

The New York Times



City Room Blogging From the Five Boroughs

Metropolitan Diary Sep 27, 2015

A Ferry to the Immigrant Wall of Honor

By Paola Corso

Corso is the name my father gave me, the name I keep, the name engraved on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.

We board the ferry to find his name. Mario Procopio Corso, a Calabrian farmer's son who flunked a grade of school after he emigrated to this country, who one day showed his teachers he could spell and write his name when he finished high school, worked in a steel mill, attended college on the G.I. Bill, and eventually became the school's business administrator signing their paychecks.

My father's course began with a boat ride to Ellis Island — not like this one. My grandmother and Aunt Grace, like others in steerage, were sick to their stomachs and eager to see Lady Liberty in New York's harbor to mark the end of an agonizing journey across the ocean. My grandmother was too weak to breast-feed her baby, so a goat on the boat saved my Uncle Domenic's life, the story goes, while my father was perched on a sailor's shoulders, sporting his naval cap because the man had taken a shine to him. Already he had found his way.

I say to my sons: Sono Corso. Siete Corso. Siamo Corso. We are the course, the main street, the boulevard, the parade that passes by. We are New Yorkers, and I will boat you to the Statue of Liberty and you will land. You'll trace the letters of our name, curved and circular, winding like a hairpin turn on the road to your grandfather's hill town. The C, the O, the R, the S, and O. Your course rests on your fingertips. Someday you'll know who you are and what direction to take. Live your life. Live your name.

Paola Corso is an award-winning author of fiction and poetry books, most recently *The Laundress Catches Her Breath* (CavanKerry Press), winner of the Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing.