

Anche Questo Passarà

Born the fourth child of two immigrants from Calabria, Italy, Rita was born in 1924 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was raised to be strong-willed – a hard-working woman without expectation of reward. After high school, Rita worked at a record store before marrying her co-worker’s brother – a son of Italian immigrants as well. Rita and her husband had four children and later, ten grandchildren, who called her ‘Grandma’.

Standing at 4’9” tall, Grandma raised her children with a stern demeanor – one that could not (and would not) be messed with. She took pride in her independence as she cared for her children, cooked three authentic Italian meals a day, hand-washed and pressed the clothes, and cleaned the house while her husband worked. She never asked for help, and you wouldn’t know if she needed it anyway. When difficult times arose in her own home, she’d say, “Anche Questo Passarà” – This Too Shall Pass. Grandma dealt out tough love to her husband and four children as a woman who survived poverty throughout her youth, bigotry due to her ancestry and accent inherited from her monolingual parents, and the Great Depression. She learned how to multi-task by using a wooden spoon on her mischievous boys, then using it to stir her Biscotti batter.

Her personality changed, however, when her grandbabies came along. As her grandchildren, the only Grandma we knew was the one who left lipstick all over our faces and cuddled us, even as we grew almost twice her size. “Anche Questo Passarà,” she’d say, when one grandbaby passed away too early. “Anche Questo Passarà,” she’d say, when another grandbaby received a diagnosis of cancer not once, but twice. She was strong in her Roman Catholic faith and truly believed that no matter how bad, this too would pass.

When something goes awry in my life, I close my eyes and say Grandma’s mantra. As I grieved her passing, I found myself taking comfort whispering those words to myself. Waves of sadness still crash into me sometimes, but this is when I hear her the loudest: “Anche Questo Passarà”.