

THANK YOU FOR THE SHOES: THE STORY OF AN EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY MAN

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The story of an extraordinary ordinary man

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This story is based on the life of a man named Michelangelo Rizzo, known as *Michele* to his family and later Mike to everyone else. It reads like a novel and spans eighty years, two continents and several U.S. states. The story opens in 1909 as this thirteen-year-old fatherless boy leaves his hometown of Platania in the mountains of southern Italy on a solo journey to find the grave of the man whose blood runs in his veins, a man he cannot possibly remember. Through flashbacks, we come to understand the circumstances and challenges faced by Mike's father and millions of others who were part of a thirty-year migration to the Americas in the late 1880s and early part of the Twentieth Century.

The story traces Mike's journey to the new world and the various detours and challenges he encounters along the way. From the port of New York, to the steel mills and coal mines of Pennsylvania; then on to a road building project along Lake Erie in Cleveland, Ohio, and finally arriving in the state where his father is buried and where he settles, Connecticut, Mike's journey is filled with joy, love, loss, tragedy and triumph of spirit.

This unusual boy grows into manhood and to old age answering only to God. With determination and a wellspring of goodness, Mike delights in the joy and gifts of a gentle woman, the birth of their four daughters. After the tragic amputation of his right arm, and the sudden loss of his wife, he faces the threat of his children being taken away. Working day and night, he struggles to care for them alone. Through unwavering commitment and sheer persistence, he manages to keep them together.

When they are grown and married, just at a time when he could relax and enjoy life, he returns to his homeland for the first time. He is moved by the impoverished plight of four fatherless children and their beautiful mother to take on a second family, after more than twenty years as a widower. He revels in the birth of a fifth daughter and finally a son who carries his name.

Because records were lost in a fire, he is foiled at every turn to find his father's gravesite. Instead, he finds other priceless treasures along the way. An imperfect

man, with a stubborn streak, a head full of hope, a heart full of faith and a zest for living, Mike leaves an everlasting marker on his children, stepchildren, grandchildren and all those whom he meets along the way.