

Island of Hope/Island of Tears

The relief of sighting the shore
was tempered by
the overwhelming fear
of being sent back to Italy.

Maria Antonia
was aware of the consequences
of rejection at Ellis Island
...the thought of a return passage,
subjecting her children to
this utter cruelty, again,
was unfathomable.

The infant, Michaelangelo,
was gravely ill
yet somehow she had to
make it through the inspection
...children in tow...
without any of them being detained
with a chalk mark
that would identify them as questionable
and direct them to the
Board of Special Inquiry.

The daily crowds of 3rd class arrivals
grew to 5,000 strong on most days
...immigrants were herded
from one processing
station to the next-
the Registry Room
for the medical inspection,
the Judgment Hall
for the physical exam.

Ninety-two years later,
in a South Jersey nursing home,
I spoke with my Great Aunt Frances
who was born as an American citizen
to her immigrant mother, Maria Antonia,
and between breakfast and bingo
she described her family arrival in Ellis Island
by simply stating,
*"I heard stories about that place.
They shove you around like pigs."*

So, for many it is remembered...
L' sola dell Lagrime,
The Island of Tears.