

## **Paula Mascioli's Brief Biographical Information**

Paula Mascioli was born in Timmins, Ontario. She is an interior designer currently living in Ottawa, Ontario.

### **THE BOX: A HIDDEN TRUTH**

**IT all started during one of her usual ROUTINE VISITs TO SEE HER FAMILY in Timmins, her hometown, SOMETIME IN THE MID TO LATE NINETIES. Timmins is A MINING COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO, small, ISOLATED, REMOTE AND PRONE TO VERY BAD WEATHER. Perhaps not APPEALING to most people, THIS LITTLE TOWN, however, holds A LOT OF MEMORIES AND HISTORY FOR PAULA AND HER FAMILY. BOTH SETS OF Paula's GRANDPARENTS HAD ARRIVED IN THIS Canadian WILDERNESS IN THE EARLY 1900S. ALL of them came FROM ITALY.**

**WHILE HER MOTHER'S PARENTS BOTH TRAGICALLY DIED YOUNG, ALONG WITH HER PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, HER PATERNAL GRANDFATHER, Leo Mascioli, LIVED A LONG, EXCITING AND PROSPEROUS LIFE. HE HAD BEEN ONE OF THE EARLY PIONEERS IN THE then BOOMING MINING TOWN. HE SAW OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP it, TO BRING IN MUCH NEEDED SUPPLIES, TO BUILD AND PROVIDE DIFFERENT VENUES TO ENTERTAIN its PEOPLE. AFTER ALL, THIS WAS A ROUGH AND TOUGH MINING TOWN WITH NOTHING TO DO AFTER THE MEN GOT OFF THEIR SHIFTS AT THE MINES. HER GRANDFATHER STARTED SHOWING MOVIES IN A BACK ROOM, CHARGING .25c A HEAD and PROVIDING KITCHEN CHAIRS TO SIT ON. THIS WAS a GROUNDBREAKING novelty FOR THIS REMOTE TOWN. HE ALSO ENTERTAINED the people of**

**Timmins WITH A SALOON, AND WENT ON TO BUILD DANCE HALLS, BOWLING ALLEYS, FULL FLEDGED MOVIE THEATRES, SKATING RINKS, HOTELS, CAR DEALERSHIPS, ETC. HE SAW OPPORTUNITY, AND HAD THE COURAGE AND DRIVE TO TAKE THE RISKS AND CREATE MUCH NEEDED BUSINESSES IN THE NORTH. HE WAS FORWARD THINKING, AND DRIVEN BY A DESIRE FOR A BETTER LIFE THAN THE ONE HE HAD LEFT BEHIND IN ITALY. HE WAS FROM A POOR, SMALL TOWN IN ABRUZZO.**

**HE BECAME A RESPECTED AND, alas, also ENVIED CHARACTER IN NORTHERN ONTARIO AS HIS BUSINESSES SPREAD BEYOND TIMMINS. STORIES WOULD ABOUND - SOME TRUE, MANY FALSE. WHERE does FACT END AND FICTION BEGIN?**

**THIS QUESTION applies perfectly when discussing Leo's INNOCENCE OR GUILT SURROUNDING HIS ARREST IN JUNE 1940, IMMEDIATELY AFTER MUSSOLINI ALLIED WITH HITLER DURING WWII. ITALY HAD PRETENDED TO REMAIN 'NEUTRAL' DURING THE WAR, BUT SPECULATION HAD IT that Mussolini DECIDED THAT ALLYING WITH AN ADVANCING MENACE LIKE HITLER WAS SAFER THAN BEING IN HARM'S WAY OF HIM. After the declaration of war, ITALY IMMEDIATELY BECAME AN ENEMY OF THE British EMPIRE, thus of Canada as well.**

**DRIVEN BY FEAR AND WAR HYSTERIA, THOUSANDS OF Italian CANADIANS WERE IMMEDIATELY ARRESTED. In just a few hours they had become "ENEMY ALIENS" AND were suspected of being DISLOYAL and of representing a threat TO CANADA. THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE RIPPED FROM THEIR FAMILIES**

without having the time to say goodbye or to pack a suitcase, OFTEN LEAVING BEHIND WIVES AND CHILDREN TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES. THE GOVERNMENT APPARENTLY CEASED ALL PERSONAL AND BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNTS BELONGING TO THE INTERNED AND DOLED OUT A MONTHLY ALLOWANCE TO THE FAMILIES LEFT BEHIND, UNTIL THE MONEY RAN OUT. OF THOSE that were not interned, MANY HAD TO REPORT monthly TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AS THEY TOO, WERE VIEWED WITH SUSPICION AND LABELLED AS ENEMY ALIENS. THE MAJORITY OF INTERNEES HAD THEIR PROPERTIES AND BUSINESSES CONFISCATED BY THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT, AND SOLD OFF FOR PEANUTS. RATHER THAN RETURNING THEIR PROPERTIES AND BUSINESSES TO THEM AFTER THEY WERE TRIED AND FREED, INTERNEES RETURNED HOME, ONLY TO discover THAT THEY HAD TO START ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS WAS POSSIBLY THE GREATEST INJUSTICE DONE TO THEM. AFTER ALL, NOT ONE INDIVIDUAL ARRESTED AND ACCUSED OF BEING DISLOYAL TO CANADA WAS EVER FOUND GUILTY. ONE BY ONE, THEY WERE ALL FREED.

PAULA'S GRANDFATHER, LEO MASCIOLI AND HER GREAT UNCLE, TONY MASCIOLI, WERE ARRESTED AND INTERNED together with more than 600 Italian Canadians. WHILE HER FAMILY WAS among THE FEW FORTUNATE ONES TO HAVE THEIR PROPERTIES AND BUSINESSES SPARED (AFTER A LOT OF CONVINCING FROM HER YOUNG FATHER AT THE TIME), THE EXPERIENCE HAD A LASTING EFFECT ON THE FAMILY.

UNFORTUNATELY, PAULA'S FAMILY, like most, NEVER SPOKE ABOUT THE INTERNMENT. SHE KNEW THAT HER GRANDFATHER AND GREAT UNCLE HAD

BEEN INTERNED BUT NO DETAILS WERE EVER VOLUNTEERED. It was a bitter subject, best ignored. SADLY, BY THE TIME SHE DEVELOPED A SERIOUS INTEREST IN THIS DRAMATIC PART OF HER FAMILY'S HISTORY and of Canada's history as well, HER FATHER, GRANDFATHER AND GREAT UNCLE HAD PASSED AWAY. HER MOTHER'S RECOLLECTION WAS ALSO LIMITED, AS HER FATHER HAD REMAINED QUITE SILENT ON THE ISSUE EVEN WITH HER. PAULA HAD NOT KNOWN HER GRANDFATHER PERSONALLY but SHE HAD HEARD many STORIES ABOUT HIM AND THE MORE SHE HEARD, the MORE CURIOUS SHE BECAME. HE was a legendary FIGURE, bigger than life, FULL OF ENERGY, AMBITION AND DRIVE. SHE DID WHAT SHE COULD TO FIND OUT MORE. SHE READ OLD NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT HIM, SHE FOUND PUBLISHED BOOKS WHERE HE HAD BEEN MENTIONED, SHE ASKED QUESTIONS, SHE STUDIED HIS PHOTOGRAPHS.

DURING THAT ROUTINE VISIT HOME, PAULA WANDERED INTO HER MOTHER'S BASEMENT. HER MOM HAD SAID FROM TIME TO TIME THAT THERE WERE MANY BOXES IN THE BASEMENT THAT SHOULD BE LOOKED THROUGH AND DISCARDED IF THEY CONTAINED NOTHING OF VALUE. PERHAPS ON HER MOTHER'S PROMPTING, SHE FINALLY DECIDED TO HAVE A LOOK. SHE HAD NO IDEA WHAT SHE WAS ABOUT TO FIND.

Indeed, THAT DAY, IN HER MOTHER'S BASEMENT, SHE DISCOVERED A DUSTY OLD BOX CONTAINING A WEALTH OF DOCUMENTS, OLD LETTERS, PAPERS, AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES - ALL SAVED BY HER FATHER FROM THE DAYS OF HER GRANDFATHER'S AND GREAT UNCLE'S INTERNMENT. WHY DID HER

FATHER KEEP ALL OF THIS? SHE KNEW HE HAD BEEN VERY ORGANIZED AND HAD MAINTAINED FILES FOR MANY DIFFERENT THINGS, BUT THIS BOX CONTAINED UNPLEASANT REMINDERS OF A MOST DIFFICULT TIME. DID HE KEEP THEM "JUST IN CASE" THEY SHOULD EVER HAVE TO BE REFERRED TO AGAIN IN THE FUTURE?

NOTHING IN THE BOX WAS IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER SO IT WAS A SLOW PROCESS FOR PAULA TO SIFT THROUGH THIS MOUNTAIN OF PAPERS. FIRST, SHE HAD TO GO THROUGH IT ALL, READ IT ALL, THEN TRY TO MAKE SOME SENSE OUT OF IT. SHE WORKED MANY, MANY HOURS, PIECING THE STORY TOGETHER AND FINALLY ARRIVING AT A CHRONOLOGY OF FACTS AND EVENTS THAT MADE SENSE AND DEMONSTRATED WHAT HAPPENED SO LONG AGO. HER INTEREST GREW FROM MILD CURIOSITY TO AN ARDENT DESIRE TO DIG DEEPER AND LEARN MORE. THE MORE SHE READ, THE MORE QUESTIONS SHE HAD.

IT WAS AN INTERESTING PROCESS FOR PAULA - FASCINATING TO HAVE HISTORY IN HER HANDS, YET CURIOUSLY, EMOTIONAL. SHE WAS SURPRISED BY THESE FEELINGS THAT SURFACED. SHE HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE A DEEPER SENSE OF FAMILY ROOTS. HER GRANDPARENTS ON BOTH SIDES HAD ALL DIED BEFORE SHE WAS BORN, SO SHE HAD NO CONNECTIONS FURTHER BACK THAN HER PARENTS. FINDING THIS BOX WAS GIVING HER A WINDOW INTO THE PAST, INTO A DRAMATIC PART OF HER FAMILY'S HISTORY, INTO A PART OF CANADA'S HISTORY THAT HAD BEEN SILENCED, AS IF NOT ACKNOWLEDGING IT WOULD MEAN IT had NEVER REALLY HAPPENED.

**READING the LETTERS her grandfather HAD WRITTEN TO HER FATHER FROM PETAWAWA WAS PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL. EVERYTHING WRITTEN AND RECEIVED WAS CENSORED BY THE AUTHORITIES BUT TOWARDS THE END OF HIS INTERNMENT, AS HIS FRUSTRATION MOUNTED, HIS WRITING GREW BOLDER. HIS LETTERS BECAME EMOTIONAL, DISHEARTENED, ANGRY. IT WAS AS IF FOR THE FIRST TIME, PAULA HEARD HER GRANDFATHER SPEAK AND HE SPOKE FROM HIS HEART! A BRIEF GLIMPSE INTO HIS SOUL TRANSFORMED HIM FROM A GHOST INTO THE PERSON PAULA ALWAYS WISHES SHE HAD KNOWN.**