February 22, 2016

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

In the mid-1950s, coverage of International Students attending Riverside City College continued to appear in the “Tiger Times” student newspaper. Below are two of those reports:

In November 3, 1955 issue of the “Tiger Times” newspaper, the tale of student Johnny Terracina’s hard-fought journey from Italy to the United States. The photo below accompanied the article:

The caption for the photo read:
THAT'S ME! – Johnny Terracina points to sign of street which by coincidence bears his name. Terracina, the student that is, came to RC directly from his native Rome.

The headline below ran with the article.

“Tiger Times” reporter, Vincent Lawton, authored the story below.

The gaiety and charm of the Italian people is well known. Less well known, perhaps, is the dauntless determination with which they can pursue a goal. Consider the case of Gianna (Johnny) Terracina. Johnny, who is now a student at RC, was born and raised in Rome. He has spent almost nine of his twenty-four years in a never-say-die struggle, against tremendous obstacles, to make his way to these United States.

Here is his story:

Raised in an Italy torn by the tensions of the 1930’s, young Terracina had his first contact with Americans in 1944. Returning to his native Rome from northern Italy where he had been sent for safety’s sake, he was adopted as “mascot” by the 3197th Signal Group of the American Fifth Army.

Career in Army

Johnny, whose father had died from exposure suffered in aiding Fascism’s foes, was spiritually an American from the start; as far as he was concerned there was never any war between Italy and the United States. With the start of his association with the U. S. Army in 1944, Johnny led a military life until 1948. Few Armies have had more devoted soldiers. It was a somewhat informal Army hitch. While not technically a member of Uncle Sam’s armed forces the youngster wore a specially made U.S. uniform. He slept and ate in barracks, he was subject to modified Army discipline. He was expected to apply for leave when visiting his mother who lived nearby. Going AWOL—as do all Americans once in a while—brought Johnny detention in quarters. He bore no weapons and acquired little knowledge of drill or the Manual of Arms. A typical Army day for the boy was spent in making himself useful around barracks or mess-hall.

Dreams of U. S. Citizenship

In short, he learned little of military science while a “soldier”. But one thing he learned quickly and forever—he, Gianna Terracina, wanted to become an American. This clearly meant getting to the United States as soon as possible. But an ocean and the red tape of a chaotic world intervened. Then, with the advent of peace, his army friends started going home. Johnny’s heart sailed for America a hundred times — but soon the 3197th, powerless to take their mascot with them, had gone, leaving behind them a sorrowing young “American” in Rome.

America Bound

Sorrowing—but not defeated—Johnny became mascot of the 529th Blue Devils, an infantry outfit. Stationed with them on guard duty at Ciampino Airport outside Rome he attempted to
stow away on a cargo plane U. S. bound but was discovered just before the plane took off. No drastic punishment followed the now familiar pattern of returning home. For a time after their departure Johnny was on involuntary furlough. During this period he met a party of U.S. sailors who suggested that he might, with luck, quietly obtain passage to the land of liberty on their aircraft carrier. Johnny accompanied them to Naples. There, at night, he slipped aboard the vessel. Once aboard, Johnny, finding no handier hiding place, fell asleep in an unoccupied bunk.

**Kismet Unkind**

Fate is an uncertain thing; a sailor calling the watch that night mistook Johnny's blanketed figure for that of a gob scheduled for duty. Johnny, thus awakened, had a miserable few minutes trying to explain the presence of an Italian accent and Army uniform on a Yankee man-of-war. In short order he was standing before the captain. Always quick witted, the youth offered to adjust matters by joining the Navy and sailing with them wherever they might go, even unto the Americas. The offer was refused.

**Bloody But Unbowed**

Dawn breaking over Naples's cobbled streets found Johnny now Navy-less as well as Army-less, headed sadly back to Rome. There, after an interval of alternate hope and despair, the would-be immigrant made the acquaintance of a group of 88th Division infantrymen. Learning of his profound desire to reach the U.S.A. they devised a plan to smuggle him aboard a troopship on which they were scheduled to return home in a few days.

**Stratagems**

Previously, Johnny had refused to involve soldier friends in such an undertaking. But after the near-miss of the aircraft carrier he was not disposed to quibble. Stopping only long enough to tell his mother that this time he felt certain of reaching the States, Johnny started for the port of Leghorn from which the troopship was to sail. At the Leghorn barracks as sailing time drew near Johnny was artfully stuffed into a duffle bag, thrown into a truck full of luggage, and in due time de posited in the vessel's hold.

**Anchors Away**

When land was safely astern Johnny's friends released him from his bondage. From there on out thy smuggled food to him and he lay hidden in the hold by day and took his exercise stealthily on deck at night. Just before reaching New York his luck ran out and he was discovered by a ship's officer. Once more he stood before a vessel's captain. Dutifully, the young patriot offered to join the merchant marine crew. Regretfully, the offer was refused. Johnny was in another cul-de-sac, and this a watery one.

**Johnny Goes Sailing Home**

After docking in New York the merchant marine officers took their unexpected guest on a tour of mid-Manhattan and then dutifully turned him over to the immigration authorities. A two months stay on Ellis Island followed and then a sad return to Italy. From Rome, Johnny went to Leghorn as mascot of a group whose designation he recalls only as PBS. Again he tried to get into the land of his choice, this time legally. All avenues seemed closed.

**Keeps Trying**
In due time the PBS group also left for America and he was once more a civilian. Now he tried to formally enlist in the U.S. Army; he wrote to Army headquarters in Germany; he applied for duty in the merchant marine; late he volunteered for the fighting in Korea. A poor Italian boy without influence could do little but hope and keep on trying. Johnny did both.

**Long Awaited Break**

Fate decided to reward him. In 1949, while a civilian employee of the Hotel Genoa in Rome, the youth had met Dr. Benjamin B. Thompson of Riverside who traveling in Europe. Impressed with the boy’s burning desire to become an American, the doctor had taken an interest in him that was renewed when he and Mrs. Thompson visited Rome in 1953. With their sponsorship and invaluable help, Johnny redoubled his efforts to get back to America. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson continued to aid him after their return to California and in 1954, Johnny won the first victory of his nine year struggle. He was granted a student’s visa to attend Riverside College, the same school his patron had attended in the 1930s.

**Journey’s End**

On August 31, 1955, Johnny landed at New York, ecstatic with happiness and as legal as a writ of mandamus. He was met by a friend of the Thompson’s who accompanied him on the plane trip to Riverside where the doctor and his wife had opened their home to him. Johnny is busy these days at Riverside College where he is studying sociology, American history and kindred spirits. To obtain full American citizenship, 5 years of continuous residence in this country is required. For Johnny, as you may guess, this will be a pleasure!

The photo below also ran with the Terracina article.
The caption for the photo read:

**COFFEE BREAK** – Terracina takes time out to chat with benefactor, Dr. Ben Thompson, who helped him come to America.

The October 25, 1956 issue of the “Tiger Times” carried the story of Spanish student Tony Marimon.

The caption for the photo read:

**IT WON’T ALWAYS BE JAN** – Tony Marimon, who arrived on the Riverside campus after a flying trip from his home in Madrid Spain, has nothing against TT staffer Jan Hurst, but after his college days in America are over he intends to return to his homeland and marry a Spanish señorita, one as yet undiscovered by this golfing enthusiast from across the sea.
The story was reported by “Tiger Times” staff member Jan Hurst who is seen (along with Tony Marimon) in the photo above.

The article had the headline below:

GOLF BRINGS TONY EDUCATION

The article read:

¿Se habla Espanol? I searched madly in my English-Spanish Dictionary and after a few minutes deliberation I said, “No”. There standing in front of me was a young man by the name of Tony Marimon, a foreign student from Spain. Tony, a freshman, just recently came from Madrid, where his four brothers live. Just how Señor Marimon came to the United States is quite a story in itself. Five years ago when Tony was a caddy at the Puerta Hierra Country Club in Madrid, an American traveler by the name of Jacqueline Cochran Odium played golf there. Asked if he would like to come to America, Tony answered, “Yes”! Mrs. Odium since then has sponsored Tony through two years of high school and has started him on his college career. Tony’s plans for the future are that he intends to finish his college and get a degree in business. Then he’s going back home to Spain where he plans to go into business and marry a little Spanish girl. As for golf, he still sticks to it for a hobby; it seems to bring him luck.

There are only 3 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five-year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college. Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library. For copyright purposes, all images originating from Riverside City College publications and the District's Office of Strategic Communications and Relations are the property of the Riverside Community College District.