

TWO BROTHERS, TWO SISTERS

by Raffaella Cortese de Bosis



John J Leone

The event hall fills up with a steady stream of residents. No one wants to miss the concert. It is a special, monthly appointment: the Four Hits and a Miss are here! Both the public and the musicians are looking forward to the event.

The group has been playing in this venue for several years. Their music ranges from folk to vintage country, to gospel. Applause at the end of each song. And at the end of the allotted time, Steve, Ron, Pat, Phil and Alessandra, the musicians, always hang out for some pleasant conversation and kidding around. Hugs, and the appointment for the next concert, set in a month. We already marked the calendar!

To understand the spirit that animates this public and this ensemble, we need to borrow a page from *The Little Prince*, where the Fox explains what it means to establish ties, to tame: *“For me, you are only a little boy just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me, either. For you, I’m only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, we’ll need each other. You’ll be the only boy in the world for me and I’ll be the only fox in the world for you.”* The Fox goes on to explain how one “tames”: *“You must be very patient... First you will sit down at a little distance from me ... But you will sit closer to me every day... If you come at 4 in the*

afternoon every day, I will begin to be happy by 3. But if you come at just any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you."

We are Crozet, Virginia. The concerts take place in the town's Senior Living Facility, today called English Meadows, formerly known as Mountainside. Each resident has a private room, with his or her name on the door. One of those doors bears the name "Emilio".

4,400 miles from here, in Rome, Italy, behind her desk strewn with post-it notes, sheets of paper, note pads, notes with thousands of names, events, and locations, a historian/researcher is preparing an article on a WWII event for a prominent Italian daily newspaper, La Repubblica. It is the story of 15 American soldiers, all of Italian origin, recruited by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and slaughtered by the Germans in the Northern Italian region of Liguria.

One of this historian's heartfelt purposes is to make these 15 boys known by finding an answer to questions like "where did their families come from?", "how did they live?", "what were their interests and their passions?". In order to do so, she needs to ferret in the memories of families. But that means finding each family. In the United States. And after 75 years it is a daunting task made even more difficult by typos in the documents, illegible handwriting, homonyms and by the sheer vastness of the United States.

One of the 15 soldiers is John Leone: There are so many families named like this. The historian/researcher looks for data, cross-checks, follows clues. Finally, in July 2017, she finds a possible track. She has to use the utmost caution. Making a mistake is not an option.

The track leads to a gentleman who may be a relative of John. Several features match. Including his age, 92. She decides to contact him by mail. She introduces herself and explains that she is writing an article for Italy's second leading newspaper La Repubblica about the OSS operation Ginny II and that she is trying to reach out to the family of T/5 John J Leone who was one of the members of the operation.

Time goes by and she receives no response. She decides to contact his family. She locates a family member. At first flabbergasted by the story, she confirms that it is the right family. She tells her about Mr. Leone and gives the researcher his address.

Mountainside Assisted Living, Crozet, VA....

In order to save on time, the researcher emails the new letter to her sister, who lives in Virginia. When she sees the address, her sister gets in touch with her and tells her that she goes to that facility every month. She is the Miss in the “Four Hits and a Miss” ensemble.

Without giving it another thought, instead of mailing the letter, the Miss calls the facility, talks briefly with Mr. Leone, hops in her car and drives 42 miles to Crozet, VA.

As she climbs the stairs leading to the main entrance, she sees a gentleman sitting on the front porch. She looks at him, he looks at her. “Mr. Leone?” “Alessandra?” An emotional encounter as if of two old friends. They speak Italian, he reminisces.

Then, by the power of technology, Alessandra videocalls her sister in Rome and her sister is able to speak with the brother of the hero John Leone about whom she had been writing. He tells her about John, his memories growing up with him, about their family and their father’s native town, Postiglione, near Salerno. Geographically far but always in his heart!!!

The author of this article is the historian/researcher. The Miss is her sister and was instrumental in this encounter. She moved to the U.S. many years ago and lives in Virginia. She had played for Mr. Leone for many years but until July 30, 2017 she could not know that his brother, John, had been the victim of a Nazi massacre, the massacre that her sister Raffaella, historian/researcher, was writing about in Rome, Italy.

Saint Exupéry’s Fox reminds us that “it is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important... You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

Translated from Italian by “The Miss”