



Clarion Review ★★★★★

Chocolate Moon

G. Zottolo Bonpensiero

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978-1-4537-5960-8

To support their families, postwar Sicilian immigrants fish the coastal waters of San Diego, casting their purse seines to catch bluefin tuna. They work to blend into their American communities, while trying to preserve traditions from the old country.

Author G. (Joe) Zottolo Bonpensiero, who learned to fish in the waters off San Diego with his adoptive father, Turri, recreates the adventurous, sometimes frightening, and always hard life of those who went to sea on small boats to make a living. Some, like his birth father, never returned.

A fictionalized autobiography, *Chocolate Moon* uses real family names, including the author's own (Joey), to recount his voyages at age nine on the Giuseppina, Turri's fishing craft. Turri is concerned that the boat and crew have fallen under the evil eye (*mala oochio*), known to be part of the mystical beliefs of the Sicilian community. Another evil force is at work through a person identified as Trinakria, a spiritual advisor to Turri's mother. Readers are shown from the outset that Trinakria is really Joey's Uncle Nicola Dipravato, who abuses boys and girls, and they later discover that this pedophile operates with the knowledge of Turri's mother.

One of the book's most dramatic moments comes when Dipravato goes along on a fishing trip, falls overboard, and encounters a great white shark. Even more dramatic is Turri's confrontation with his elderly mother. He confronts her about Dipravato's misdoings as she continues to defend Trinakria, her spiritual advisor. In an angry rage, "Turri then put his open hand to his mouth and bit down savagely. Viciously he tore into his hand ripping flesh, bone and cartilage as the blood splattered. His mother had viewed this nasty Sicilian sign of contempt and self-abuse before...If his words went unheeded someone would die."

The book is tender, humorous, and graphic all at once. It takes its title from an incident when Joey and a cousin gave a chocolate laxative to crew members of the Giuseppina; they were seen "mooning" as they relieved themselves over the boat's sides.

The story would have a smoother flow if the author had chosen to produce either a work of fiction or nonfiction, rather than combining the two and speaking of himself in the third person. Additional editing and proofreading would also benefit this book, with special attention paid to the author's problematic punctuation. Some names are inexplicably italicized, and Sicilian words and phrases that are easily discernible from the context are translated into English, despite the fact that there is a glossary. The frequent translations break the dramatic action.

Photographs of boats, purse seine, and family members from the author's childhood complement the heartfelt story of a bygone era in San Diego's Little Italy. The author clearly loves the community in which he was raised and the fishing—a life that wasn't easy and was often dangerous.

LINDA SALISBURY (July 5, 2011)

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