



## **CLARA CENTRONE, President 2009 – 2011 In The SPOTLIGHT**

In 1928, my mother arrived in New York from Italy after five years of not seeing her husband, who came to America to make a better life for his family. He had left his wife pregnant and with one other son who was about one year old.

I was born about nine months after her arrival in New York. I was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 41<sup>st</sup> Street. We later moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Streets. Trolley cars were the vogue and the elevated train passed overhead. I went to parochial school on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. I walked to school, in those days it was safe to do so. I loved school and often helped the nuns by bringing the

crying children to their class. We, the children of the neighborhood, played time, potsy and watched the boys pitch pennies. In the winter, we made igloos in the middle of the street with the mounds of snow. We, the family, moved to another apartment because the landlord said she was going to put steam heat in the apartment. In the previous house we had to stoke coal in the furnace ourselves. After a couple of years of promises and no steam heat, father moved us to another apartment between 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets because they had steam heat.

My father had a business and a few trucks and the garage rents were going higher and higher. With this in mind, he continued to look for better living conditions and garage space. Viola! He found a house in Woodside that had a large building in the rear that had been a screen and storm window factory. He was able to buy it cheaply because the man had gone bankrupt. It was ideal for us, as we had a new house and space for my father's vehicles. I could not get into parochial school and to go to another one, I would have had to take a bus, so my mother sent me to public school where I learned to sew and cook. When I graduated 6<sup>th</sup> grade from P.S. 11, I went to Junior High School 125. After graduating from there, I went to W.C. Bryant High School and enrolled in an academic curriculum. On June 1, 2006, I went to my 60<sup>th</sup> reunion. It was good to see some of the people from my early days of high school.

After school, I worked for my father doing his bookkeeping; e.g., doing statements and speaking to his customers. He did not want me to go to work for strangers. I wanted to go to college and become a lawyer, but being an old fashioned Italian, this was not to be. I worked for my father in every business he owned. He was an ice man who sold to large hotels and restaurants, like Delmonico, Allerton, Ritz Tower, Billy the Oysterman, Bal Tabarin (French nightclub with Apache dancers), Nedicks, Dartmouth Club and many others.

I got married at 19. I proceeded to have three girls and one son. In 1960, my sister-in-law passed away from heart surgery, leaving five children behind. My husband told my brother we would take the five children because family wanted to split the children. I told him he was crazy. That meant we would have nine children, plus my brother for one year, made a total of 12 people in the house. At that time, we lived in a three bedroom home. The children ranged in age from 18 months to 15 years old. We made

sleeping arrangements work by utilizing two Danish couches, bunk and trundle beds, Castro hassocks which were made into single beds and a port a crib. It made for an interesting time. When we watched TV, the children would lie on the floor, becoming wall to wall people. My brother finally got married again and his children went with him. About eight months later, he also died and the children were back with me. That's another story to be told.

We had lots of fun and interesting times together. But things changed. My husband had a heart attack and for seven years I watched him when he slept to see him take his every breath. I was then forced to go to work. I started working for the AAA (not Alcoholics Anonymous) counting coupons which AAA gave. Six months later, I became a cashier at their office in Jamaica, Queens. I sold the coupons, issued airline tickets, tour documents and accepted payments for insurance, tours and cruises. I took a test and went to marketing trips (trip tiks). After a couple of years of marketing, I took another test and became a trained consultant on telephones. A couple of years later, I went to World Wide Travel. So, after working for AAA 20 years, I was forced into retirement because they wanted to have part time help which would get rid of higher paying consultants.

By this time, most of the children were either out of the house or married.

In 1935, my daughter and I came to visit my brother who had remarried and moved to Las Vegas. I had been to Las Vegas as a travel consultant, but never dreamed of the changes I saw when we came in 1995. We returned in August to see how hot it would be, as we had come in February. When we came in August, my daughter and her husband went traveling and I took off looking for a place to buy because my daughter said this would be a place to retire. She bought the condo where I just relocated from in North Las Vegas. I came out in November to do a walk through and never wanted to go back home. I did go back to NY for the holidays and left January 1, 1996, just in time to miss a 17 inch snow fall.

After that experience, I started to join different organizations to keep busy. I joined Senior Friends, now known as H2O, later Derfelt Signing Seniors, Art Classes, AARP, Italian Catholic Federation, Catholic Daughters, Forever Young, Single Seniors at Derfelt, docent at Spring Mt. Ranch, volunteered at Mountain View Hospital, visiting sick members, SAWA, and recently Club Italian, all of which kept me busy, besides seeing plays at the Las Vegas Little Theatre, UNLV-Bailey Theatre and Las Vegas Art Museum.

The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary is my favorite not for profit organization where my friends are the nicest. I joined SAWA in 2001 and Ida Grieco was my sponsor, may her soul rest in peace, she passed in July 2013. Loved every minute of 14 years volunteering in Hospitality, Recruitment, Solicitation, Modeling & Registering guests at our many Nearly New Fashion Shows, as Chair Lady for many Christmas Teas. Voted by my beloved membership to serve as Vice President, 2007 - 2009 & President, 2009 - 2011 "Doing The Most Good."