

Excerpts From

Only In America

By Paul F. Oreffice

“My Horse is Smarter than Mussolini”

For a long time, my father didn't know who betrayed him, why [he had been]... beaten and imprisoned.... His views had landed him first in jail, and then, after my mother had been able to obtain his release [from a most surprising source: Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law], it landed him in court in February of 1940, where the prosecuting attorney asked for the death sentence.... If the Fascists could beat him, lock him up for twelve days, conjure up charges against him, and his own friends could either turn him in or not stand up for him, then who was to say that the death sentence...could not be passed? Not far into the trial, Luigi Ghirardelli [a longtime family friend] was called to the stand.... “Max Oreffice has spoken to me on numerous occasions about his disdain for Mr. Mussolini and for fascism.... He said that Mr. Mussolini was ruining the country, that fascism was Italy's shame, and he questioned Mr. Mussolini's intelligence.... He said that one of his horses was smarter than Mr. Mussolini.” (pps. 20-22)

Papa Oreffice's Battle for Freedom

My father's grim face broke into a broad smile when he saw us.... We cried out and ran to him and gave him hugs. I felt his bristly whiskers against my face. I pulled back to look at him again and hoped my worry was hidden.... [T]he six weeks in jail had not helped his appearance any.... Now his face was gray, with that scraggly growth of beard, and his eyes were sunken; he looked emaciated. His clothes were dirty rags.... But he was home. He was home, he was alive, and that was all that mattered. (p. 12)

A Family Tradition of American Pride

My father had a deep respect for America, even in the '30s, before he had visited the country himself. This respect tied in with American idealism and with capitalism, including the notion that hard work should be rewarded. He was a true Liberal—one who believed in liberty, in individual responsibility, and in free enterprise. In Italy he belonged to the Liberal Party, which was grounded in those ideals. (Today, the term “liberal” has been prostituted, especially in the US; what we call liberals today are people who *don't* believe in personal responsibility and who think that government should do everything for the citizens...) (p. 18)

The Youngest Boy to Win the Gran Concorso

Gran Concorso Ippico di Padova was a big competition... [At only 12 years of age, the youngest rider to enter the competition] I rode Pasquina flawlessly. We made every jump without breaking stride, and we moved crisply from one jump to the next.... We completed the course without a single penalty point. The crowd cheered, in part for the flawless ride and in part because of my age.... When the last rider knocked down a bar early on, I was ecstatic. I had won with Pasquina and placed fourth with Vespa. I received two plaques, one with a whip for the first-place ride, and I felt as if I had won the *Gran Premio di Milano*. (pps. 50-53)

Icons of Freedom

“So what do you think?” my father said, smiling and pointing toward the Statue of Liberty and the harbor.... That had been one of my goals in life... I wiped my eyes and sniffed. “I think it’s incredible,” I said, smiling. A thought struck like a jolt of lightning: with Italy in the war, the Black Shirts would have even more power and would go berserk. It was like stirring up a hornet’s nest. They would not have been content with checking in on my father, keeping him under house arrest. On this very day, had we remained in Italy, my father would have been rounded up with all the other so-called traitors and placed in *confino*—or worse. I shuddered and hugged my father tightly. He hugged me back. “We made it, Paolo,” he whispered. “We’re safe. We’re going to be all right.” (p. 100)

The Path to Greatness

Don’t be afraid to dream. Don’t be afraid to aim high. So what if you don’t get exactly what you aim for? You will get something else just as good, maybe even better.... Don’t live in fear, Paolo. The only person who can hold you back is yourself.... “Intelligence and wisdom are great gifts, but if they aren’t governed by honesty, they’re wasted.... Honesty isn’t always easy, and it can hurt at times. But it’s the best route.” ...Because of his honesty about Fascism, he had suffered... Was Venice to New York to Quito to West Lafayette, Indiana, where Purdue University was located, the best route for me? Absolutely.... “You have great opportunity ahead of you. You, Paolo, are headed toward great things in America.” (pps. 158-159)

I Had Rolled the Dice—And Won

I ripped off a letter to Starks, saying, in part, *You offer me this lousy salary to come work in your general sales training program when my talents and interests are in the international end. Unless your job offer can lead me to the international end, I have absolutely no interest....* I sent the letter....his secretary, Elaina received it.... She knew how Steve Starks would respond. She had liked me from my initial visit.... she held the letter for a couple of days, until Starks went on a trip....she took the letter and my resume to Bill Dixon, who was general sales manager for Dow US, and asked if Bill would respond in Starks’ absence.... I got the most amazing two-page letter back from Bill Dixon. It was a masterpiece...making it clear that Dow would be remiss not to steer me toward international. Bill... said, “You know, it would be foolish if we didn’t put you where your talents will serve you and us best, and that’s obviously international.” He ended his letter by... “We want you.” I had rolled the dice, and I had won. (pps. 181-182)

Oreffice the Maverick

About nine months after I had landed in Brazil, Bill Groening, Dow International’s general counsel, came to Sao Paulo.... I said, “Bill, I have to fess up. I’ve been dealing with more than just City Bank.” ...I drew in a sharp breath, knowing it might be one of my last as head of Dow Brazil. “It’s twenty-four banks.” ...In fact, I’ve created four more Dow companies so I could import more products”... Bill could have stormed out of that restaurant, flown back to Midland, and had me in very hot water within fifteen minutes of returning to his office. Instead, he got me official clearance to do what I had already been doing: financing Dow Brazil in whatever ways I could to grow the company from a tiny chemical company to the second-largest chemical company in Brazil in less than two years. (pps. 190-191)

Only with an Unanimous Vote

I had by far the most support, and Clyde was second. Based on that, the board was about to name me [as the Dow CEO], but I put a halt to the informality. “No,” I said. “I won’t do it unless the vote is unanimous.” So another vote was taken, and it was unanimous.... As I was being congratulated, I thought back to the words my father spoke to me 15 years earlier, shortly before he passed away: *I’m only sorry that I won’t be able to see you when you’re running Dow. I see it clearly, as clearly as I see you right now, right here.* And, for a moment, I saw my father clearly as well. I nodded, far away now from those around me, and had to fight back tears as I silently said, “I made it, Papá. I really made it.” ...the first man [to show confidence in me] was my father, and I had gained much of my confidence from him. (p. 221)

My Greatest Achievement – My Kids

I appeared a number of years ago on CNN’s *Pinnacle* on a segment featuring CEOs. I was asked, “Name your greatest achievement in the last year.” I spontaneously answered, “That my kids who are in their upper teens still like to go on vacation with me.” Not much has changed.... A year after we moved to Michigan, Andy announced that he was going out for Little League baseball. He had just turned 10 and was big and klutzy for his age.... [H]is first season was a disaster.... At season’s end he was despondent, so I said, “Things don’t come easily in life, you know.... You have to work at it. If you want me to, I will work with you every day that I am here, but you have to ask me.”... The next season Andy was one of the leading hitters in the league and was a superb fielder. It was a great lesson for him. It showed him what hard work can accomplish. (p. 240)

A Love Letter

Only now do I realize that this entire book, really, is a response to your letter. It is a love letter to you, Papá, and to Mamma also. The two of you forged in me a passion for life and for freedom, and a will to pursue that passion, that took me places I never dreamed of going, and doing things I never dreamed of doing. It was your response to Fascism that turned me into a lover of freedom. It was your disgust for dictatorial regimes that made me an unflinching patriot of the United States. It was your willingness to take risks that shone a light on my path. As you were unafraid to venture into the unknown, so was I. (p. 252)

Thank you Mr. Mussolini

It is only in America that an immigrant could find the freedom to grow, and take risks, and build a life that is blessed beyond belief. I remember when you thanked Ludovico Foscarei, the Fascist in Venice who forced you to drink castor oil and who threw you in prison...because he had given you the idea to use castor oil for good purpose in Ecuador. As I reflect about my early days in Italy...about our escape to Ecuador and then to America, I realize that had it not been for a certain dictator, none of that would have happened. While I am outraged at how Benito Mussolini ruined the lives of millions of people, he did not ruin ours, did he, Papá? I can honestly say that my life would not have been so wonderful had Mussolini not created the crisis from which we came through. And so, in solemn remembrance of all the evil he perpetrated, and also with the knowledge that my life was forever changed—for the better—by what was meant for evil, I say this: Thank you, Mr. Mussolini. (p. 252)

For more information on *Only in America* or to schedule an interview with Paul Oreffice, please contact Lauren Perry at lauren@kaspublicity.com, 410.300.3563 or Kristen Schremp at kristen@kaspublicity.com or 703.928.5527