

## And Not to Yield\*

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Harry Theobald, formerly called Ulderico Theobaldi, entered the kingdom of God today at 11:02 a.m. having lived his life with all the vigor he possessed. At age 76, he died of leukemia at the Golden Hills Nursing Home, leaving three children and three granddaughters the deed to his warm spirit. Included in his will was a document citing three basic inheritances—faith, hope, and love—to be practiced with positive consideration and serious contemplation in his remembrance.

It might have been printed that way instead of the cold, impersonal death record I saw in the New Castle News when I arrived. I was only twelve years old at the time, but I recall the silent funeral home, strange relatives, and genuine grief. Grandpa was there, too, in that very room; yet that stiff figure is not the man I now cherish. No, I remember him vividly—a large man with a head of white waves, sparkling green eyes, and rosy flushed cheeks. He spoke the “broken English from the north Italian school.” And he sang—gay little rhymes with jaunty tunes; I knew all of his favorites once. However, I especially remember his hands—strong and soft, warm and eager. Grandpa was this man of immense sensitivity and animation, experience and optimism; he lives today.

When I was little, Grandpa planted an enormous garden in the empty lots behind his house. He had corn, tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, radishes, onions, zucchini, carrots, squash, melons, cucumbers, potatoes—each variety growing in its proper vegetable row. Often, when I accompanied him to reap the day’s produce, Grandpa told me of his farm on the northern slopes of Italy. In clear verbal illustrations he described his home, his village, and his mother; sometimes he paused

in the middle of our conversations, thinking of his lonely voyage to America and the love he left behind. Then he resumed his discussion, concentrating upon his first years in the new country—this enticing land of “golden opportunity.” I listened with fascination—awed by his courage and trust, his pride and faith.

Through my eyes Grandpa could do everything; nothing was hard or impossible for his hands. With his saw and scraps of lumber, he built chests, tables, and chairs for me; he made storage shelves and flour bins in the cellar. He patched cement and laid bricks. Preserving his traditional heritage, he continued to make wine from fresh grapes in huge wooden barrels; he brewed large kegs of root beer. Utilizing all that he had, he produced yards of sausage links from his press and dozens of waxed cavella cheese balls. Jars of homemade preserves and pickled vegetables shone on the rough shelves; he continually praised this land of plenty.

Laboring in the heat of the Johnson Bronze, he was a typical Pennsylvanian mill-worker. Endless energy and boundless initiative sustained him as he trudged home after his eight-hour day. At his laden table, he enjoyed the presence of his family and thanked God for His bountiful providence. In the evening Grandpa read the newspaper or played a game of solitaire; on Sunday afternoons he usually gathered with his piasonos for cards and bocchi at the Sons of Italy. With stale cigar smoke clinging to his clothes, he returned, relaxed and anxious for a new week.

Slowly, Grandpa lost his brisk step and pink cheeks. He became thinner and more tired as I watched, but I tried to help him. Now I amused him more frequently in his moments of pain and comforted him more often in his days of distress. During those months I clung to him, attempting to hold his presence, his very life, as long as I could. In late November his condition became worse; he was admitted to Saint Francis Hospital. I went with Mother on the train to visit him the week after Thanksgiving. Pale and thin, Grandpa smiled at us; actually, Grandpa's face shone with delight when we arrived. I kissed his yellow cheek solemnly and whispered in his room. Finally, I realized that it was my duty to revive his spirits, bolster his courage, strengthen his faith; so I tried my best to display an exemplary countenance. I did not want to face his death; therefore,

I brought life to him. Grandpa improved, recharging his strength and wit; he spoke of days past and days future. That week ended, however, and Mother and I had to depart. Late Saturday evening we went to say good-bye to Grandpa (we expected to see him at Christmas). Although tears filled my eyes, I blinked them back and hugged him mightily. Grandpa kissed me tenderly and squeezed my trembling hands; I did not want to leave him.

I recall his laughing eyes and happy face gazing upon my frail smile; he knew that his life was closing. Summoning his tremendous courage, he began to sing in a soft voice: "Arrivederci, Roma, Goodbye, goodbye . . ." When I left the cold air stung my tears in a gust of wind. Grandpa was leaving. "Arrivederci, Roma. It's time for us to part. . ." The refrain echoed within me, and I wanted to see him once more.

. . . . .

We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Ulysses," Alfred Lord Tennyson.