

War bride

*Sergeant Ronald Lockwood didn't know.
But his Italian bride always knew.*

By Jim Ridings

[Introduction: From the book *Cardiff: Ghost Town on the Prairie, Volume 2*, by Jim Ridings.]

Cardiff was a coal mining town in Livingston County that sprang up when coal was discovered in 1899. It quickly became one of the bigger towns in the area at a peak of 2,500 people. The quality of the coal ran out in 1912 and the mine closed. The town disappeared as fast as it had begun. Houses were moved by rail and stores were dismantled for the wood. Perhaps two dozen people live in that rural area now. This story is from Jim Ridings' book, "Cardiff Volume 2, A Further History of the Ghost Town on the Prairie."

It is a story that romantic movies are made of — a man and a woman falling in love amid the dangers of a war-torn land. It isn't *Casablanca* or *Gone With The Wind*, but a true story that happened to a Cardiff man and his war bride.

Staff Sgt. Ronald Lockwood arrived in Bari, Italy, in January 1944. The Americans had liberated Bari, but the Germans still held Rome and other important Italian cities. In addition to their freedom, the Americans were giving the local citizens something else — a chance to earn some money by making parachutes for the Allied troops.

The Italians were thrilled at the prospect, after years of starving and going without the simple necessities of life. They formed long lines at the high school, which had been turned into a wartime factory.

Among those looking for work was a petite 16-year-old girl named Vincenza Principi. As Vincenza was pushing the door open, she turned to ask her cousin about the job. Vincenza pushed the door right into the head of a handsome American Air Corps sergeant, knocking his cap off. She was startled, but not too startled to notice his eyes.

"I saw these big beautiful eyes and I just said in Italian, 'His eyes are like two pieces of sky!' He smiled and said, 'Grazie.'" Vincenza was surprised that an American soldier understood Italian. She started walking away and the soldier ran after her, yelling (in Italian) for her to stop. She did. He said, "Didn't you come here to get a job?" Vincenza said yes. The soldier asked her how old she was. "Sixteen, but I'll be seventeen soon," she answered. "You come back when you're seventeen," he replied.

A month later, Vincenza was back at the school building. She looked around the crowded room and finally found her soldier in the distance. She waved to him and said, "I'm 17 today!" He told her she had the job.

The soldier was Sgt. Ronald Lockwood. Vincenza was known as Doris, a name given to her by a lieutenant in the Italian Air Corps. Before long, Ron was walking Doris home.



Sgt. Ronald Lockwood and his Doris in Italy during World War II.

The people of Bari and all of Italy suffered greatly during the war. The Italians had fought the Germans in the last war, and now Mussolini had joined with Germany against the rest of the world. The Italians did not like the Germans, and now they liked them even less. The Germans did not act like allies to the Italians, they acted like conquerors. They occupied Italy and treated the civilians badly.

"The Germans took over our houses," Doris said. "They were unsmiling. They had the attitude of 'We are superior.' If they were coming down the street, you had to move out of the way. Even if there was plenty of room, they did not move to the side. They knocked old women down if they were in their path."

A German on a motorcycle almost ran down Doris, as she rode on her bicycle one day.

"When the war started, once everything sold out of the stores, it was gone. Then everything was rationed. We got six ounces of bread a day, one egg a month, three ounces of salt a month, 18 ounces of sugar a month or whenever it was available. We might get meat once a month, and that mostly was brains, because the good meat went to the Nazis. The Germans came first, they took the best of everything."

The Germans also took all the gold wedding bands from the women of Italy. People wore their clothes until they turned to rags, then they sewed the rags into new clothing. Once, when a store got in a supply of shoes, people lined up at 2 a.m., even though there was no guarantee that any of the shoes might fit. Doris wore rubber galoshes in August because it was the only footwear she had.

When the American troops rolled into Bari, Doris saw an old couple watching the scene. The old man said, "Thank you,



Ronald and Doris Lockwood.

Jesus, we are saved, the Americans are here.” The old man took off his cap while the old woman wiped away her tears.

Doris lived with her grandmother, who had raised her since she was five months old. Doris ran home to tell her grandmother about the arriving Americans. She was glad. “We have no food, but we are saved,” grandmother said.

As Doris Principi got to know the sergeant, she found out how this American with the Anglo name spoke Italian so fluently. Like her, he was raised by his grandparents. And the Ballotti’s in Cardiff spoke only Italian, so young Ronald grew up speaking both English and Italian. His Army job was as a translator. The sergeant and the grandmother got along very well.

There was no traditional dating in a war zone. The young couple got together whenever they could, taking walks along the Adriatic coast and enjoying whatever simple pleasures were available.

Everyone in the war plant noticed that Ronald spent a lot of time at Doris’ work station. It was only a few weeks before he proposed marriage.

Sgt. Lockwood’s commanding officer approved the paperwork so Ron and Doris could get married. According to Italian law, the mayor of the city had to perform the wedding. Even a church wedding wasn’t legal until the mayor performed his own ceremony. Ronald and Doris were sup-

posed to get married in March 1944. But the commanding officer had a request to let another soldier have the papers, so that he could marry a local girl before her baby arrived. Ronald didn’t object. His own wedding kept being put off again and again, as the approved paperwork was needed for other soldiers who had gotten a girl in trouble. Finally, the frustrated commander just kept the papers for Ronald.

Ronald and Doris were married on January 20, 1945. Doris went back to her grandmother and Ronald went back to camp. Meanwhile, Doris was learning English.

Ronald Lockwood came home to Cardiff in September 1945. Doris had to wait until April 1946, when she and 500 other war brides (and 75 babies) sailed from Naples to New York on a special ship. Doris was to take the train to Joliet, and then to Dwight, where her husband would be waiting for her at the station. On the way, Doris asked a conductor if Joliet was a big city. Yes, he said, sort of a big city. What about Dwight? No, Dwight was a small town. Even as a teenage war bride in a new land, Doris was independent and straightforward. She got off the train in Joliet, where Ken and Hildy Lockwood lived. She called them and they picked her up at Joliet’s Union Station. Ken had Ron paged at the Dwight depot, and Ron took a bus to Joliet to get his bride. It was that kind of free-spirited relationship that marked their marriage.

When Doris arrived in Cardiff, or what was left of Cardiff, she was shocked. She grew up in Bari, a cosmopolitan city of 200,000 people. Cardiff was the poor Ballotti farm and a few nearby houses. Doris had never been on a farm before. When her husband went out to the pump to get water, she asked him what he was doing. When she watched him milk a cow, she just stood there, and all she could say was, “Don’t forget to wash your hands.” The Ballotti bathroom was an outhouse. It was quite a culture shock. She told her husband, “I don’t like it here. I want to go home.” Fortunately, she spent only a few hours at Cardiff. Ron was working in a wallpaper plant in Joliet, and they went home to Joliet that evening.

Ronald grew up poor on a Cardiff farm. He was two years old when his mother died. His older brother Kenneth went to live with the Ballotti’s while he went with an aunt in Joliet. Then, one day, his aunt dropped him off at the Ballotti farm when he was four years old. Neither Kenneth nor Ronald knew they had a brother. Ronald went to Reddick High School for one year, then had to quit because he had no good clothing, shoes, or any way to get to school. When he was 17, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, a government work program for youth, and then he went into the Army. Both the CCC and the military were welcome escapes from the poverty of the farm.


Despite Ronald’s hard upbringing, Doris was tougher and more direct. After all, she spent her teenage years ducking into doorways as bombs went off in the street. She was the big-city girl. A new land did not intimidate her.

During the war, Ron sent money home, and he had \$500 waiting for him in the Campus State Bank when he returned. That was a fortune at the time. One day in Joliet, Ron told Doris that a family member wanted to borrow money. Doris was confused — Ron earned \$18 a week, their apartment

was \$18 a month, and they basically were penniless. He then told her about his \$500 in the bank. She told him to go to Campus and bring that money back. He did. The next day, while Ron was at work, Doris walked down Cass Street from their apartment to a downtown Joliet bank and opened a savings account. She used her passport to open the account in the name of Vincenza Principi. That way, no one else could touch it.

Doris made the decisions and Ron trusted her judgment. He knew that if that \$500 was in his hands, he probably would have loaned it, and it would be gone. He could be influenced by family. Doris could not. It was one of many examples which led her husband to thankfully remark, "I can't imagine what our life would be like if you were like me."

The Lockwoods lived in several houses during their 55-year marriage. Always, it was Doris who bought the house, and Ron who said, "Yes, Love." Once, she put the new address in his lunch pail so he would know where to come home that night. There may have been some heavenly help in making decisions. "Always, help came through the goodness of other people who came just when we needed it," she said.

One day in late 1982, as Ron was leaving for work, Doris said, "Tell your boss today that you are retiring this month." I am, he said? Yes, she replied. He did. A few months later, a co-worker called and asked Ron how he was so smart as to know to retire in December, rather than in January, when a new Caterpillar contract took effect, one much less favorable than the one on which Ron retired. It has meant tremendous financial benefits that the Lockwoods enjoyed the rest of their lives. Ron didn't know. Doris did. She always did. 

Nine-time ISHS award-winning author Jim Ridings of Hersher, Illinois, is a frequent contributor to Illinois Heritage.



Doris Lockwood and her daughter Paula at the dedication of the Illinois State Historical Society marker at Cardiff in 2007.

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