, and especially to our family. He completed "La Mamma" shortly before his sudden and unexpected death.

Special thanks go to Dr. Paul Reddin for agreeing to publish this manuscript, to Michael White for his inspired portraits, Sue Ann Marasco for her wonderful introduction, and my niece, Paula Marasco White who joyfully helped me find and gather pictures. I also would like to express my gratitude to Janet Mease and Connie Girardi for their lovely visits and the time and care they took in selecting photographs and getting "La Mamma" into print. Thank you to my children and friends for their love and encouragement.

Rachel Marasco

Bernardo and Maria Giuseppa Marasco. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco, and Paula and Michael White.)

Introduction

By Sue Ann Marasco*

Everyone has a collection of stories vital to their history. These stories include the people and events essential to their family's ability to survive to the present day. "La Mamma" is the story of Maria Giuseppa Marasco and the family she shepherded to a new world and invested in the early years of Grand Junction's development. First and foremost, it is a personal narrative describing the central role of motherhood in the Marasco family's history in America. However, it is also a historical account important to all of us who seek to understand the larger history of the United States. The Marascos were one family in millions of Southern Italians who fled government corruption in search of a better life in the Western Hemisphere. They were also one family in a wave of individuals who settled in western states in towns like Grand Junction along the transportation arteries provided by the expanding railroads. "La Mamma" provides the rich and emotive details explaining why a family would leave a beautiful new house and a deeply rooted family tradition to risk life and limb in the raw environment of the American West. "La Mamma" explains how the struggles of immigration bore the fruits of the American Dream.

*Sue Ann Marasco is a Ph.D. candidate at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Sue Ann's husband, Paul Marasco, is a descendant of one of Grand Junction's early Italian families. Sue Ann Marasco is also the author of "Transplanting the Body: Bringing Southern Italian Culture to Grand Junction, 1870-1930," *Journal of the Western Slope* 14, No.2 (Spring 1999).

Maria Giuseppa and Bernardo Marasco's journey to America reflects the trends in immigration before World War I. Many forces pushed young men and women from their traditional homes and into the uncertainty of trans-Atlantic travel. Political corruption, environmental devastation, and destabilized social networks kept many hard-working individuals in Southern Italy from providing for their families. Italians chose America for many reasons. Corporations in America often recruited workers through propaganda distributed by shipping companies. Novels, newspapers, and touring performers from the United States also depicted the Americas as a place where men and women enjoyed religious choice, political participation, and freedom of conscience. Also, personal testimonies from those who found success in America enticed many to take their chances in America.

Bernardo was one of these many men who found work in the Western Hemisphere. Likewise, Maria Giuseppa was one of thousands of wives who remained in villages uncertain of the return date or safety of absent husbands. Beginning in the 1880s, nearly half of the immigrants to the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe were young men who returned home to families on a regular basis. Bernardo was one of these so-called "birds of passage" who found seasonal labor jobs building railroads throughout the far West. Often, as in Bernardo's case, Italians would find work based on family and community contacts in America. Their eventual decision to move to America permanently coincided with the last great surges of immigration to the United States. When Maria Giuseppa and her two children said goodbye to Italy and boarded the crowded steamship in 1914, they were among 900,000 people who left their region of Southern and Eastern Europe as World War I threatened. Maria Giuseppa agonized over leaving their family home and ripping up her children's roots in a familiar land. Yet, she was one in a virtual tidal wave of her fellow Southern Italians who came to the United States

and transformed American society in the early twentieth century.

Unlike the majority of Italian immigrants who remained in eastern cities, the Marascos made their way to the American West. Once in the West, they faced the same hardships as the many hardscrabble settlers. They became pioneers as well as immigrants. Like other Americans, Bernardo lived and worked with other men in primitive conditions as he laid rail for the Denver and Rio Grande railroads in western Colorado and eastern Utah. All over the mountains and plains of the West, itinerant mining and railroad camps, and nascent settlements catered to an overwhelmingly male population. Women arrived from eastern cities to find their husbands, brothers, and fathers living in rambunctious masculine environments sorely lacking in religious, educational, or civic institutions. Maria Giuseppa was like many American women who came from nice houses and stable communities to live in tents or make-shift dwellings and create a sense of refinement in a rough-hewn environment. While the sacrifice was overwhelming for some, many overcame what the region lacked in amenities to succeed in the burgeoning labor market of the West. Beginning in the 1890s, eastern Utah and the Grand Valley lured settlers with jobs digging canals, building railroads, and caring for the expanding fruit industry. Grand Junction's economy developed around the ability of the railroad to transport the yield of farms and mines to markets across the country. At the heart of Grand Junction was the rail yard and round house, which provided men like Bernardo Marasco the opportunity to exchange the camp life for stationary employment. Like many settlers in the western states at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Marascos had given up physical and community security for risky economic opportunities in the mountains and deserts of the American West. By 1920, those who persevered had the financial

foundation to develop stable neighborhoods and communities centered around home ownership and fellowship.

Tent living, the open plains, and striking landscape of the Grand Valley does not conjure up the stereotypical "Little Italy" neighborhoods of cramped New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston. Yet, the Marascos invested in a community in Grand Junction demonstrating the best traditions of Italian culture. The houses in Riverside adjacent to the rail yard became an ethnic Italian enclave in the earliest years of the twentieth century where families helped one another adjust to their new homes as soon as they arrived. This community served as a bridge between the culture of Italy and the possibilities of America. Not only did they maintain their commitments to strong family, active community, and deep religious belief brought from Italy, but they also believed that food—growing it, eating it, and sharing it—was the glue that held families and communities together. In Southern Italy, poverty and deforestation left the landscape barren, and its inhabitants lacking both variety and abundance of food. Thus, gardening, bread baking, preparing sausage, and wine making in America were all activities that celebrated and strengthened family and community. "La Mamma" describes how gardening and food were a means of celebrating family health and community bonds in Riverside.

Italian immigrants who made their homes in the American West were more successful than their counterparts who stayed in Eastern cities. Historian Andrew Rolle found that they bought more land, achieved more savings during their lifetime, and saw their children attain greater levels of education. Yet, behind these conclusions lay the stories of immense hardship, personal sacrifice, and individual resolve which made this success a reality. At the heart of "La Mamma" is the story of Maria Giuseppa Marasco's personal determination to provide a better, more secure future for her children. Like most Italian immigrants, she had to weigh the

burden of staying in Italy with the risks of immigration. She also had to live with the consequences of her decision when her husband and children faced unforeseen animosity, poverty, and even death in America. Maria Giuseppa maintained an active and loving conviction to persevere and succeed and taught her children to do the same. She and Bernardo also remained mindful of the assistance they received from friends, and family, as well as the privileges offered by American citizenship. They inculcated in their children the importance of giving back to the people, communities, and country that had given them so much. Just as Maria Giuseppa promised to repay her father's loan at double the interest, her children chose careers and accepted duties based in public service: medicine, teaching, and military duty. Their lives reflect the finest of what the United States offers immigrants and how those individuals and families invested their best in return. "La Mamma" is a story we can all relate to.

Maria Giuseppa, with her parents, Paolo and Carolina Cerra. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

La Mamma

By Roland Joseph Marasco, M.D.,
with his wife, Rachel O. Marasco

Maria Giuseppa Cerra and Bernardo Marasco married when they were very young. She was a very attractive girl, well built, with dark hair, dark eyes, and an energetic expression. He was a good looking, medium-sized, lean man, with high cheek bones, deep set black eyes, and a trim little black mustache. On the day of their wedding, Bernardo's parents, Ferdinando and Angelina Marasco, gave him a little tract of land. Maria Giuseppa's parents, Paolo and Carolina Cerra, gave her the same thing, as was the custom of the time.

A short time later, Maria Giuseppa's father returned to America, where he had been for several years and the young couple then lived with her family. Bernardo worked the two farms that they had received as their dowry and Maria Giuseppa helped her mother, who was a talented weaver.

They lived in a village of Southern Italy, Praticello, which means "little meadow." It was a quaint little village at the foot of Mt. Reventino, bordered by a tributary of the Amato River, with tall narrow houses built close together and cobbled, winding streets.

In this little village, many of the people were self-employed. There was the tailor, who made suits on the first floor of their house; there was the carpenter, who built furniture on the ground floor of where they lived; the baker had his big oven semi-attached to the main house; the

blacksmith had his shop in his shed. Most of the people, however, worked in the fields.

On a hillside of Praticello stood the Catholic church. Below it, there was the three-room schoolhouse. Education was only offered through the third grade. Not too far from the school was the piazza (plaza), overshadowed by an old, enormous oak tree, where men usually gathered for a short time on Sundays after mass or in the evening, after work.

One day Bernardo returned home from the plaza and said, "Maria Giuseppa, these days everybody is talking about going to America, that golden land, where people have steady jobs and good wages. Here I work all day long, but we are going nowhere. If I had enough money to go to America, perhaps I could work there for a little while, save enough money, then come back and, like your father and other villagers have done, build a house for ourselves."

"Are you sure that's what you want to do?" Maria Giuseppa asked.

"Yes, I am."

Maria Giuseppa looked at him with sadness in her heart. America was so far away, across the sea. She would miss her husband very much. She felt pangs of pain in her stomach associated with nausea, but she tried not to show it. She was in early pregnancy.

Bernardo was a kind, gentle young man. "If you don't want me to go, I won't," he said softly.

"I want for you to be happy," she said, "and if you think this is the best thing for us, we will find a way to get the money for the trip."

She had saved a little bit of money, not very much, but enough for Bernardo to get to Naples. All he needed now was the money for passage on the steamship. So, in the best way she knew how, she wrote to her father and pleaded with him to lend her husband some money so that he, too, could go to America.

Several weeks later her father answered. He wrote that he would send Bernardo the money, but that it was strictly a loan. Once in America, as soon as he could, he would have to pay him back. After all, he had done all that he could for a daughter—he had given her a nice piece of land, and the money that he was saving now, from helping to build the railroad in the desert of Utah, was to be used for the other children in the family and to help him and his wife in their later years.

Immediately, Maria Giuseppa wrote back to her father, "Of course Bernardo will pay off his loan, with double interest, once he arrives in America and starts working! Bernardo is a good, honest man, and we will eternally be obligated to you for what you are doing for us!"

So, trying to improve his lot and allured by the idea of steady work and good pay, Bernardo came to America. But, America was not what he had envisioned! His father-in-law was a foreman on the railroad, but "Ben," as he was now called, did not know any English, and so was forced to accept the manual jobs that no one else wanted for smaller wages. But he was good natured, young, and strong, and so he plugged along. He put in a good twelve hours a day, seven days a week, and when he went home in the evening, he showered, fixed himself something to eat, did his laundry, wrote to his wife, and by then, he was ready for bed. So it was for young Ben, week after week, month after month.

His wife, in the meantime, delivered a baby boy, Ferdinando. Ben wished he could see his newborn whom his relatives wrote was a beautiful child, but he had just finished re-paying his father-in-law, and he would have to wait a little longer until he had saved enough for passage to Italy and to build a house there.

His wife devotedly answered his letters, writing him about their boy, how he cooed and jabbered, how the first word he said was "pa-pa," plain as day, and how he could almost walk, even though he was only a few months old. She

wrote of village life—who had been born and who had died. Not much more was happening, with the exception of someone immigrating to North or South America, once in a while. One day she wrote that Giuseppe, the baker, had sold his bakery to some of their relatives and was leaving for America. So, she had begun to work there.

"And who takes care of our boy?" Ben wrote, concerned.

But his wife assured him that Ferdinando was well taken care of. She wrote how every evening she would tell her mother to stay in her bed as she went to make bread in the early morning and that the baby would sleep through, but when she returned she always found her mother sleeping next to the baby, her arms encircling him, like the "Madonna and Child."

Sadly, while Ben was still in America, his mother died; however, his father, Grandpa Ferdinando, often visited his grandson, played with him and pitched in to take care of him when needed.

Maria Giuseppa's days were full. After she helped make the bread and did the household chores, she would take her little boy by the hand, and they would go to the river, she carrying a burlap sack and he, a little pail. There they would look for the prettiest rocks that they could find, and carry them to a small ridge nearby. "Someday," she would say to little Ferdinando, "someday soon, your father and I will build our house here."

Finally, a few years later, Bernardo returned from America, and, as planned, they built a nice two-story house. It had sunny windows, a wrought-iron balcony, and a red tiled roof, cream white and powder blue tiles on the floor and exposed beams on the ceiling. Behind the rear of the house flowed the shiny river and beyond it, fields of fragrant camomile grew wild. Bernardo and Maria Giuseppa were very pleased with the way the house had turned out and with its beautiful location.

But work was scarce in Italy, and the day came when Bernardo felt compelled to tell his wife, "We have a nice house, but can we eat a house? Our two fields are too small to give us

The front corner section of Maria Giuseppa's beautiful stone house in Praticello, southern Italy. Photo taken by Roland Marasco in 1992. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

enough to live on. I must go back to America and earn more money for our family!"

Maria Giuseppa was not too happy to hear this. Not only would she miss him, but she was now expecting another child. But, after some talk, she agreed with him, and so, Bernardo returned to America.

A few months later, Maria Giuseppa gave birth to a little girl, Angelina, "little angel." She was very pretty and as bright as a new coin. When the little girl grew a little older, her mother would put a towel around her waist and tie her to the rails inside the balcony, and the little girl would joyously talk to everyone that passed by. Ferdinando, in the meantime, started school. He liked school, the teacher liked him, and he had lots of little friends. Mother and the children were happy there. But then, their lives changed suddenly when, in the wave of the European immigration of the early 1900's, the little family thought of going to the new world.

"I have enough for passage for all three of you," Bernardo wrote to his wife, "but perhaps you should sell what we have there and use that money for the trip. With what I have saved, we could buy something here."

Maria Giuseppa would not hear of it at first. She finally did sell the fields, but refused to sell their beautiful little house for which they had worked so hard to build. She often talked about their upcoming trip with her family, her father-in-law and other relatives, the neighbors, and other villagers and they all told spellbinding stories about America as if they had lived there for years themselves!

"America is the land of plenty," people said. "Maria Giuseppa, you should sell your house! Chances are that in America you will find a much more beautiful house than the one you have here, perhaps, even a palace or a castle!"

To which Maria Giuseppa would retort, "Once I am in America and have a palace or a castle, like you say, then I will

sell this house, but not until then!" And here, her eyes would become misty.

"Stubborn woman!" people said, "Her husband is probably getting a big house for her in America and she cries because she does not want to leave the house she has in this little village!"

But her house meant a great deal to Maria Giuseppa. She remembered the many trips to the river to gather the stones and the pails of rocks that her little boy carried and, at that, her brow wrinkled and her chin quivered, and when the time came for her to leave, she went around to each room, touching the highly-polished cherry wood dresser, the walnut cupboard which the town carpenter had made, the brass head-board and every other piece of furniture, and she wept over them, as if they were the corpses of family members. It was not until her mother promised her that she would take as good care of her house as if it were her own, that she calmed herself down.

Petronella, the mother of the town's previous baker, came, aided by her cane. "Maria Giuseppa," she said, "when you arrive in America, be sure to give my regards to my Giuseppe, and please tell him to write to me, once in a while."

Maria Giuseppa promised to do that, and then asked where Giuseppe lived. But Petronella did not know where Giuseppe lived! "He lives in America," she answered.

People laughed, saying, "Petronella, America is not as small as Praticello! America is a big country!"

Even Maria Giuseppa laughed. But then, bursting into great big sobs, she embraced her mother for the last time, as well as her little sister, her two little brothers, her old father-in-law, the other relatives, Petronella, and the townspeople, who with tears in their eyes, had come in throngs, to wish them farewell and *buona fortuna*. She, with her two children, then left their home, their family, and their village forever.

On a cold day in December of the year 1914, after two miserable weeks at sea spent in a small, crowded cabin of the

lower deck where they had lain on their cots most of the time due to sea-sickness, with poor food and bad water, and unspeakable sanitary conditions, Maria Giuseppa and her children finally arrived at Ellis Island. She crossed herself, made the sign of the cross on her children's foreheads, and thanked God that they had survived the trip and were now in America at last.

Standing on the main deck, shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of other immigrants, the young mother and her two children silently stared at the Statue of Liberty, rising from the sea, welcoming them. A flock of sea gulls circled about and sailed in the sky, and somewhere in the drifting fog of the harbor, Papa Ben was anxiously waiting to meet his family.

It was a great reunion for the little family, a dream come true. Papa Ben, as a railroad worker, had been able to secure passes for each one of them, and excitedly, they started their journey West. They traveled for days. The children, their faces pressed against the glass windows of the train, would often turn and ask, "When are we going to arrive?" America was so big! They were so happy when they finally reached a small town in Utah and stepped off the train.

"We are almost there," Papa Ben informed them. He was presently working for the DRG Railroad and was living in a railroad camp, nearby. But, in order to make a better impression on his family, he had rented a room in the town's hotel for their first night.

The next morning they started for the camp. The newcomers were so excited as they looked forward to their final destination. But, when at length, they arrived, they found a tent with some coats on the dirt floor, a couple of benches, and a raw pine table on which stood a kerosene lamp. There was no plumbing, electricity or heat.

Ben was sure that he had written to his wife about camp living, but perhaps he had not gone into detail. Nonetheless, during the long journey West, he tried to explain to her some of

the camp conditions. She had listened to him, but could not, for the life of her, imagine how primitive it really was.

Bewildered, the children looked around the tent and at each other, not knowing what to think or say. Maria Giuseppa was also silent. They had left behind a nice house, with nice furniture and sunny windows, and now they were living in a tent that had a dirt floor and where a scant light came in through a small opening. But she did not complain, because she did not want to hurt her Ben's feelings. Right away, she went outside, made a broom by tying some sage brushes together and started sweeping the floor, but no matter how many times she swept, with the constant wind, rain and snow, there was no way to keep the place clean. It was hard for all of them.

Remembering Grandpa Ferdinando, the little girl said in Italian, "Oh, mamma, it was better in Italy with that old papa than here with this new one!"

Her mother smiled, put her arms around her little girl's shoulders and said, "Things will get better."

The children needed to go to school and Maria Giuseppa saw to it that they would not lose any schooling. Even in the old country when they had a bad winter, and there was too much snow on the ground, she would carry Ferdinando in her arms, so that he could attend classes.

So, the children were enrolled in the neighboring town school, where soon, Ferdinando became Fred and Angelina became Ann. On the first day of school, the mother unpacked Fred's nice little suit and Ann's pretty white flannel dress, with the crochet edging around the collar, which the tailor had made for them in Italy just for the trip to America, and took them to school.

They looked very nice, but they did not speak English, and the other kids, all laughing, made grimaces at them. In the following days, they were made fun of, called "Dagos" and "Waps" and, though at first they did not know what those words meant,

they could tell they were not nice words. Every day they were ridiculed, and everyday Fred and Ann would come home in tears.

One day, little Ann was thrown into the canal by some older children. Fortunately, some grownups were made aware of this incident and she was rescued. On another day, Fred did not return home from school because, as the story goes, some children had tied him to the trunk of a tree. Learning of this, Maria Giuseppa threw up her hands and lashed out. This time, she thought, she would not hold her tongue.

In order to make it easier on the children, their parents thought of renting a small place in town, but the owners of what was available refused to rent to them. Unfortunately, discrimination was a fact of life in those days.

At times like this, Maria Giuseppa found it difficult not to get discouraged. Perhaps, she thought, they should go back to Italy. There they still had a house. But, then, that would be a defeat, and she knew that neither she nor Ben wanted that.

Eventually, the family moved to Grand Junction, Colorado, a town of about 4,000 inhabitants, which had better amenities. Grand Junction was a division point of the DRGW railroad, and Papa Ben found work at the railroad yard. The family found a little house on a big lot on what was then West Main, near the tracks, took out a loan, and bought it. It was badly in need of repairs, but they would fix it up later, when better days would come.

On the first evening there, the neighbors, as well as other *paesani,* all of them immigrants, came with broad smiles and outstretched arms, to welcome them and to offer them words of encouragement. All of them brought gifts: Mr. and Mrs. Scalzo brought a bottle of wine, Mr. and Mrs. Raso brought a cask of olive oil, imported from Italy, from their grocery store, Mr. and Mrs. Fuoco brought a box of chocolates, Mr. and Mrs. Iachetta brought a plateful of cookies, Mr. and Mrs. Stranger, who owned the liquor store, brought a bottle of Anisette, Mr. and Mrs.

Talarico brought a paper sack of *taralli*, Mr. and Mrs. Arcieri brought a plate of *pizzelle*, and Mr. and Mrs. Chiaro brought a plate full of *grispelle*, the Italian doughnuts which were their home town's specialty. Mr. and Mrs. Mancuso brought a box of fresh vegetables from their farm, Mr. and Mrs. Ligrani came with a brimming basket of pears, Mr. and Mrs. Cardamone, being candy-makers, brought a box of candy. Mr. and Mrs. Fazio brought a string of sausages, which they had made themselves when they slaughtered their pig in January. "Do you slaughter the pig in America?" Maria Giuseppa asked.

"Yes, we do, just like we did in the old country!" Mr. Fazio explained, "We get together and process the meat in the same way that our old folks always did. If you want to do it, we will help you, when the time comes."

"That's nice," Papa Ben said, "we will do it, then."

Mr. and Mrs. Abramo came carrying a box of peaches. "This valley has the best orchards you can think of," they boasted, "and the best peaches in the world!"

"I have never seen peaches so big and beautiful!" exclaimed Maria Giuseppa.

"Ah!" said Mr. Abramo, "the Western Slope is God's country."

Then came Mr. and Mrs. Mendicino, who owned a shoestore, with some boots for the children. "Here in the West," Mr. Medicino said, "the kids use boots instead of shoes." And he told them all about the cowboys and Indians.

Mr. and Mrs. DeRose brought a teddy bear for the children, explaining that in American the teddy bear is the symbol of love and affection.

God be thanked! Light-hearted, Maria Giuseppa now felt as if they were, once again, in their small village in Italy, across the sea, with their relatives and the town folks, and when the visitors left, she said to her husband, "You know, Ben, there are good people all over the world."

Ben worked hard, but his wages, which had never been that great because of a strike, were cut in half. And just now,

Maria Giuseppa thought, when they had the mortgage to pay every first of the month! She was worried. In the old country one lived with family until one had enough money to build a house for himself, but in America one could buy a house even before he had any money, though one had to pay for it just the same, plus interest. She sighed, and the house loan was not the only thing they had to pay for—they needed money for food, clothing, and the children's school supplies. She lay in bed at night, wondering what could be done to make ends meet.

One night, she tossed and turned, but very lightly, so that she would not wake her husband, who worked so hard from dawn to dusk, coming home exhausted. Finally, she got up and walked to the kitchen, put her head down on the kitchen table, thinking, "What can I do to help?" Unable to speak English, she could hardly go downtown and apply for a job.

Little Ann heard some noise, got up, and went to her mother, "Why are you up? Are you ill, do you have a headache, mother?"

"No, I don't," she answered, "I just can't sleep."

"You must be worried about something. What is it?"

Ever since Ann was a little girl her mother had talked over with her any problems they had, sharing her thoughts and feelings. Ann was a good and sympathetic little listener. But this night, her mother did not want the little girl to worry—she knew she had a test the next morning and that she needed her rest.

"Go back to bed," she said "I'm going to bed now, I'm getting sleepy." She went back to bed, but still she could not go to sleep. What was she to do? And then, suddenly it came to her, in a flash! She could bake bread!!

It wasn't long before her husband built her a brick oven in the back yard, and she began to bake bread for her family and their neighbors. Her bread was very good and soon it was sold to every family on West Main.

Maria Giuseppa's worries were soon lifted, now they were able to make their loan payments, pay the grocer, the utility

bill, buy the children's school supplies, and even, from time to time, purchase a piece of clothing and a new pair of shoes.

That spring, Papa Ben took a few days off work and painted the house inside and out. "It is amazing what a little paint can do."

The little house looked much better, though the interior, because of the deep front porch, remained a little dark. In an attempt to disguise the darkness of the house, Maria Giuseppa planted some bright flowers in the front yard, but that did not make the inside of the house any brighter. Well, she would have to adjust to that.

That same spring, Papa Ben built a chicken coop in the back yard and planted a vegetable garden. "At least," he said, "the children can have fresh eggs and fresh vegetables."

At one time they even had a goat that gave them fresh milk. The children loved the goat and gave her a pet name, "Billie," and put crowns of flowers on her horns, between its ears. They loved animals, and because of that, that year for Christmas presents they received a rambunctious puppy, "Prince," and a calico cat, "Sally," which they adored. They played with them, petted them, and laughed when they fed them spaghetti and the precious animals got red mustaches and spaghetti all over their coats.

Before long, Maria Giuseppa was expecting again. This time it was a hard pregnancy, but every day she did the house chores and continued making and selling bread. Besides all that, her father, Paolo Cerra, who was the boss of the crew that worked on the railroad in the state of Utah, would come to his daughter's house every weekend with a sack full of laundry, to unwind, to have a home-cooked meal, and to have his laundry done. Every weekend, scrubbing on a wash-board, Maria Giuseppa did her father's laundry, hung it up on a line in the back yard, ironed his shirts and trousers, and by Sunday afternoon, it was ready to be

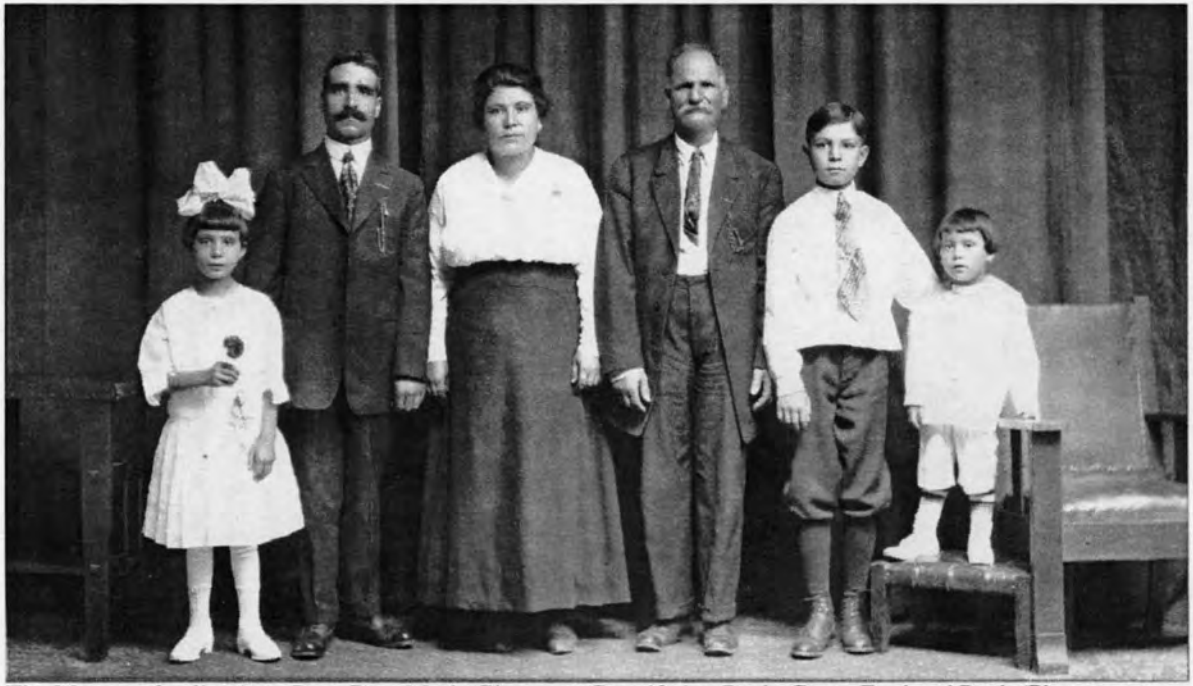
packed. Sometimes, Maria Giuseppa could not do it all alone and then little Ann would take over. After all, they all knew that they were obligated to the Grandfather for having loaned the money to Papa Ben so that he could come to America.

On March 5, 1917, a second son was born whom the parents promptly named Paolo, Paul, in honor of his grandfather. The whole family agreed that this was the right thing to do—after all, they were forever obligated to Grandfather Paolo.

Grandpa Paul was happy to have a grandson who was good-looking and was named after him, but soon after the happy event, he returned to his native Italy to spend his later years with his wife and the rest of his family. There, he bought some farmland and a chestnut grove, returning to his roots of working the earth.

Not long after Grandpa Paolo had returned to Italy, one of his sons immigrated to America, and after a short stint back East, he came West to live with his sister and her family. "Peppino" Cerra, or Joseph, as he was called in America, was a tailor and a natural born artist. He was a meticulous craftsman and had a great flair for fashions, but he was not very healthy and had a very sensitive stomach.

Maria Giuseppa was like a mother to him, cooking food that he could eat, often fixing a separate supper for him than for the rest of the family and when she could not find the right food for him, she would move heaven and earth to get it. For example, when the local grocery stores stopped carrying *ricotta*, the light Italian cottage cheese that he liked to eat, she would search other stores to find him some, or when she was unable to find *cicorie* or *ascarole*, the green vegetables that Peppino could eat, she would go out into the countryside and gather some for him. Her brother was like a son to Maria Giuseppa, and the children looked up to him, as one looks up to an older brother. He was loved by the whole family and respected as an uncle is respected in the old country, and he was well taken care of.



The Marasco family: Ann, Papa Ben, Maria Giuseppa, Grandfather Paolo Cerra, Fred and Paul. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Joseph Cerra emigrated from Calabria, Italy to the United States as a young boy. He co-owned *Cerra-Landry*, a fine men's clothing store in Grand Junction. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Little Paul was only six years old when on cold winter mornings, before going to school, would go and light the small iron stove at his uncle's shop so that when Uncle Joe went to work he would find the place toasty warm. And young Ann, having watched her mother many times, would pitch in, as well, starching and beautifully ironing her uncle's shirts so that he would look like a respectable businessman should.

On July 20, 1920, another boy was born, but he died a few days later. His parents placed Amerigo's tiny body in a little white casket, surrounded it with fresh flowers, and buried him at Mt. Calvary, the Catholic Cemetery in Grand Junction. The mother, who had been stoic until then, when it came time to leave the little grave, started sobbing, "You will never be forgotten, little one."

Maria Guiseppa grieved for a long time. For a while she was so withdrawn and felt so tired that she had to stop making bread and was only able to do the household chores which were absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, the resilient Ann would take her mother's place, taking care of little Paul, playing with him, feeding him, and rocking him to sleep in her little arms, just like a little mother, and when little Paul would refuse to go to sleep and cried, she would put her index finger on her lips, like her mother did, "Now hush and be a nice little boy, because I have work to do."

Gradually, Maria Giuseppa emerged from her sadness and became herself again, and two years later, on May 29, 1922, another adorable baby boy was born. He was named Roland, after Dr. Roland Raso, the son of another immigrant couple who were close family friends.

Papa Ben was now working at the coal chute. One evening, Maria Giuseppa looked at her poor husband, black from head to toe, and thought, "We have left our homeland, our home, our relatives, we have had hard times, but we have also been blessed with healthy and bright children. I think we should keep them in

school so they will be well educated and not have to go through life doing what we are doing."

If there was only one thing that Maria Giuseppa could have in this world, it was to be able to give her children an education. She did not want her children to be laborers like herself and her husband, or for them to only get a basic education. She wanted for them to get the best education available, including learning good values and everything else that would make of them well-rounded individuals and good citizens. "If they are good citizens," she reasoned, "they will be successful at whatever they choose to be." To Maria Giuseppa "success" did not mean acquiring wealth, fame or material goods. Instead, it meant becoming productive members of society that would help and benefit the life of others.

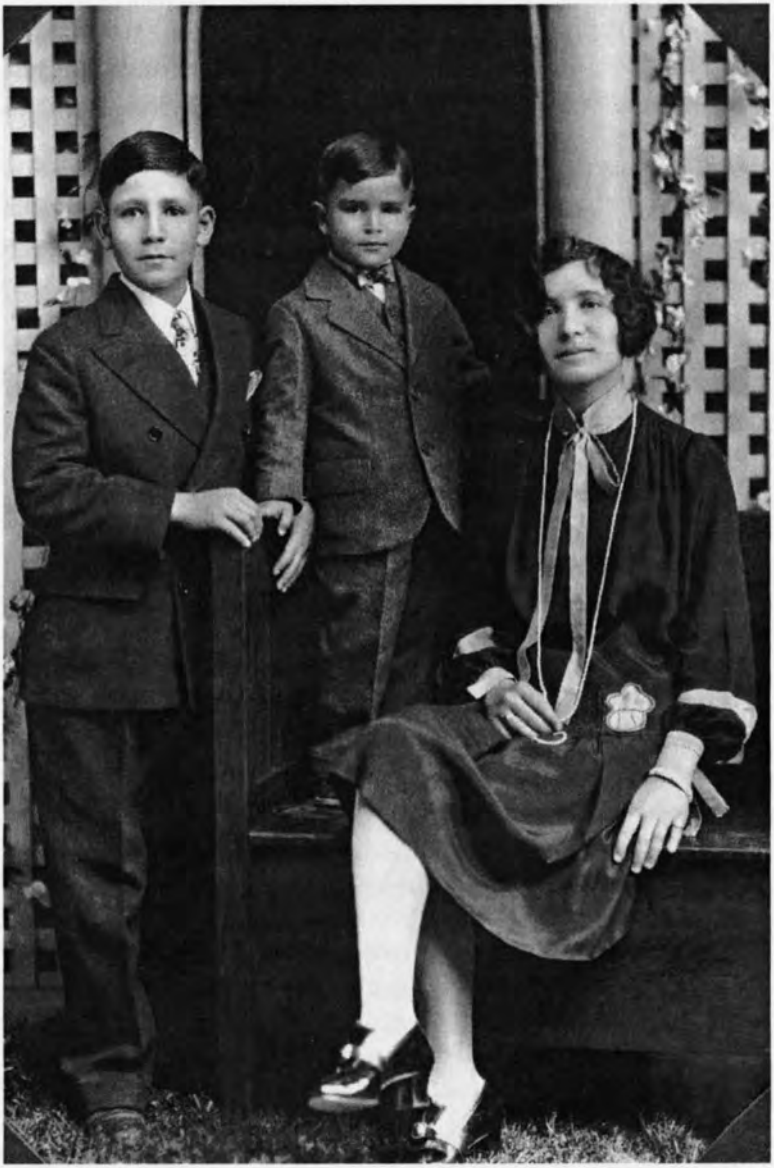
She and Ben did not have the financial means it required to send their children to fancy schools, but, she thought, they were healthy and strong, and they were living in America, the land of opportunities. If they worked hard, with God's help, they would succeed.

She talked all this over with her husband, and one evening husband and wife called a meeting and told everyone in the family about their vision and their dreams. "It will not be easy. There will be hardships, there will be endurances to bear," they admonished, and all the children nodded and promised to cooperate and to work to that end.

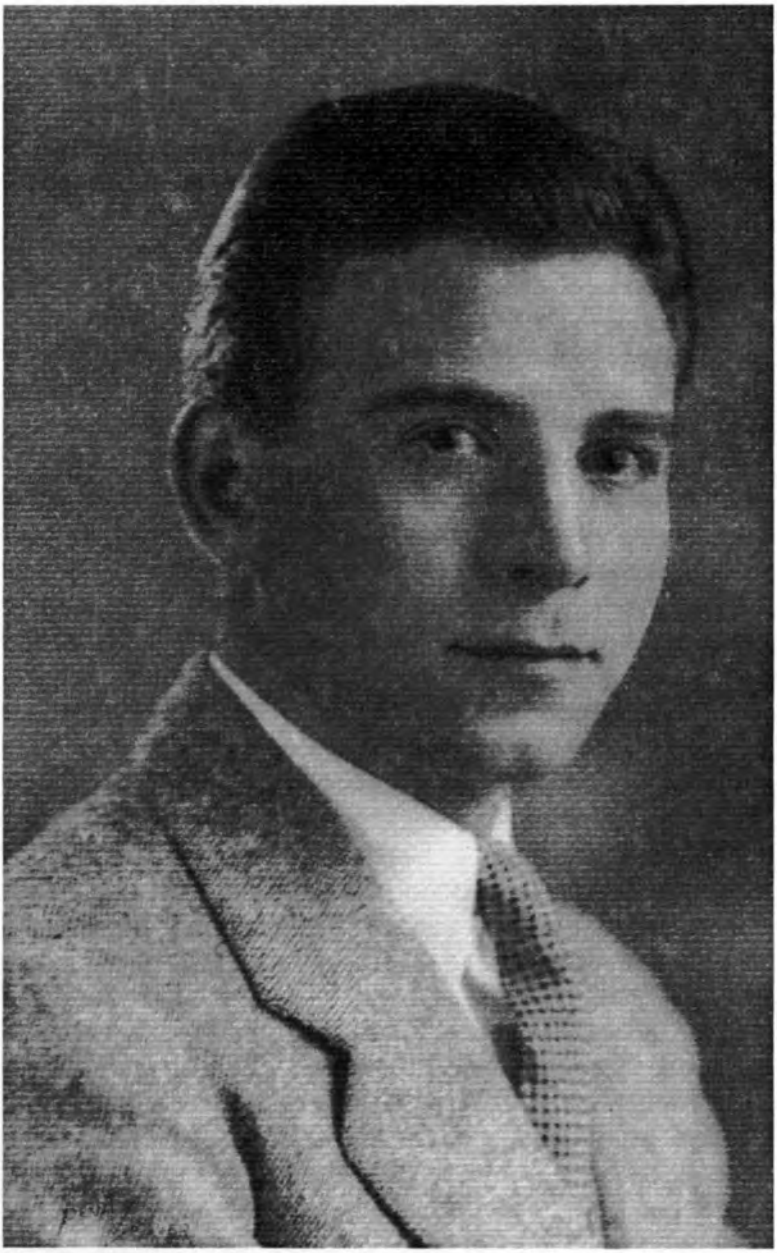
"Look at the baby!" Ann exclaimed. Baby Roland, in his mother's arms, was looking at everyone with his big brown eyes, and nodding.

"You agree, too!" his mother laughed, holding him up and talking to him, as little Roland continued to nod and to smile at everyone, the dimple in his left cheek becoming bigger and bigger.

Returning to this discussion, they all promised to work hard, and work hard they did.



Paul, Roland, and Ann Marasco. Portrait by Dean Studios, Grand Junction. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)



Fred Marasco. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

By now Fred was in high school, and that summer a new store, the Fair Store, opened its doors in Grand Junction. Fred, handsome, bright, and a good worker, dressed up in nice trousers and a crisp white shirt, went to apply for a summer job. But he was refused because of prejudice against the Italians. It wasn't much of a surprise, in those days people still suffered ethnic slights.

Fred did find a job in construction, the only job available to him. Carrying buckets of mortar on his shoulders all day long, he came home in the evening with his hands calloused by the heavy labor, his shoulders bleeding by the heavy loads. He would take a shower and then fall asleep on the sofa, as his mother sighed, "Poor boy, he's too young for such work!" Then, she would put cold packs on his bruised shoulders.

Once in a while, Fred would open his eyes, look at his mother and they talked. "Mother, if you had had the chance, you would have made an excellent nurse," he teased.

"And what about you, Fred? Before long you will graduate from high school. Have you thought about what you want to be?"

"Now and then," Fred answered, "I think that I would like to be a doctor."

Maria Guiseppa put down the cold pack she held in her hand, and looking up at him with wide eyes, her eyebrows raised, she asked, smiling, "A doctor?!"

"Yes, a doctor," Fred said. He was quiet a few moments, and then continued, "but I know I never can be."

"And why is that?" his mother asked.

"Because I know we can't afford it," he said sadly.

"Do you really want to be a doctor?" the mother asked.

"Yes, I really would like to be a doctor."

"Then you certainly will be one!" his mother affirmed.

Sometimes Fred talked with his school friends about his desire and what his mother had said, and they all told him, "Wait until you start college! Then your family will realize that they can't afford to send you to medical school."

Fred would then tell his folks what his friends had told him, and they would reply, "Tell them not to worry about it. Where there is a will, there is a way. God will provide, son." They were a very religious family.

Because of his good grades, Fred had no difficulty being accepted at the University of Colorado Medical School. Scholarships and student loans were non-existent in those days, but when the time came for Fred to go to medical school, the family scrimped and paid for his tuition and books. For room and board, he worked at the college cafeteria, washing dishes and serving meals for the other fellow students.

Paul and Roland also did their share of work to contribute to their brother's education. They delivered newspapers, mowed the lawns of some of the wealthy people in town, and in the evenings, cleaned Moslander's cigar store. They also worked in the orchards picking cherries, peaches, pears, and apples, carried the fruit crates onto the platforms, and they always brought home their earnings.

The family was making ends meet, but then Ann began at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and even though Papa Ben had taken some overtime work and Uncle Joe was helping out some, Maria Giuseppa was always a little short when the first of the month came and she had to send money for her daughter's expenses. There were plenty of lean meals in the Marasco household and many times dinner consisted of a piece of bread and a bowl of beans.

"It's a good thing that the kids like beans!" Papa Ben would say.

"In Italy, in our little village, they used to say that beans are the meat of the poor," replied Maria Giuseppa, as she continued to serve the usual dinner of bread and beans. Ah! But that, nobody knew, for they had their dignity. In fact, on Sunday mornings when the little family went to Mass, all dressed up in

Ann Marasco. Colorado University, Boulder graduation portrait by Dean Studio. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

the beautifully-made clothing that Uncle Joe had made for them, people thought that they must belong to a family with old money, and when Maria Giuseppa looked at her good-looking brood, sitting together in the church pew, she was overwhelmed by feelings of pride and joy, and humbly, she asked, "Lord Jesus, what have I ever done to deserve so many blessings?"

They were having a hard time, but it was only temporary, Maria Giuseppa thought. She had faith, and trusted that God would help them.

And help came when the Currie Canning Factory, later the Kuner-Empson Factory, opened in Grand Junction to process tomatoes for ketchup. Right away Maria Giuseppa applied for a job and soon began working there. Peeling tomatoes from morning to evening, six days a week, she made enough money to make up the difference needed for Ann's expenses. She did all this so that her daughter could have a college degree and become a school teacher.

Ann, by now, was a pretty young woman, perhaps a little too thin, but she had a wealth of dark curls, which she washed and groomed every evening, and brown velvet eyes. She was sensitive, strong, and loving

One day, while visiting her brother at his dormitory, she met one of his friends. Antonio was a very good-looking medical student from back East, who was now in Boulder attending Colorado University. They only exchanged glances and a few words, but a spark had definitely been ignited. It was, as they say, "love at first sight."

They discovered that they had a lot in common. Antonio's parents were also first-generation immigrants, and he had two brothers, one was in law school, and the other was studying to be an accountant. His father worked in the mines and he wanted better lives for his children. Antonio had worked in the mines himself several summers to save some money and to attend the University.

"Tell me about your mother," Ann asked.

"My mother," Antonio replied, "is as gentle as the new-driven snow, and she is the best cook in town. She makes the best *gnocchi* you have ever tasted, as light as feathers, and she serves them with the snap peas she raises in her garden, which are as sweet as sugar."

"You make my mouth water," Ann teased.

"Good," Antonio said, "because I have told my mother about you, and she can't wait to meet you and to prepare her *gnocchi* with her snap peas."

"Do you think she will like me?" Ann asked timidly.

"Of course she will, I have told her that I'm going with a girl of Italian descent and she was delighted."

But, Ann's mother was not so delighted. When Maria Giuseppa found out that Ann was going steady with Antonio, she was not very happy, simply because she had counted on Ann's help for the other two boys' education. She called Ann on the phone. "My darling daughter, it isn't that I don't want for you to be happy...but you have an obligation toward your brothers, so that they, too, can go to college."

"But, mother, it isn't fair!" Ann protested. "I'm in love."

"I understand, my child, I understand," she nodded as if Ann were in front of her, "but...."

Ann's voice cracked, and tears started rolling down her cheeks, "What if I promise that I will continue to help, even after I get married."

"But how? Tell me how?" her mother asked wistfully. She knew that when a woman married in America, she had to give up her teaching career. She had worked so hard, peeling tomatoes from dawn to dusk so that Ann could continue her education and become a school teacher, and her daughter was now going to throw all that away.

A struggle went on between mother and daughter for some time. There were harsh words and more tears, but no matter

what the mother said, no matter what Papa Ben and Uncle Joe advised, no matter the scoldings, Ann and Antonio continued to see each other and to make plans of their own.

Not knowing what else to do, Maria Giuseppa wrote to Fred and begged him to intercede. He would have to break this thing off between his friend, Antonio, and his sister.

"It isn't right," Fred wrote back. "They are so happy together, they seem to be made for each other."

But, in the end, at his mother's insistence, he reluctantly talked to Antonio and Ann, and the two parted.

In later years, Maria Giuseppa regretted having interfered with her daughter's plans, and her empathy was real.

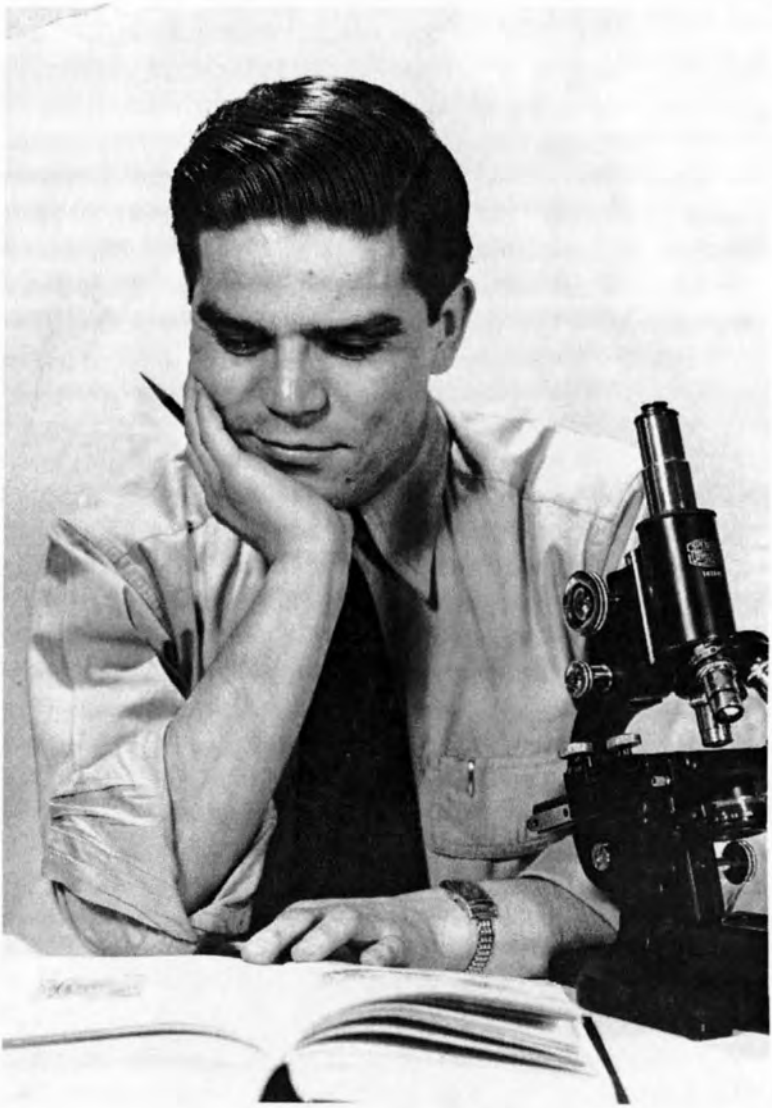
The same year that all this happened, Ann graduated *summa cum laude* with a degree in foreign languages from the University of Colorado, but there was no real joy in her heart, and her disposition was forever changed. She returned home to Grand Junction where there was a teaching vacancy at Grand Junction High School. She began working there, but the fact that she had graduated with honors did not make too much of an impact, and she had to prove herself before her position became permanent.

She taught Latin, Spanish, and French there for many years, and devoutly gave her salary to her mother to be saved for her brothers' education. By this time Roland had started high school, but now things had started to change and he did not have any problems getting a job downtown. As a youngster he applied to be an usher at the Mission Theatre and worked there all through his high school years.

Paul was accepted to Medical School at Saint Louis University. Fred, in the meantime, had begun his internship at St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco, where he met Marion, a San Franciscan girl and soon the two made plans to be married.

His mother was worried. "Just now, son, when you can start working and could help your younger brothers get through school, you are going to abandon us! Perhaps you should wait a little while."

Paul Marasco. Graduation portrait, St. Louis University Medical School, 19 November 1943. (Photo courtesy of Paula and Michael White.)



Roland Marasco. Medical School Portrait by Dick Jordan. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Fred promised to wait, but he did not, and soon married Marion. To his new wife's displeasure, however, he faithfully sent money home to help with Paul's tuition.

Likewise, in St. Louis, Paul met a pretty student nurse, Violet, and soon they started to go steady. Again, the mother was concerned, and encouraged Paul to wait before marrying, at least until he was through with school, but he, too, went ahead and got married.

"That's the way it is in America," Papa Ben said quietly, trying to resign himself to the facts and to appease his wife. "In America, you can't tell the kids what to do."

"Two boys married," Maria Giuseppa cried, "and we were not even invited! We don't even know the dates of their weddings!"

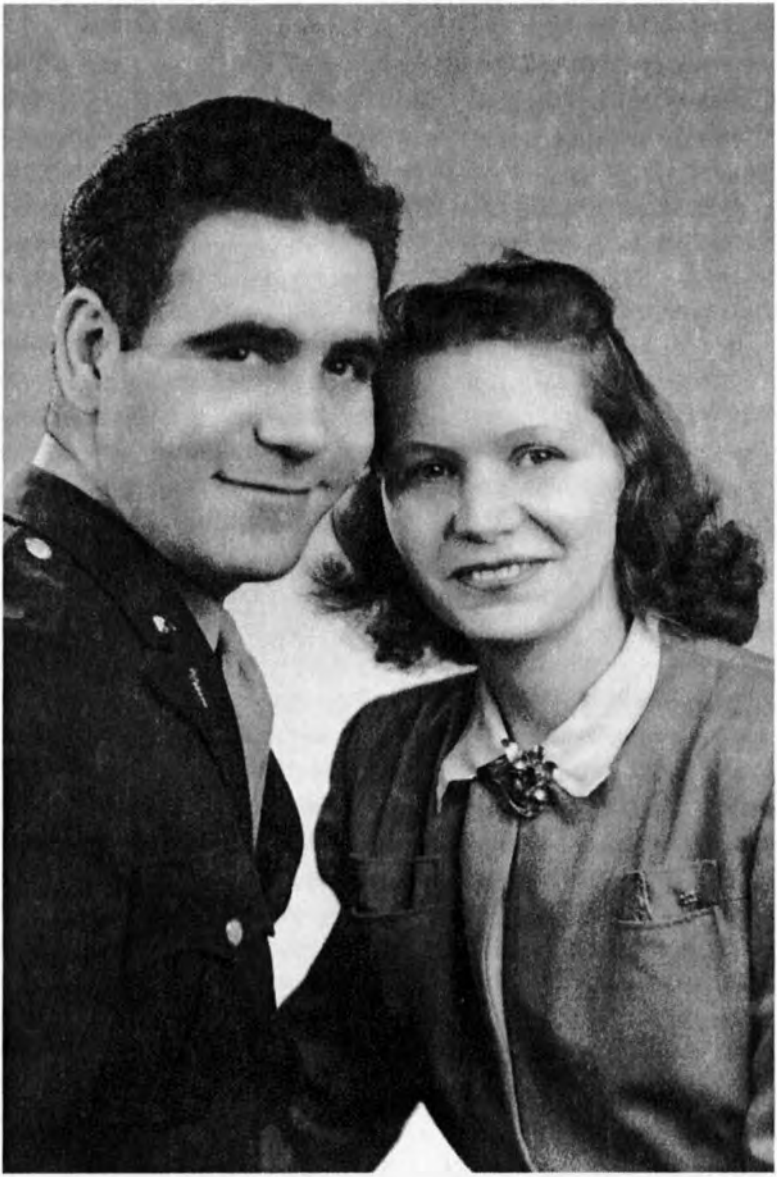
Time passed and soon it was time for Roland to start college. He first attended Mesa County Junior College, then applied and was accepted to St. Louis University as a pre-med student.

About this time Father S.J. Schwitala, the Dean of St. Louis University, together with a handful of other astute deans, created the ASTP and the V-12 programs. Roland was accepted into the V-12 program and went to Athol, Idaho, for three months, before returning to St. Louis University to attend medical school. His parents couldn't believe their luck, that they didn't have to pay for tuition and books for Roland, but only for board and room!

It was at this time that the occasion then presented itself for the family to buy a house uptown, at 902 Colorado Avenue. Ann had been wanting to move from the other side of the tracks for quite a while.

"It has been alright. Our little house on West Main has served us well, but in America," she explained to her folks, "it is very important for one to have a nice house."

Fred and Marion Marasco. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)



Paul and Violet (Pingel) Marasco. Picture taken circa April 1944, just before Paul was shipped overseas. (Photo courtesy Paula and Michael White.)

"The American people always have to be on the move or they are not happy," lamented Uncle Joe. "I have noticed that several of my customers one day they live in one house and when I go to deliver them another suit, they have moved to a different one! I guess that in America success is measured by the house one lives in!"

Papa Ben did not object—he almost never objected about anything. Maria Giuseppa listened without saying anything, either. She was saddened by the fact that they were leaving their little house. Through the years they had done quite a bit of work on it. Maria Giuseppa looked now at the little parlor's cheerful wallpaper, at the white lacy curtains on the little windows, at the scattered doilies that she had made, and she thought that their little house looked almost like a dollhouse. Besides, she thought, 535 West Main had been the first place of their own in this country. There, Paul, Baby Amerigo and Roland had been born...and on West Main, she had made many good friends. There, was *Cummari* Rosina, who lived next door and was like a sister to her, and there was *Cummari* Diodata who lived down the street and who had always been so helpful, such as when Baby Amerigo was sick and she spent several nights taking turns at rocking him. And when Roland was born, Paul, who was not quite five years old and feeling left out, disappeared. The family was distraught and was getting frantic. Finally, at dusk, Mr. and Mrs. Fazio who had looked for him all day long, found him sitting all alone on the second pier of the Colorado River and brought him home. Maria Giuseppa walked to the porch and looked outside at the surroundings with intense fondness. A flood of memories came rushing in. She thought of their Sunday picnics at the little park, of the fun they all had, the boys romping and playing on the merry-go-round, the little girls rolling hoops and frolicking while the older men played a game of bocci balls under a stand of cottonwood trees and the women shared recipes, and learned how to quilt and how to crochet. She remembered how, on Christmas Eve, the children walked through the snow to

The Marasco home at 902 Colorado Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

the little park gazebo, their noses reddened by the cold, singing Christmas carols.

Her thoughts were interrupted by her husband, who just then walked on the porch. "Maria Giuseppa," he asked, "what do you think about this moving?" Maria Giuseppa nodded and quietly said that she would go along.

They bought the house on Colorado Avenue. It was a frame structure on a corner lot, with a rose garden in front and a little plot of land for Papa Ben's garden in the back. The house had four nice bedrooms, a parlor, a dining area, a laundry porch, a bathroom and a big kitchen. They did not buy new furniture, though Ann purchased a nice sofa and a big kitchen table for them.

And when, Maria Giuseppa got up in the morning, pulled the drapes from the big bay window in the living room, and saw the sun streaming through, she was so happy, she almost cried, and after her husband and her brother had gone to work and Ann had gone to the high school to teach, not being able to contain her joy, she sat at the kitchen table and wrote to her old mother in Italy (her father had passed away a few years earlier):

> Dear Mother, I hope this finds you well. I have received your letter and I should have already answered you, but we have been very busy, having moved to a new house. And now, Mother, I want to write to you something I have never written before. Perhaps my late father, may God bless his soul, told you, perhaps not, but we have had a hard time here. Nonetheless, we have worked hard, have endured...but if you could see me now, sitting in front of a long table with a bright yellow formica top, in an uptown house....It does not have a balcony, but it has many sunny windows and among other things, a furnace to keep us warm and a cooler to keep us cool, and we only have to turn a knob to have some fresh air or soothing heat.
>
> As I said, it has not been easy, but where else in the world, could Ben and I, two poor laborers, have sent

three sons to medical school and a daughter to college
to be a high school teacher?!

She ended the letter with "May God bless America."

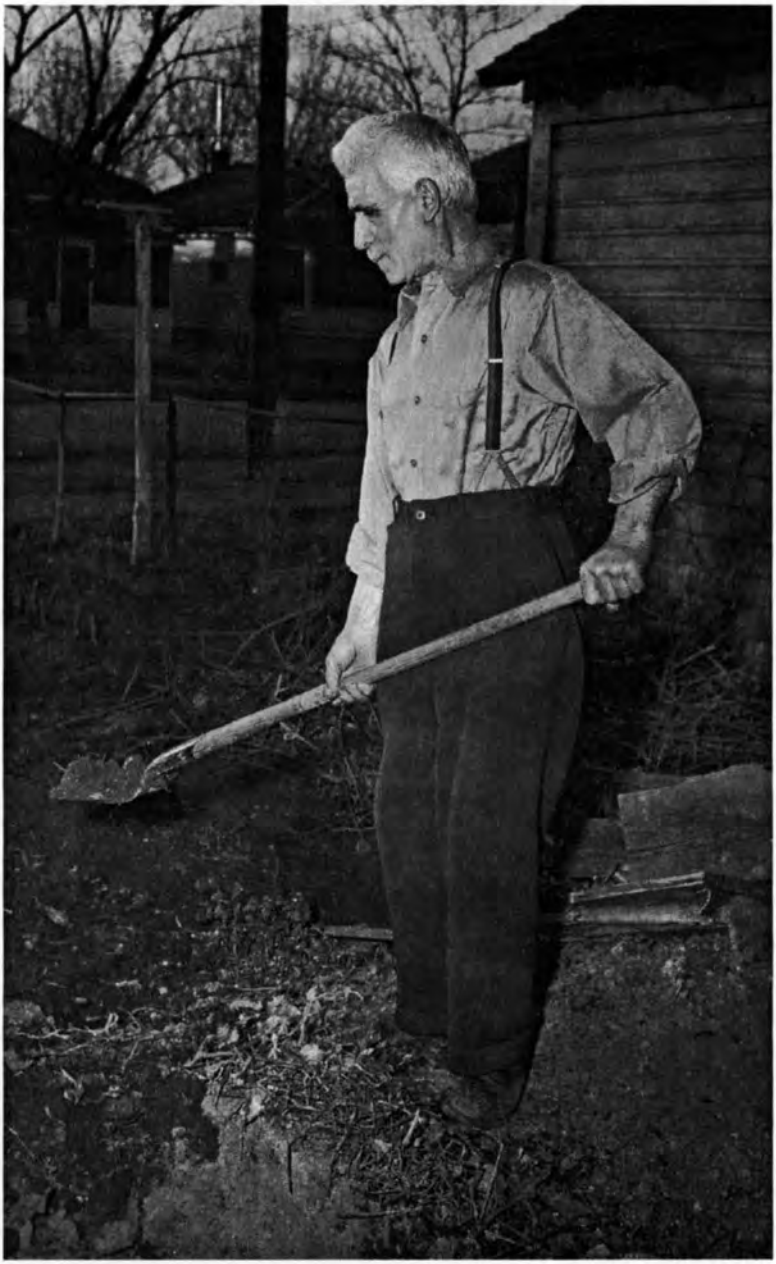
The letter written by Maria Guiseppa was mailed, but never arrived to its destination, as World War II had begun and all communication between America and Europe were cut off.

Uptown, Maria Giuseppa made new friendships, but her West Main friends were always in her heart, and every evening after she did her chores, she would sit on a little stool by the telephone and call her old friends to see how they were and to keep in touch, "You have heard the saying that new friends are fine, but old ones are the best."

It was because of the goodness of her women friends there, who gave so generously of their time, that she had learned how to make jellies and jams and how to can fruit and vegetables. Her pantry was full of jars of canned peaches, pears, cherries, pickles, and the fancy ketchup that she often served with her pan-fried potatoes and peppers. It was because of those skilled women who had taught her how to crochet intricate designs that she had crocheted beautiful tablecloths for her daughter and her two daughters-in-law. Those friends were precious, she thought, and so was the old neighborhood and their little house below the tracks.

At their new residence, Papa Ben planted his garden and to save space, as it was a small area, he planted the vegetables on trellises so tall that the snap peas and the green beans looked like green Indian tepees. He even planted some grapevines. It was only a little patch of land, but it produced so abundantly that Papa Ben often shared the produce with the neighbors, who always stopped and marveled at his green thumb, saying that his garden should be in the *House Beautiful* or *Better Homes and Garden* magazines.

Maria Giuseppa tended the rose garden, did the household chores, and, to help with the new house expenses, took in some boarders.



Papa Ben working in his garden. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Maria Giuseppa, Ann and Prince in the garden. Papa Ben's vegetable tepees stand proudly in the background. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Ann objected, "You have worked so hard all your life, you don't want to take care of strangers, launder their sheets and towels, clean their rooms."

But Maria Giuseppa insisted. She appreciated her daughter's concern, but she knew that Ann had been very helpful for so many years and it was now time for her to save what she made for her own future.

One day, one of the boarders, a good-looking man who had come to Grand Junction from California to start a welding shop, took a liking to Ann. He told her that he had been born and raised on a farm in Oklahoma during the Depression era, and though he had not had a chance to finish his schooling he was willing to educate himself. As a matter of fact, he had left Oklahoma and gone to California to learn a trade. He also told Ann that he was divorced and had three children, a girl and two boys, from his previous marriage. He wanted to know whether she was interested in him.

Ann did not commit herself, but they dated now and then. She taught him the basics of good manners, how to dress and how to speak properly, and since he was very smart, he learned quickly. Maria Giuseppa, on her part, encouraged the two to go steady. She did not want her daughter to remain alone and unmarried.

The Second World War was now raging and young people were being called to the serve in the armed forces. Maria Giuseppa and her friends, like the rest of the other mothers in America, had many concerns and anxieties. They would often meet in the parish hall, together with other parishioners, sit in a circle, and pray for the safe return of the American soldiers, offering each other emotional support and finding joy and hope in singing hymns together.

Fred was the first of the Marasco boys to go to war. He served in the Army Air Force for three years in the European

theater of war, where in England he was badly wounded. Paul, as soon as he graduated from medical school and had finished his internship at Holy Cross Hospital in Salt Like City, was shipped to France. Roland, the youngest son, graduated from St. Louis University Medical School. After an internship at Mercy Hospital in Denver and a senior internship at Sacramento County Hospital, Roland was accepted in the surgical residency program at the Mayo Clinic. He was set to go there, when the doctor of Palisade, a town twelve miles east of Grand Junction, died leaving a need for a physician. Dr. Roland, as he was called, went there. He enjoyed the small town practice and the Palisade people, but then the Korean war broke out, and he decided to join the Navy.

"If you don't stay here, we will have to go to Grand Junction. You are the only doctor in town, you don't need to go," his patients kept telling him. But the young doctor felt he owed that much to his country.

He served in the Pacific for the duration of the war, on the *USS Boxer*-CVA-21, an aircraft carrier with a crew of 3,000 men. The *Boxer* was attacked several times, and more than once the young lieutenant junior grade escaped almost miraculously. In the midst of it all, the ship caught on fire. Dr. Roland was terribly shaken by seeing his good friend, a fellow doctor, with whom he had played the ukulele only a few hours before, burned to a crisp. He held his head in both hands for a time, but then the call to duty took over, and laying his grief aside, he took charge and did all that he could to save the lives of others.

Later, when the war was over and he was discharged, the Commanding Officer wrote him the following letter of commendation:

> During a major fire aboard this vessel on 6 August 1952, while operating against enemy North Korean and Chinese Communist forces, you displayed commendable initiative in establishing a first aid

Roland Marasco in his military uniform. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

station for the treatment of casualties when your own first aid station was untenable, treating casualties suffering from smoke exhaustion, burns and shrapnel wounds. Through your professional skill and untiring efforts in administering first aid and subsequent treatment, no casualty suffered loss of life, and prolonged hospitalization was kept to a minimum. Your performance of duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

It is with a great deal of pleasure and pride that I commend you for your outstanding services.

A copy of this letter will be made a permanent part of your remarkable service record. M.B. Gurney.

Papa Ben and Maria Giuseppa were so proud of Roland, as well as of their other two sons, for having served their country, and for helping America to free other nations from dictatorships and to obtain freedom. Papa Ben and Maria Giuseppa also felt very fortunate that, by the grace of God, their sons had returned home, while so many young men did not come back.

On his return to the States, Roland was introduced to a young exchange student from Italy, Rachel. That was like magic for both of them, almost surreal, and after a short, but very romantic courtship, they decided to get married. Monsignor Cawley performed the wedding ceremony at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, the Marasco's parish church, with friends and family attending.

"That'sa nice," Papa Ben said, but Maria Giuseppa was unable to answer, being too choked with emotion.

At this time, Roland who had also been accepted in the surgical program at St. Josephs Hospital in Denver, Colorado, decided to accept that, being close to home and his aging parents. Soon, the young couple left for Denver and with the help of the GI loan, Roland started his surgical training.

By the time he was through, Papa Ben and Maria Giuseppa were up in years. Each one of the boys was now on their own, Ann was the only one left at home. When the young man from Oklahoma asked her to marry him and to be a mother to his three children, she said that she would. To be a mother was her legacy, a role for which she had been very well prepared by her mother.

Al and Ann Cornelison. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Roland and Rachel on their wedding day, 5 August 1953, in front of Dr. Marasco's green 1953 Oldsmobile 88. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Maria Giuseppa and Ben Marasco. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Marasco.)

Epilogue

Ben Marasco and his wife Maria Giuseppa lived at 902 Colorado Avenue until their demise. In their later years, the children often asked them if they would like to move to some other place, but they always refused. They were content to remain in their old house, where Papa Ben continued to plant his garden and to make the wine. Maria Giuseppa continued to take care of the rose garden, can her fruits and vegetables, make jams and jellies for family and friends, and later, when she had difficulty moving around, made baby quilts and crocheted sweaters, little hats and mittens for the grandchildren and for the church bazaar. She always had a new project. Nonetheless, she was never too busy to listen to whatever interested the members of her family. They both lived to the ripe age of 81. Uncle Joe also lived to a ripe old age and notwithstanding his physical limitations, he continued to design and create beautiful suits.

Dr. Fred Marasco, the oldest son, a very good, conscientious, and devoted doctor, lived with his wife, Marion, and a son, Joseph, in a fashionable area of South San Francisco. He practiced in North Beach, the Italian section of that great city, where he was held in high esteem and loved by all.

The second son, Dr. Paul Marasco, lived in Grand Junction, Colorado, with his wife, Violet, and their two daughters, Paula and Joan, where he built a large practice and then retired to follow his dream of entrepreneurship. He invented the cool mist humidifier and the disposable surgical mask.

Ann, an excellent teacher, the rules having changed in America, continued to teach at Grand Junction High School even after she married, and, together with her husband, raised his children, Marion, John and Billy. Her husband, Al Cornelison,

founded Grand Junction Steel Fabricating Company, a very successful company that gave jobs to many people and offered jobs to many students during the summer months.

The third son, Dr. Roland Marasco, returned to his beloved Grand Junction after his surgical training with his wife and daughters, Mary Jo and Emily, to begin his medical practice and to help take care of his elderly parents. A third child, Bernie, was born in Grand Junction.

After forty-four years in the practice of General Medicine and Surgery, Roland retired from private practice and devoted his life to volunteer work. As a short-term missionary doctor, he served in an isolated village on St. Lucia, an island in the West Indies, and on many Indian Reservations. When his health no longer allowed him to travel afar, he dedicated the last ten years of his life to volunteering at the Marillac Clinic in Grand Junction, providing services and comfort to people in need.

Homebound, due to spinal stenosis and other ailments, but being of sound mind, he realized one day that he was the only one in his family still living, so he decided to write this little history in order that his children, grandchildren, and other young members of the family would know of their roots. Theirs was not exactly a Norman Rockwell kind of family, he wrote. There had been times when, like in most families, there were quiet rivalries among the siblings, but etched in each one of their hearts was the love they all had for each another, and when one of them had a need, the rest of the family was right there to help.

Papa Ben was a quiet, soft-spoken man and a hard worker. He was a good husband and a devoted father, but Maria Giuseppa was the constant rudder of the family. Born and raised in a small village of Southern Italy at a time when women stayed home, she ventured, with her two small children, on the voyage to America to join their father and her husband. She had quite an imagination and dreamed what, at the time, seemed an impossible dream and, through good times and bad, she continued to be focused.

Maria Giuseppa Marasco. (Drawing courtesy of Michael White.)

Book Review

Mesa County, Colorado: A 100 Year History. Updated and expanded with a Timeline through 2002. Grand Junction, CO: The Museum of Western Colorado Press, 2002. Pp. iv, 66. Paper $12.95.

Mesa County, Colorado: A Hundred Year History (1883-1983) originally appeared in 1986, and since that time has served as one of the standard references for scholars and others interested in the History of Mesa County. It contains a number of sections, including a general history of Mesa County, profiles of its prominent citizens, an introduction to its politics and government, and short articles on a number of "Special Interests." Numerous photographs grace the volume, and it contains the best readily accessible bibliography on the Western Slope.

The "updated and expanded" 2002 edition is a reprint of the original volume, plus twelve pages of new material, notably, a "Grand Junction Timeline" that begins in 1880 and goes to 2002. An "Errata" section at the end of the book corrects mistakes in the original publication. In these ways the work has been "expanded," but material from the original publication is not "updated." The bibliography does not include works published since 1986, nor does the text reflect scholarship since that date. Those who own the original volume, and purchase the new edition are doing so to acquire the "Timeline."

The Museum of Western Colorado has performed a valuable service to the community by keeping this volume in print.

Paul Reddin
Mesa State College

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE is published quarterly by Mesa State College. The purpose of the JOURNAL is to encourage scholarly study (particularly by the students at Mesa State College) of Colorado's Western Slope. The primary goal is to preserve and record its history, anthropolory, economics, government, natural history, and sociology. Annual subscriptions are $14. (Single copies and overseas subscriptions are available by contacting the editors of the Journal.) Retailers are encouraged to write for prices. Address subscriptions and orders for back issues to:

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