



*This book is dedicated to AWON's founder, Ann Bennett Mix, whose vision and devotion made this story possible.*

Only recently did I share my introduction to fellow Awoners. How welcoming and normal they made me feel. For so many, many years I have been torn by shame, self-consciousness, hidden grief displayed by an aloofness that did not permit anyone to know the depth of my pain. It has only been in the last eight years that my emergence began. In part, I will share the first paragraph of my recent introduction to AWON that certainly goes far in releasing one of my earliest shames.

As a small child and just wanting to be like everyone else, I recall my confusion at seeing my father's name on his headstone reading, Pvt. Ricardo de Lama y Martin as I knew my name was written Gloria de Lama. You see all of my grandparents were born, raised and married in Spain. My mother's grandparents came to this country at the turn of the century and my mother was the first of their children to be born in America. Yikes, they even gave her the name of 'America' as her middle name. I was too young to even understand their pride for I only saw my embarrassment. As for my father's side, my grandparents also left Spain at the turn of the century but moved to Cuba instead of America. In 1930 at age 17, my father left Cuba to fulfill his dream of becoming a pilot, something my grandmother dis-allowed in Cuba. I'm proud to say that my father did indeed fulfill his dream and went on to fly planes for stunts and acrobats.

My mother and father were married August of 1941 and I came along November of 1942. My father's entry into WW II began in North Africa March of 1944 as part of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division, 133<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, Company G known as The Red Bulls. My father had received two purple hearts before that fateful Thanksgiving day when he was killed in Livergnano, Italy on November 23, 1944 just three days after my second birthday.

Thus began the life I came to know all throughout my growing years. We returned to live with my maternal grandparents. I often saw myself as someone very tiny in a sea of tall adults. Although, I had many cousins, I came to see that my family was "just my mother and me". My mother never remarried and still today, I wonder why her fears played such a part in my life as a child. In no uncertain terms was I ever to join the girl scouts or as a teen take part in a pajama party. I did not know if her reason was a European custom or belief I would be harmed. Nevertheless, it became yet another shame as I dodged friend's questions on their invites. Eventually, they no longer asked.

To further add to my isolation of unspoken pain, I thought for sure that the nuns at school were the absolute word that we would lose our mother if we didn't obey the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. I lived in fear that my only surviving parent would die for any mis-behavior on my part. That fear was compounded when we would watch a movie called Boys Town and I worried that if I had to go to an orphanage, I would be asked to leave when I reached eighteen. Today, I think about that child just accepting yet another fate as part of life in worrying that the orphanage would release her at eighteen years of age.

The silence I maintained about my fears was perhaps taught to me in the silence displayed by my mother. You see, around the age of nine, I would cut out the outline of my father holding me from the family photo album and place it under my pillow. So many times, I would forget to remove the photo before going to school only to discover that the photo was missing as a result of my mother making up the bed in the morning. Never once did she ask if I was missing my father nor ask me to refrain from cutting up the remaining photos. I remember a time or two wanting to ask questions about my father and the awkwardness on how to address him, "my father.." or "daddy/dad" all felt uncomfortable to be said out loud. Years later, I remember how privileged I felt to honor my father-in-law's request and call him Dad. Finally, I began to use the word and it felt wonderful to use a term that was normal to everyone else.

I have been grateful to my mother for keeping her promise to my father that I come to know his family in Cuba. We visited there when I was four and fourteen years of age. The political scene became such between our two countries that I was never to see my beloved grandfather again. However, in high school, I learned to write in Spanish. He became the "pen pal" and "confidant" of my teenage years. For it was in my beloved grandfather that I could share all that was in my heart. He guided me emotionally through the diagnosis of my mother's terminal illness in my teenage years and later her subsequent death when I was twenty-two years old.

Abandonment fears have plagued me my entire life with drastic consequences. Somehow, I have managed to stay afloat through it all. My teenage years were happy and fulfilling. I did not share with anyone my fates or the longings of my heart. Often times, I wore the face "everything is okay". Truthfully, I may have fooled but a few.

Today, my fates have been kinder. I somehow have brought into this world three beautiful well-adjusted children. All are happily married and I have been blessed with four grandchildren thus far. I have returned to my father's homeland to visit the old haunts of my earlier trips. I am grateful that working for The College of William and Mary afforded me the safety of that trip through academic license to really say "goodbye" to my grandfather's memory. In the past eight years I have had the occasion to travel with my father's 34<sup>th</sup> Division to Italy and although no one seems to remember him, I nevertheless was welcomed as one of their own. And lastly and more importantly, I caress my mother in thought for trying to raise me the only way she knew how. Although, it was too European even for the fifties, I nevertheless knew that after my father, I was her 'light'. I trust that she knows I'm grateful and that I am a very happy person today in many aspects of my life. My road to releasing the past has taken decades for I am quite secure in my life today. I have reassured that "little girl" in me that all is well and she is secure.

To this end, I release all the pain related to my father's death and tell anyone now of my pride both in his heritage and the tremendous sacrifice he made to a country adopted as a homeland.

Respectfully submitted in his memory,

Gloria de Lama Sciole