

## THE BODOS: FROM ITALY TO THE RANCH

By Amber Lark

Growing up in Italy, Rosetta Bodo was a hard worker. Little did she know that her labors in her native country were just the prelude to an arduous but rewarding life in America. She was born Rosalia "Rosetta" Ballegio on July 18, 1885 in the city of Cirié, in the Torino Province of Italy. Her father operated a barbershop while her mother ran a restaurant in the downstairs section of the family's home. When Rosetta was 10 years old, she went to work at a textile factory for 10 hours a day. After her factory shift, she would come home to do chores and wait on tables at the restaurant. Due to the hard life she endured as a child, Rosetta vowed to marry the first man who asked her. That man turned out to be Mike Bodo.

Mike was also born in the Province of Torino, Italy but he travelled to America and back before he met Rosetta. He was born Michele Bodoira on November 6, 1882. When he was 16, he moved to America with his mother, stepfather and various brothers and sisters. Michele's stepfather, Francesco, had worked on the Simplon Tunnel which went through the French Alps to connect France and Italy. With the extension of narrow gauge railways into more mining towns, new mining jobs were opening up in Colorado. American companies were recruiting European miners like Francesco to work in Colorado.

Michele found work at the Durango Smelter. For convenience at the Smelter's payroll department, Michele Bodoira's name was Americanized to Mike Bodo. Each week on payday, Mike would give his paycheck to his mother, but kept a few dollars to spend at the saloon. One night, Mike had been gambling at the roulette wheel. He only had one nickel left, so he decided to try his luck at roulette one last time. He won and he kept winning. By the end of the night, Mike had won somewhere between \$7,000 and \$8,000. With his new found wealth, Mike quit his job at the Smelter and returned to Italy to find a wife.

In 1905, Mike brought Rosetta back to the United States on a steamship. She was in steerage class and not allowed to go up on deck. She remembered being stuck with other seasick women and children below deck for the entire voyage across the Atlantic. Immigration records show the couple arrived in New York City on May 14, 1905. She was held on Ellis Island for two or three days in quarantine. She did not know any English. Once released, they boarded the train for Colorado.

When the couple arrived in Durango, they stayed with Mike's parents for about a year. The family lived in the "Mexican Flats" neighborhood which was in the area of present-day Santa Rita Park. Despite its name, the neighborhood was home to immigrants from around the world. Here, Rosetta gave birth to Mike Bodo Jr. on May 31, 1906.

Later that year, Mike Sr. and Rosetta moved their small, young family to Porter, so Mike Sr. could work at the coal mine. The mining town of Porter was located off of present day Wildcat Canyon Road (CR 141). While in Porter, Rosetta operated a boarding house for around 20 miners. She offered beds, meals, and washing for about \$20 in gold per man each month.

After about a year in Porter, the Bodo family moved to the southeastern Colorado coal mining towns of Scofield and Trinidad between 1907 and 1909. In both

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Rosetta Bodo (standing) with her family in 1916 from left to right: Mike Jr., Archie, Vernon, Mike Sr., and Rose. The Bodo family started out by renting land. Their ranch holdings grew over time to include the land that is now Bodo Park and much of Lake Nighthorse. Bodo Collection, Animas Museum photo archives

towns, Mike Sr. worked in the mines and Rosetta ran another boarding house. On January 1, 1908, the day the family moved from Scofield to Trinidad, Rosetta somehow managed to also give birth to their second child, Rose. Eventually, the family moved back to Durango where Archie Bodo was born on May 6, 1909.

After the Bodo family moved back to Durango, they decided to take up farming along Junction Creek. They started a small truck garden and sold vegetables to local businesses and families door-to-door. They then moved onto 32 acres which they rented in Ridges Basin on March 1, 1912. Rosetta gave birth to their last child, Vernon, on August 9, 1912.

The Bodos slowly acquired land in Ridges Basin and in the 1920s, the family started buying cattle. Mike Sr. concentrated on the farming, while Mike Jr. took control over the cattle ranching. Rosetta kept a Labor Record Book which is now in the collections of the Animas Museum. It listed everyone who ever worked on the ranch, but Mike still handled the payroll. Mike Bodo Sr. died in 1960. Rosetta Bodo outlived her husband for a few years, and died in 1968.

The Bodo farm passed to the next generation. After more than 60 years of ranching and farming, the Bodos decided it was time for a change. They divided the land and donated a large portion to the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Much of this land eventually became part of Lake Nighthorse. Another portion of the land was sold to be developed as the Bodo Industrial Park.

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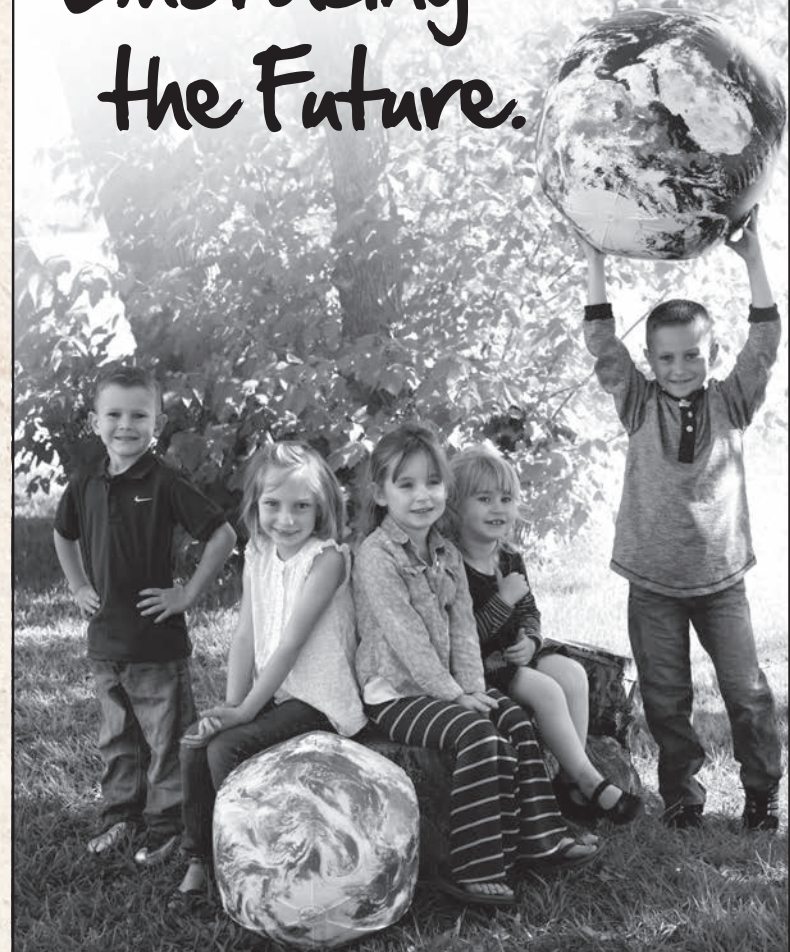
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