

*Just Another Singer With A Song* An autobiography by Ronnie Tourso

*For Todd...*

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## FOREWORD

February 1998

It began innocently enough with a computer program called 'The Ultimate Family Tree *DELUXE*,' an innocuous Christmas Present in 1996 given to me by my significant other of thirteen years, Valerie Humphreys. While we have not married legally...no licensed, church sanctioned union could hold a stronger bond than the love we share for each other. Both of us have been married and divorced once and our relationship is so good that (while the prospect of making it legal is always a consideration) we figure why tinker with success? Val had recently (a couple of years earlier) received a book about her ancestry, written by a relative (who coincidentally was born the same date as I am) who had done an extensive search of their genealogy. I was impressed and, at the time, mentioned that I should do some checking about my ancestors. Val thought this program would give me a start and it looked pretty comprehensive...well...

*Deluxe* as defined in Webster's Dictionary means elaborate; elegant; of especially high quality. Consider this definition before you buy anything that's described as *DELUXE*. Trying to install this program into my computer was like trying to put a 1986, 5.7 liter, fuel injected air conditioned GM engine into a '62 Volkswagen Beetle. The computer I had at the time was 'the Beetle' and therefore incapable of taking on the Ultimate Tree program...it required huge amounts of space that I did not have available. So, I put the program in a closet figuring 'someday'. I was busy at the time writing an album for myself and did not have the time anyway.

But now...I have this new computer...

## INTRODUCTION

### 'Tourso or Turso', That Is The Question!

I don't know when the question's seed began to germinate, or when it first broke ground, or when it grew so large as to no longer be ignored. I *do* know that it was always there, lurking in the shadows of my mind, only to vanish amid the preponderance of more important questions that littered the landscape of day-to-day living. But at some point in everyone's life, from somewhere deep in the recesses of the subconscious, our eventually impending mortality springs from its camouflaged aerie, rises somewhat like the Phoenix and screams, "Who are you...what are you? Where have you been and where are you going? Where do you come from and what do you leave behind?" And, as it has echoed throughout time immemorial, the big question that in younger days seemed irrelevant, becomes an almost obsessive quest: "Why are you...you?" It is that obsession which had (and still has) me in its grasp and refuses to relent. And so I began 'The Quest'...for myself...but even more for my son, who will also one day ask the same questions.

'The Quest' began as a simple genealogical search; an exercise dealing with black and white issues: names, births, deaths...fill in the blanks. No abstracts here...just point and click. As instructed, by various resources regarding genealogy, I used myself as its starting point and started the retro-process. Gradually, yet inexorably, the work began to take on color, and before long, it seemed to have a life of its own. As I traveled deeper and deeper into the back roads of the lives that led up to my existence (and onto the highway of my own), I found that the answers to the aforementioned questions began to reveal themselves like out of the smoke of some grand David Copperfield illusion. I wasn't expecting it. I just wanted to trace the bloodlines back as far as I could...this was supposed to be the nuts and bolts, the instruction booklet, if you will. It turned out to be so much more. Because somewhere in that backtrack, it was there. There...like a fine thread intricately woven amid the fabric of my ancestry, was a cipher for the riddles of my life. It's not anywhere specifically, yet it is everywhere... it's like something you can sense peripherally but when you try to find and focus on it, it's gone; like trying to trace the track of a feverish firefly in heat, or that annoying, blurring, jelly-goo-gunk floating elusively in your eye. But, as elusive as it is, it begs to be discovered. I knew (instinctively) that the only way to put all of it into perspective and sharpen my focus was to examine my *own* life...to find the texture and the color that I added to the fabric that is my ancestry. So that's what I did. I began to write it down, mostly for historical record...but also because I just felt that I *needed* to. In so doing, I came to understand that I am only a small part of a larger whole – we all 'know' and acknowledge that basic tenet, but I never really understood it; I have a place in all that was, that is, and that will be the genealogical history of my family and I offer it here as part of that

history. I have a sincere hope that you will enjoy it. I beg your indulgence if it seems narcissistic...I truly do not mean it to be such. Not now. I am guilty of being narcissistic at some times over the course of my lifetime (as you will see), I'm sure we all have, but not very often and not for a very long time. My elders taught me better than that.

I was born the only son to Irish and Italian parents in the Irish/Italian neighborhood of Woodside, Queens, New York. I have two sisters, both younger than I: LynnAnn and Stacey, respectively. My father's (Anthony) side were Tourso's, of course, and my mother's (Mildred) side, Kroll. My father is pure Italian (well...almost). My Dad recently found out that he had an aunt that was Irish...probably married in and not blood) while my mother was 80% Irish and 20% a mixture of German and English. Mom had two sisters: Alma (Mickey) and Martha. She told me that the German was mixed with Austrian and Hungarian, but...she believed the confusion was probably a consequence of World War II. My maternal Grandfather (Hugo Kroll) was mostly German but was hesitant to use the nomenclature at the risk of being associated with that fascist regime, so he (probably) concocted the Austria-Hungary mix in the 1940's so as not to engender any misconception of Germanic (Arian) genes. My maternal Grandmother (Alma Kroll) was of the Devine family (pure Irish) out of Londonderry and immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1800's. She had two sisters: Mae Klein nee Devine, and Lillian DiBenedetto nee Devine. My paternal Grandmother's family was from Calabria and named Lanzarotti, which became Lazarto. Her name was Genueffe or Genevieve (American convention - Jenny). No one knows why Lanzarotti became Lazarto...probably just American convention or a mistake at the immigration station. My paternal Grandfather's family was from Naples. As for their legal surnames? You can take your pick. My grandfather Joe had four brothers; all born here in the U.S.; three of them have Turso on their birth certificates, two have Tourso. Again, no one knows why. But everyone from my father's family agrees that my Great-grandfather's name was Raphael TURSO. Either way...my birth certificate reads Ronald William *Tourso*. Mom named me after Ronald Wilson Reagan, she said that she thought he was a great actor. I call myself Ronnie Turso.