

From Ragus to Richies

This is a story about two cities, one woman and tomato sauce.

The story began nearly one hundred years ago, in the kitchen of a small house in the ancient city of Melfi, in southern Italy. It ended with one of the USA best selling sauces.

In July 1892, a baby girl was born in Melfi. She was called Assunta Gala. Her father, Michelangelo, and his wife Amelia, had ten children all together. Four of them died. In those days life in southern Italy was very hard. One way of escape was a ticket to the USA. The whole family emigrated and Assunta arrived in New York on 15th May, 1914.

They went straight to little Italy in New York State and settled in the city of Rochester. Assunta had no skills except cooking and she worked in her brother's restaurant for several years. In 1927 she married Giovanni Cantisano and started a family.

To earn a little extra money, Assunta began to make spaghetti sauce. She used her mother's old recipe, made the sauce in her kitchen and sold it locally. Soon everyone wanted the sauce and the Cantisanos moved the "kitchen" to a factory. They put the sauce into cans, called it ragu and sold it throughout the north-eastern states.

In 1969, an American food company bought the golden recipe for over forty million dollars!

Assunta began her life in poverty and died a millionaire. Her sauce was the best selling spaghetti sauce in the whole of the USA.