

## ATTIC RAGE

*Two weeks were planned to acclimate me to my new home and get settled before school started. As reasonable as that seemed, it was far from what actually occurred.*

*In our family it is remembered as "the attic being held hostage by a five-year old gone wild!" Subtitled, "Some days, everyone in the attic was crying."*

I am without any true recollection, I have no concrete memory to recall that flash in time when my Grandmother "Nonna" abandoned me in New Jersey. It was late in the summer of 1939.

I do recall the trauma of it all. I am certain she returned to her Staten Island home that same day. It was not her habit to travel in the darkness of night.

The frantic realization that she, in fact was not there with me, the crying and fist pounding of the air and then the walls around me, are painful to recall. I could not be calmed. There was screaming and a deluge of tears. There was kicking. This "Bionda," of a mother was fragile and I was hurting her.

The attic was being held hostage by a five-year old gone wild.

My father's younger sisters. Two teenage aunts, raced up the stairs from their living quarters below, to help my mother. All three adults had difficulty restraining me. They removed the two younger sobbing siblings to the sanctuary of the second floor.

My mother is on her knees crying hysterically, her frail body blocking me from bolting down the stairs. She managed to get me into a small bedroom and closed the door behind her,

securing me in a place where in darkness, I fell asleep, exhausted, in a lump on the floor, still wearing that coat Nonna had made for me for this special day.

In the daylight there would be food tossed back to the feeder, milk slapped into the air, breaking glass and seemingly, the sound barrier, with new pleas now only in Italian "*Per piacere...Voglio andare a casa.*" (Please, I want to go home. Please. Please.)

Face blown swollen from the surge of tears, the drooling, and the runny nose. The underpants wet.

The new coat, made with so much love, a fretful mess of tossed food and liquids, wet unfailing tears and soiled by a barrage of hands reaching out to calm me, would not be surrendered.

There was to be no consolation, no peace pipe smoked.

Send in the father!

Who was this man?

He was big and dark with eyes staring, wide and unblinking. He was very strong. He lifted me from that floor, carried me down that hallway, his arms straight out to avoid those staccato, high kicking, Rockette legs. My mother trailing behind, then leading, starting to run a warm bath. My father, silent. He held me mid air while my mother, shakingly began to undress me. The screams now louder, resounding off the walls of this small bathroom. Together they set me in a warm bath. My father left the room.

I had never been in a bath tub.

I am sobbing. I am hungry. I am thirsty. I am missing my Nonna. Looking for my lost breath, "I want Nonna." I am slapping at the bath water, demanding in a tiny, cracked voice left, "I want my Nonna,"..."I want to go home to my Nonna." "I want my coat!" My mother was without voice. She tried gently working the water to soothe me. "Voglio andare a casa mia, la mia vera casa." Please. PLEASE !!!

There was no telephone in Nonna's house. Uncle Cesare had a telephone. Whenever a call was made, we went next door to use their phone. There were no calming calls to or from Nonna. No SKYPE! No nothing!

Yes, this day, there was milk to drink, some cheese and bread to eat, some clothes, clean and dry, lifted from Nonna's shopping bag. I stared at the shopping bag and pulled it close to me in a hug. A whisper. "Where's my Nonna?" Rocking back and forth, where could she be, I wondered, where? Where is my coat?

Before darkness came, in an unguarded moment, I took the shopping bag and ran noisily down the wood stairs. There were more stairs. The thick carpet with the big roses felt soft beneath my flying feet. My bare feet.

The big door would not open. Dropping the shopping bag and gripping the knob with both hands made no difference. Me, too little; the door, too big. Aunt Rita caught up with me and in a single move tossed me over her shoulder and bounded up the stairs back into the attic.

Other chances to escape were countless. Once, I made it, quite by accident, to the cellar but never as far as that back door and the outdoors. One aunt or another would be right on me.

The trolley. I could hear the trolley, but why could I not find it and go back to my Nonna? Why did she not take the trolley to find me? Maybe I was bad. Maybe I was not a good girl. Where is my coat?

The hunger strikes went on, attempts to run away, hiding in closets, the troublesome behavior continued. Some days, everyone in the attic was crying. Uncontrolled tears.

After several days, I became physically ill. Oh, I could still cry and whimper but sleep stole any chance of escape. Sleep won.

My father's older brother was a physician in New York City. He was called and came that same day. Uncle Philip was another stranger to me, but I was a warrior no longer. I was taken prisoner by an illness. Comforted at last by an invisible invader.

I had pneumonia.

Uncle Cesare had a telephone.

They dropped the dime.

Nonna was summoned.