



Maruggi's "Remembrances" Anthology reviewed by Rob Marchesani

Dominic Candeloro (May 10, 2009)



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Rob Marchesani reviews Edward Maruggi's collection "Remembrances: Sixty Tales of Growing Up with Italian Mothers, Grandmothers and Godmothers." It is as much a walk through the reader's own history as it is through the history of those in the stories that are told.

The Wisdom of Our Mothers, Grandmothers and Godmothers Can Be Found in Our Remembrances....

Edward Maruggi's collection Remembrances: Sixty Tales of Growing Up with Italian Mothers, Grandmothers and Godmothers is as much a walk through the reader's own history as it is through the history of those in the stories that are told. The photographs add a certain nostalgia that would take any reader back to grandma's house for a Sunday meal or to the memory of one's Godmother who held her own place in our lives.

As our own mothers figure most prominently in most of our lives, it is a logical arrangement for the book to begin with a section on Mothers, then Grandmothers and finally Godmothers. (Mother-in-laws and great grandmothers also find their place in these tales!) Such an order represents the natural progression of relationships as they would naturally flow from our birth. Our mothers provide our first home in the belly of their own bodies from whence we are born into the larger world where our stories unfold.

Maruggi's own wish, which he ends his introduction with, is that the reader finds her or his own memorable tales of these important female figures in our lives to in turn share with our own family and friends. In this sense, Remembrances becomes a vehicle to return us to our own forgotten or disregarded experiences with our maternal ancestors.

To set the stage for the first section on Mothers, Remembrances begins with a rich Foreward by Fred Gardaphe who shares his own experience of the importance of his mother in his own life as it shifted in the course of therapy: "A few years ago I began to explore this uncharted land of the mother when I entered therapy; I was told that to understand myself I had to understand my origins and that meant getting the stories of my parents, especially my mother."



The section on Mothers begins with Viola Medori Labozzetta's tale "An Immigrant Experience" and quickly moves into "My Dinners At My Mother's House" by Maria Mazziotti Gillan.

Of the many gems to be found in Remembrances, one of the most touching is a lesson in compassion and racism. In "My Mother - The Florentine War Bride" Diane Melville recounts this about her mother: "My first lesson came when I was in first grade. I came home from school one day and told her about a sad black girl who was in my class. Nobody talks to her, Mommy. So she said, Well, tomorrow you start talking to her and she won't be sad anymore. No lecture about racial prejudice and why it was wrong. Just simple logic that made sense thereafter." Her mother's compassion did not stop there. It continued one day on the street to help "a drunk" who had fallen, "a person who needed help," her mother clarified.

In "I Love You Mom: Do Me A Favor...Don't Tell Nobody," Chickie Farella tells the all too familiar tale of Italian mothers and their sons as her brother's, and mother's, witness.

In "The Wearing of the Black," Josephine Galgano Gore shares her mothers proverbs, such as "Leaving home changes one's destiny," and "Even a roach is beautiful to his mother."

Throughout Remembrances, Maruggi makes the best use of poetry along with prose to tell the tales. There's Louisa Calio's Mamma Mia Rose (to the tune of Abba):

So too did you discipline my temper
offering me a guidance I did not want.
Patiently you watched me learn and suffer
as I grew up and left you.

Gil Fagiani's American Now, Decay, Holdout, and The Saint:

Her brother-in-law
nicknamed her the saint
when she took him in and paid
his cab from Ellis island....

Maria Mazziotti Gillan's I Dream of My Grandmother and Great Grandmother:

I see those women in my mother
as she worked, grinning and happy,



in her garden that spilled its bounty into her arms.

She gave away baskets of peppers,

lettuce, eggplant, gave away bowls of pasta,

meatballs, zeppoli, loaves of homemade bread.

"It was a miracle," she said.

"The more I gave away, the more I had to give."

Maria Fama's For the Birds:

My grandmother almost starved in Sicily

during the Second World War

without any bread

she lived on some olives some fruit

whatever she managed to grow and save...

Maria Mazziotti Gillan's Magic Circle:

...The stories,

saved our lives, passing the meaning on from one

generation to the next, a silver thread, a silver

thread that strengthens us, all those women,

caught in our hearts, teaching us how to laugh,

how to make our arms into cradles

to hold each other and sing.

Al Tacconelli's All Saints Eve:

Last night the month of holy angels

became the month of dead remembered --

souls gone yet present...



Louisa Calio's Aunt Ann My True Comare (1910-2004) (for Ann Marchesani Buck Abruzzo):

When I think of you I think: a simple well lived life,

a model for our planet of strife.

Abundant, generous but never extravagant or wasteful.

Lover of children, animals and Nature.

Whether poetry or prose, each tale in this collection is told with an offering of words for the reader to describe our own ancestors. There's Grandma the Healer about Maria Antonia Corona Molino by Ed Maruggi, The Do-It-Yourselfer by Barbara DiNucci Hendrickson, Grandma's Sunday Dinner by Nancy Caronia, and In the Footsteps of Giants by Matthew Maruggi among others.

The book ends with A Mother and a Godmother (first in Italian, then in English) by Adriano Menegoi in which he finishes the tales with these words: "Decades later we still have these two wonderful characters fresh in our memory and we think about how much they have given to us; two strong links of a chain that ties the two of us to our origins in the long history of generations."

For some, chains hold back, for others, they pull forward. In therapy, as in books like Remembrances, we are often pulled back to our roots but not without being pulled forward into our own future. And in books, as in therapy, we often find ourselves within its tales. Remembrances is filled with sixty tales, too many to cite from all in a review. You'll just have to buy the book and read the rest yourself!

"Remembrances" is published by Winston Publishing and is available by emailing winston@winstonpublishing.com [3] or by calling 585-392-6737.

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