

**Poggioreale in America
2022 Student Scholarship Essay**

by

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The country of Sicily holds a vast history of war, famine, corruption, and political turmoil. At the turn of the 20th century, many Sicilians were forced to emigrate because of the intolerable violence of the mafia and the great famine surrounding them. My great great grandparents, Francis Vincente Aloï and Lula LaRocca, experienced this first hand and immigrated to the United States around 1905. Both Aloï and LaRocca came to the United States as young teenagers with their families when the violence forced them to leave everything behind including their family members, their material possessions, and their cultural roots. As new immigrants, they had close to nothing, could not yet speak English, and were treated very poorly. They ultimately came to the United States in search of a better life which they worked tirelessly to attain.

After arriving in New Orleans on a boat, they moved to Bryan, Texas and became farmers. This was common amongst Sicilians immigrants because the land was similar to that of Sicily and so they knew how to successfully grow crops there. Because of the intense oppression they faced upon their arrival to the United States, Sicilians stuck together. They held steadfast to their Italian culture and their strong Catholic faith as they navigated all the new challenges they faced.

During their time as farmers, Aloï and LaRocca became acclimated to US culture by learning English and becoming citizens of the United States. With his new status as a citizen, Aloï went to fight in World War I soon after it began in 1914. After the war concluded, the couple moved to Dallas, TX, where they had two children: Rosalie born in 1923 and Vincent in 1925. Francis Vincent Aloï opened an Italian grocery store by the name of Aloï's in order to make money for the family and he later worked as a barber. Through every endeavor, the family valued both working hard and sticking together. They carried many of their Sicilian traditions over to the United States including Pasta Sundays, where the entire family would gather for lunch after Mass, blessing fava beans for good luck, and baking bread on Saint Joseph's Day to ensure safety during harsh storms.

Our family still holds dearly the Easter traditions of our Sicilian ancestors by having a big Easter parade through the neighborhood, baking the traditional pascal lamb cake, and breaking apart the big chocolate egg. We also often bake traditional Italian meals, including my personal favorite, fraguni AKA "Old Man's Face." My great grandparents kept quiet about much of their past because their life in Sicily was so horrible. Their lives however, influence me everyday by reminding me that family is everything. Even though they faced many hardships, they stuck together which ultimately led them to be successful in their new lives.