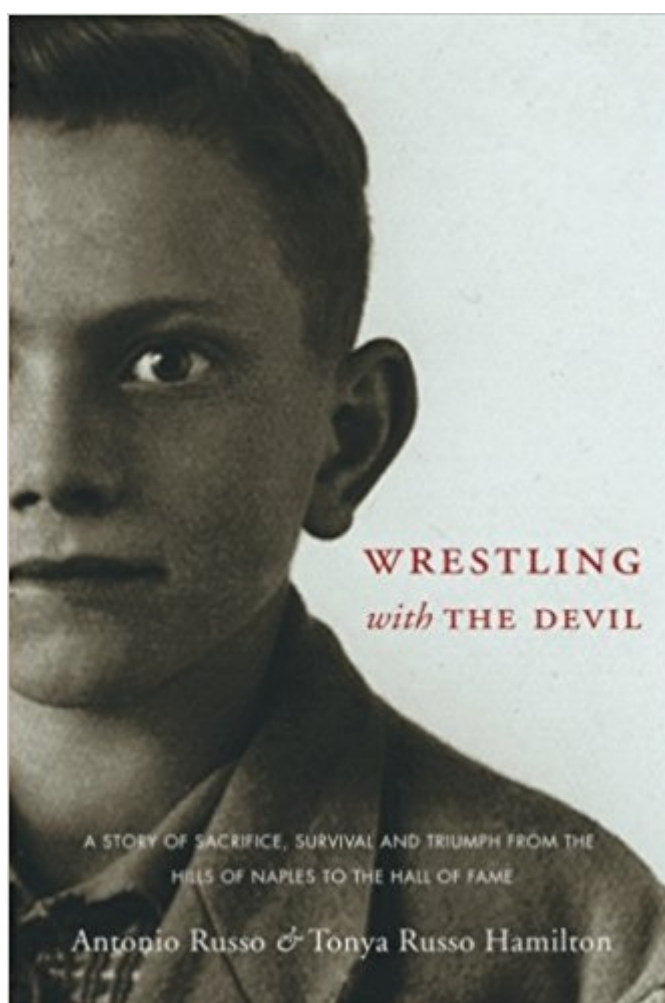


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# Wrestling With The Devil: A Story Of Sacrifice, Survival And Triumph From The Hills Of Naples To The Hall Of Fame



## Synopsis

Wrestling with the Devil follows a Southern Italian boy, Antonio Russo, on a journey across nations and into the far reaches of his soul. He is separated from his family at the age of ten and placed alone on an ocean liner in the Bay of Naples- sacrificed for his parent's dream of a better life. In Italy Antonio runs through the fields, works on his family's farmland, and roasts chestnuts over the fire in the evenings with his grandmother. But his parent's goal was to rise from the impoverished life they were living. They found a way to do this but it would mean parting with their eldest child. They did the unthinkable, and thus begins the journey of this young boy's life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Wrestling with the Devil is an entrancing tale of perseverance, hard work and the pursuit of the American Dream. My reverie was broken only by surges of inspiration to make the best out of my life." --Jason Quick, The Oregonian  
"This work is an important contribution to the world of wrestling and a must-read for enthusiasts of the sport." --Curley Culp, Professional Football Player, NCAA Wrestling Champion, 1967 Arizona State University  
"This wonderful book captures the whole of the immigrant experience in America, the bravado, the ingenuity, the struggle for survival, and most of all, the grace and strength of the Italian-American family. Oral history at its most thrilling."  
--Merridawn Duckler, Senior Fellow, The Attic Institute Portland, Oregon

When you work hard, good things happen. One of my mother's favorite quotes has been

branded in my subconscious and rises to the surface almost every day.~ She was right.~ I have spent the last few years digging deeper and recounting my experiences in detail in the form of interviews conducted by my daughter.~ Many of the stories, which on the surface may have appeared funny and lighthearted as presented to my family, actually cut deeply, and over the years I have battled the demons as they have reared their ugly heads one by one. ~ ~Antonio Russo

This is the story of Tony Russo, who immigrated to the United States from Italy thinking he would find trees that bloomed with gold. In order to ensure a better future for their son than he would have in their village in Italy, his parents put him on a ship from Naples to New York when he was ten years old. They hoped that their relatives already in the States would take him in and care for him until they could join him. When Tony arrived in New York, he was penniless, spoke no English and was sick from the voyage on the ship. What's more, his New York relatives couldn't support him, although they tried. They put Tony on a plane to Portland, where some other relatives took him in and became a stable family for him. Four years later, his birth family immigrated to Portland too. Immigrating to the States was easy neither for Tony nor for the rest of his birth family. Yet, Tony's parents, Tony and his brother shared a strong work ethic that enabled them to make a life. His parents found blue-collar jobs that they held for decades, and although Tony struggled with school, he made it--just barely--through high school and college because he loved and was gifted at wrestling, worked himself to the bone, and had coaches and a family who believed in and encouraged him. Tony ultimately earned a masters and became a beloved high school wrestling coach himself. I have read many, many memoirs, and I'm not particularly a fan of those written by famous people. I enjoy those by unknown people who, in the course of their lives, accomplish extraordinary things that few people recognize as such. This is one such memoir. Yes, Tony did win wrestling prizes and become a member of the wrestling hall of fame, but his story is not a story of celebrity. It's about risk, hard work, hope, love, and gratitude, intermingled with lots of screwing up. In my view, Tony's really great achievement was inspiring his students the way his coaches inspired him and inspiring his daughter as his parents inspired him. Although the story is narrated in the first person in Tony's voice, the book was written by his daughter Tonya--herself a teacher--and is the result of several years of interviews and work. The result is a beautiful book. Although this is a book about an Italian American family with a penchant for wrestling, it's not a book just for Italian Americans or for wrestlers. It's a timeless American immigration story that will inspire not only people whose families have been in the US for generations but also America's most recent immigrants, no matter their origin.

Wrestling with the Devil provided me with new insights on the life of all immigrants, but especially Italian immigrants. The struggle between maintaining the traditions and values that the older generation brought with them from Italy, while the younger generation learned how to be American teenagers and adults is felt as the reader enters the Russo home in Portland, Oregon. Antonio navigated that stage of life with risks and some rebellion, but his determination and deeply rooted values turned him from potential destruction just in time. My heart broke as 10-year old Antonio was sent to America, alone. The desire for her child to have a chance at a better, more prosperous life was so powerful that it overcame his mother's need to keep a young son close at home. Such a sacrifice of hope - and with a happy ending. I had no interest in the sport of wrestling when I started the book, but I found myself caught up in the matches - I felt the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." Russo has written a book that satisfies my interest in all-things-Italian, while also touching the emotions that motherhood has unleashed in me, and perhaps even igniting a tiny spark of interest in wrestling. Read Wrestling with the Devil and find yourself in the lush backyard vegetable garden in Portland, Oregon - or drinking the Russo family wine around the dining table - you'll feel the anguish of a mother saying good-bye to her young son, and the fear of the little boy alone and sick on a ship to a new land. You'll get beat up along with Tony on the wrestling mat, and then feel the pride of winning. And you will feel the love of generations of the Russo family and the bonds that distance would not break.

I'm not an Italian and my parents were only English-speaking immigrants from Canada but I lived in Italy and know a little about the area where Mr. Russo came from, and of the many Italians who emigrated to the US to find a better life. And, oddly enough, I grew up in Portland at about the same time so the references to many of the locations were easy for me to picture. One thing I know nothing about is wrestling but it is an apt metaphor for the story of this family's struggle to integrate and keep their heritage at the same time. I've read a number of books about the Italian experience coming to the US in the early 1900s and their dreadful harsh lives. This story isn't so much with getting food on the table after they settle in Portland, but more about Mr. Russo's determination to become his own person and a success in life - career, marriage, family. Yes, it can be done! And, I loved the story about the train trip across the US from New York to Portland. It reminded me of some trips on Italian trains.

I LOVED this book! I found it hard to put down as I had to know what was going to happen next to

this little guy from Italy. Both heartwarming and heartbreaking, but ultimately triumphant, this tender and true tale is a beautiful testimony to the worthy struggle that is The American Dream.

A truly inspirational story that made me laugh, cry and cheer, but this story is so much more. Infused with Italian food and red wine throughout it will make you want to sit with a glass of your favorite vino while turning the pages!

Having taught at Newberg School District, Tony Russo was a fellow teacher of mine. After hearing about the book, I was very interested in reading about a fellow teacher. I was not disappointed in the least. I learned many things about Tony's life that I knew little or nothing about. Tony was definitely a great coach and teacher in every thing he pursued. It was easy reading and hard to put down. Tonya Hamilton did a great job in writing about her dad.

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