

THE GRACE OF MAYOR LA GUARDIA

LaGuardia Airport in New York is named for Fiorello LaGuardia, mayor of New York City from 1934 to 1945. It began as an idea with an outburst from the mayor upon the arrival of his TWA flight at Newark (New Jersey) Airport – the only commercial airport serving the New York region at the time.



LaGuardia said that his ticket read “New York,” and he demanded to be taken to New York. He ordered the plane to be flown to Brooklyn’s Floyd Bennett Field, giving an impromptu press conference along the way about the need for an airport.

The incident shows the energetic, charismatic figure LaGuardia was. He is acclaimed as one of the greatest mayors in American history.

As mayor of New York during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of World War II, he was adored by New Yorkers. He was called “the Little Flower” because he was only 5-foot-2 in stature, wore a carnation in his lapel, and *Fiorello* in Italian means “little flower.”

LaGuardia was a very compassionate man. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman, charged with stealing a loaf of bread, was brought before him. She told LaGuardia that her daughter’s husband had deserted her, that her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper from whom the bread was stolen refused to drop the charges.

“It’s a real bad neighborhood, Your Honor,” the man told the mayor. “She’s got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.”

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, “I’ve got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions – 10 dollars or 10 days in jail.

But even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero, saying. “Here is the ten-dollar fine, which I now remit, and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom 50 cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.”

(more)

The next day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered old lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren – 50 cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced grocery store owner. And, the newspapers added, some 70 petty criminals, people with traffic violations and New York City policemen – each of whom had just paid 50 cents for the privilege of doing so – gave the mayor a standing ovation.

What a remarkable act of grace by Mayor LaGuardia!

Grace is defined by *Merriam-Webster* as “an act or instance of kindness, courtesy, or clemency” and as “a virtue coming from God.”



Associates of Life Care and Century Park are endowed with grace, and it is demonstrated every day in their service to those entrusted to us.

Thank God for grace – grace that we receive, and grace that we can give!

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter