

Vittorio Antonino Todaro (Vick Todaro)

By Tanya Todaro Noble, Great-Granddaughter

Vittorio Antonino Todaro was born in Poggioreale, Sicily on March 22, 1877 to Antonino Todaro and Maria (Allegra) Todaro. He was the youngest of their sons. Antonino and Maria's first-born son, born in 1862, was named Vittorio. However, he passed away November 10, 1872. Following Sicilian traditions, the next son born will also be named after his paternal grandfather.

At the age of twenty, Vittorio, left his mother, father, and brothers to venture across the Atlantic Ocean, over five thousand miles, to the United States to make a better life for himself. He left Italy during a time of poverty and political hardship. On June 1, 1897, he departed from Palermo on the *SS Scandia*, and arrived in New York on June 23, 1897. His final destination would be New Orleans to meet his older brother Rosario Todaro. It was once told to me that my great grandfather obtained the money for his passenger ticket by winning a game of bocce ball. His ticket was for the steerage compartment of the vessel. The manifest shows that he had ten dollars, which in 2018 would be equivalent to approximately three hundred dollars. After reaching New Orleans, he found work in the sugar cane plantations as a day laborer. In 1900, he was living in the 8th Ward, Plaquemines Parish of Louisiana. He lived next door to his brother Rosario and his family.

As many of his fellow Poggiorealese, he soon ventured to small farming community off the Brazos River, Highbank, Texas. It was there that he married his first wife, Caterina Salvato, on April 29, 1907. Caterina was the daughter of Nicolo Salvato and Leonarda (Tusa) Salvato. Vick and Caterina's first son, Tony was born in 1911. In 1913, their second son, Nick, was born. On the farm, they grew cotton, corn, and raised a few cows. Vick fell on hardship when Caterina became ill and passed away on May 6, 1915 in a hospital in New Orleans. She is buried in the Italian Cemetery in Highbank, Texas. As all Italian communities do, the Italian families in Highbank helped Vick with his two young sons.

As time went by many of the men of the community suggested that he find a new wife to help raise his family. Vick remembered meeting Felipe Buffamante and his family while he worked on the sugar cane plantations in New Orleans. Felipe Buffamante only had daughters and had moved his family from New Orleans to Houston. Vick went and meet with Felipe in Houston and planned to marry his fourth daughter, Giuseppa (Josephine) Buffamante. Vick and Josephine married on January 13, 1917 at the Holy Rosary Church in Houston, Texas. Josephine raised Tony and Nick as her own. They had four children: Filip, born 1918, Mary born 1920, Virginia born 1922, and Joseph (Joe) born in 1924. Together, Vick and Josephine, worked to raise their family as one and successfully farm their land.

In June of 1942, the family felt the pain of losing a daughter and a sister. Virginia fell ill and died at the age of 20. Also, during this time period, Vick relied on his sons help on the farm. Filip and Joseph joined the Army and left to serve our county in World War II. With all his sons no longer living at home and his age, it became difficult for Vick to continue farming. In the October of 1942, Vick and Josephine moved to Houston, Texas. After retiring from farming and making the move to Houston, Vick worked as a carpenter. In 1947, Vick took his oath of allegiance and became a US Citizen. Vick and Josephine remained in Houston and continued to strive on family and traditions. They carried on Sunday family

dinners followed by penny poker, card games, and dominoes on their porch. Josephine would make homemade wine, fig cookies, and pizza. Their back fence was always full of cucuzza squash. Vick would always be witting. He used his woodworking skills to make toys for his grandchildren. My father still has the toy wheelbarrow the he made for him. Vick was very sweet and compassionate and loved his family dearly. He helped instill the love of family in all of his children and grandchildren. On October 26, 1961, Vick passed away at the age of 84. He is buried with his wife Josephine, and his sons, Tony and Filip, in Forest Park Cemetery, Houston, Texas.

As you research your family history, little statistics and facts jump out at you. They often jog memories of stories that you hear throughout your life. For instance, on Vick's naturalization papers is states the he is five foot three inches. To many this wouldn't mean much. But to me, it makes me remember my grandfather, Filip, telling us how his Papa (Vick) was too short to see over the steering wheel and reach the foot pedals at the same time. The first car that he ever bought was a 1927 Chevy. When he first got the car, he drove it through the garage. So, my grandfather Filip, would ride in the floor board shifting the gears and working the pedals, while his dad did all the steering. Filip contributed this as the reason he learned to drive at such an early age.

Although many of us do not have the chance to meet all of our relatives, they continue to live on through the stories that are passed from generation to generation. It is important to hold on to our family traditions and heritage, and to be thankful for the journeys and sacrifices that they made in order to offer their families better opportunities.