

Soldier's Daughter Shares Her Parents' Love Story During WWII

By Henry M. Holden

World War II was known as the deadliest conflict in human history with upwards of 60-million lives destroyed. But it was also a period when individual love blossomed. Out of this catastrophic time came a love story between an American Army soldier and a young English woman.

It started in a little town called Wigan, in Lancashire, England. She was a young English girl with raven hair and green eyes. Her name was Freda Cottom. He was a tall handsome soldier of Italian heritage. His name was Marco Troiano.

"My mother had experienced terrible times in her childhood years, and she rarely talked about them," said her daughter, Marcella



Russo, who lives in Randolph. "She told me how she would stand on ration lines for hours for food for her brother, sister, mother and herself. Her dad died when she was only seven-years old, and her mom

barely survived with her three children on a widow's pension. Freda, the oldest child, had to quit school to work and help support her family.

"Once she told me she had waited on the ration

line for two hours and only received one egg to bring home to her family," said Russo. "Her health had suffered from the scarcity of food. Life was extremely hard for a critically undernourished girl."

Marco Troiano lived in

Harlem, in New York City, and had enlisted in the Army right after he graduated high school, in 1942. He held the rank of Private First Class in the 94th Infantry Division, and served in combat in central Europe, Northern France and Rhineland.

One day, when Troiano was in England, on leave from the combat zone, he was playing basketball behind a church with some of his army buddies. A man struck up a conversation with Troiano. This man

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would later become Troiano's brother-in-law, Eddie Cottom. Cottom saw that this American soldier was different from many of the other American soldiers who were in England. He was soft-spoken, energetic and polite. Cottom wanted

Troiano to meet his sister, Freda.

"When they met, their future was cast in stone," said Russo. They saw each other regularly until Troiano left for the U.S. when the war ended. They promised to write to each other, and after many letters back

and forth from New York to Lancashire, England, Troiano sent Freda a telegram. Back in the 1940's only the wealthy made long distance calls to Europe. So, the telegram was short, and to the point. "I love you. Will you marry me?"

"My mom wrote back

to tell Marco that she could not afford the airfare," said Russo. "She told me later that she was poorer than a church mouse. Marco then sent her the airfare money. In 1947, with an airline ticket in hand, my mom left her family and friends to start her new life in an unknown country, with an unknown family."

Because of her sad memories of war-torn England,

Troiano never returned to her former home.

"As she was flying over New York harbor, toward Idlewild Airport, now JFK; she cried as she looked down at the Statue of Liberty," said Russo. "She later said that the Statue of Liberty was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen!"

Unfortunately, every ethnic group immigrating to the United States has experi-

enced disdain and prejudice. Troiano's new family did not approve of her because she was not of Italian heritage. But this would pass. Despite the family's disapproval, Troiano and Cottom married. Troiano was happy and relieved she would live a better life with the man she loved, and would never again wait on ration lines for food.

"My mother adapted to America very well," said Russo. "She even learned to make Italian meatballs just the way my dad liked them."

The newlyweds settled on City Island, N.Y., and later moved to New Jersey.

"They were irrevocably committed to each other," said Russo. "They raised a daughter, and experienced more than 45-years of wonderful memories together."

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