

What's All The Fuss? Asks Italian Who Changed From Girl To Boy

Editor's Note: The world was startled recently when word came out of a small Italian village about a peasant family whose "daughters" were being changed into sons in almost wholesale numbers. United Press International sent a reporter to visit the family for the firsthand story which follows.

By ERNEST SAKLER

United Press International
GIFFONE, Italy (UPI) — The young man was black-haired, very small, belligerent, and didn't look at all as though he'd ever been a girl.

Standing there in the field, a hoe on his shoulder and his pretty, 15-year-old wife, Serafina, by his side, Vittorio Alvaro didn't want to answer questions.

Yes, he was 23 years old, Vittorio conceded, and it was just three years ago that he went to a clinic and became a girl-into-boy. But it wasn't much of a story. Why so much interest?

To Vittorio's fellow-villagers, as to Vittorio himself, it was nothing to get excited about. He had never behaved like a girl anyway — "always running after girls," he admitted with a grin. The village didn't find it too exciting that a person's sex should be set straight. That's what those hospitals in the cities were for.

To doctors, however, Vittorio and

his family were wonderful specimens. There were no less than five cases in the family of women who had or could have turned man. One of Vittorio's sisters had done so, at the same time he was "corrected." Another was going to be. And then there were Vittorio's two aunts, his mother's sisters, who could have used sex-change surgery if it had been advanced enough in their time.

Vittorio finally told his story reluctantly, letting it be known that as a hard-working peasant high up in the hills of Calabria ("it is a poor land") he didn't have time to stand there gabbling.

As Vittorio told it, it didn't sound like much of a story.

When he was born he was a girl and they called him Rosa Marina and they combed his hair into tresses. But he never quite felt like a girl and would rove the fields climbing trees and walls and fighting with boys and doing other ungirlish things. He would play cards in the inns and go around at night strumming serenades on his mandolin.

Oh, yes, there was his younger sister, Maria Antonia, who was also like that, only shyer. And there were the two aunts, Pasqualina Sorbara who is now dead and Michelina who is alive, in her 50s,

wears men's shoes and carries a whip.

For a few summers Vittorio — at that time still Rosa Marina — worked as a housemaid in nearby Cinquefronde. Then Rosa Marina heard of a girl who became a man in the town of Cittanova and was called Edoardo Simonetta. She decided she wanted a sex change too.

It took some time to get a doctor interested, Vittorio said. But Dr. Salvatore Musumeci, a surgeon in Catania, Sicily, heard of the case. In 1955, Rosa Marina and Maria Antonia went to his clinic and on July 23 that year became Vittorio and Antonio.

Antonio is now 19 and helps out in the fields. He was away from home, looking for seasonal work in northern Italy. He hasn't found a girl friend yet because he is shy and also because he wants to marry a rich girl now that his name has been in the papers.

It took three years, until this summer, to get the sex changes recognized by a court order, and the bureaucratic machinery hasn't quite caught up with it yet. In the general elections in May this year, Vittorio had to vote with a woman's certificate.

He is not eligible for military service because he is a family

head now, but Antonio may be drafted next year.

That was about all Vittorio had to tell, except for the fact that he has a three-year-old sister, Francesca Giuseppina, who also needs a sex change and will get it in the next few months.

In Catania, Dr. Musumeci said it had taken him considerable time and biological and psychological tests to decide if Vittorio had better be a boy or a girl.

"Vittorio Alvaro was a typical instance of a genuine hermaphrodite," the Sicilian surgeon said. "He had both inward and outward characteristics of both sexes. Biological tests failed to prove decisive, but psychological tests showed the male side was predominant in his character and I made my decision on the basis of that."

The case of Antonio was simpler, Dr. Musumeci said. He was a "false hermaphrodite of the female type," meaning that his inner organs were male and only outward characteristics were female.

Both were prepared psychologically before being operated on, Dr. Musumeci said. They were placed in the male section of the clinic so they would become accustomed to being among men. Their long hair was first combed and then

cut. Both were perfectly normal and fit to marry and have children when they left the clinic, Dr. Musumeci said.

The surgeon said such sex change operations "are not exceptional" but require considerable skill and knowledge. He said the most interesting side of the Giffone cases was their clear hereditary factor, he believed centuries of marriages between close kin in the small hill village played a role in it.

The heredity, Dr. Musumeci said, came from the family of Vittorio's mother, Caterina Sorbara. She herself is normal, but the two masculine-looking aunts were her sisters.

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Papal Farm To Establish Angus Herd

Breeders of registered Aberdeen-Angus cattle in the United States are providing a foundation breeding herd for the Papal Farm near Rome, Italy, according to Monsignor L. G. Ligutti, executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference of America with headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa.

The desire to place a fine breeding herd of beef cattle on the Papal Farm occurred when Pope Pius XII and Dr. Bonomelli, manager of the farm, became concerned over the lack of beef cattle in Italy and Southern Europe. They approached Monsignor Ligutti, seeking to remedy the situation with the best type of beef cattle and he urged that they obtain Aberdeen-Angus from the United States.

Their plan is to start their Papal Farm beef herd with at least 14 registered Aberdeen-Angus heifers and one bull, hoping that the generosity of American breeders will make this number possible. As the herd increases, bulls and heifers will be given, not sold, to proven worthy poor farmers and to charitable institutions (hospitals, homes for the aged, orphanages, etc.) that operate farms. This long range program should, within a reasonable number of years, greatly increase the supply of quality beef as well as elevate the standard of living of many Southern European farmers. It will also aid in expanding the Angus breed in the world.

A few Angus breeders in the Midwest have already donated a number of registered cattle for the foundation herd. Don C. Houston of Iowa Angus Farm, Dunlap, Iowa, has contributed a bull and has offered his farm as an assembly point for the herd prior to its shipment to Italy.

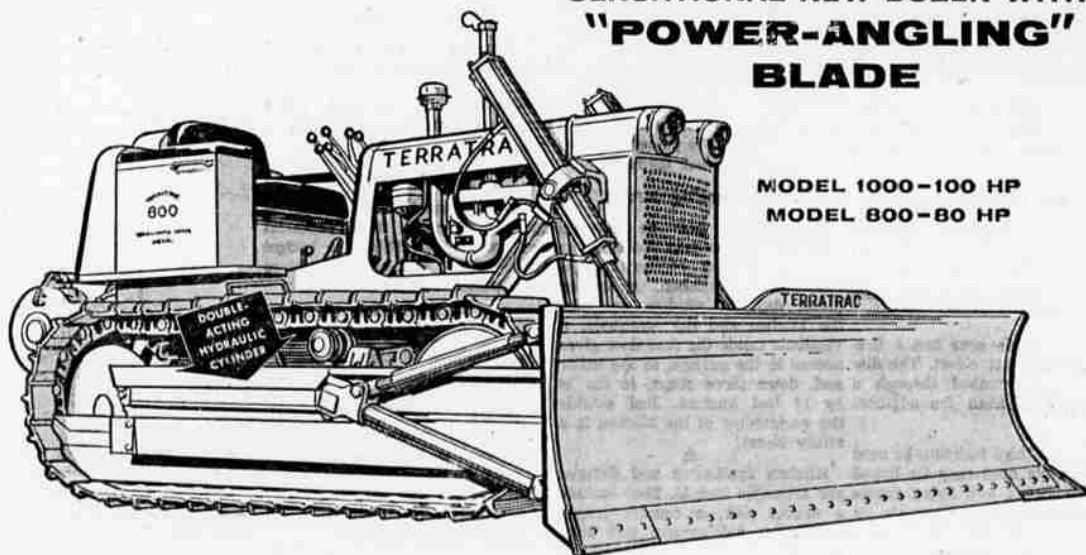
Other heifers have been offered from herds in Iowa, South Dakota, and Montana, but a few more are needed to complete the herd. Anyone wishing to assist in this program by giving a registered yearling Angus heifer should notify Mr. Houston. The Rev. Leo J. Gannon, Harlan, Iowa, has been appointed treasurer of the funds needed for paying the cost of transportation of the cattle to the Papal Farm which is 15 miles south of Rome.

STAGE RAIN

NEW YORK (UPI) — Under orders from director Joshua Logan, Jo Mielziner is designing a set for the forthcoming "The World of Suzie Wong" which will include a rainfall.

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