



Carmela Criscione
ROBS History Project
May 6, 2001

Carmela Criscione was named holding to her Italian family's tradition whereby the first girl was named after her father's mother. Antoinette was her godmother's name. Carmela Antoinette Paola Criscione is her full given name. Paola was her aunt's name who was also her confirmation sponsor. Traditionally, the first boy would be named after the father's father, her brother's name was Sal. She never had a nickname at school and always responded to Carmela. It was when she started work that people began to call her Carm or Carmie. In her immediate family she was known as Minnutsa. The name was a diminutive of Carmelina. She knew she was in trouble when her mother called her Minnutsa.

Carmela's brother Sal was married to Marabeth. They had two children, Vincent and T'Rea. They are big Star Trek family. T'Rea was named after Spock's father's first wife. Carmela is close with her niece and nephew.

Carm was living in Bay Shore but not in the same house her father built for the family. It had stood on an acre and a half with a one hundred and thirty-five foot driveway. Carmela smiled when she told us that she was probably the only employee in the entire Brentwood School District who cringed when she heard the following day's forecast would be snow. Once her brother Sal got married she was the one who had to shovel that driveway. She also had to mow the lawn on the property. It soon got to be too much. She and her mother made the decision to remain in the area and moved one or two miles from where they'd been living.

Her father had built their house. He started construction on it in 1954, the same year her Mom became pregnant with little sister. Some of Carmela's earliest memories were of packing up the car on a Friday afternoon and of her parents picking them up at school and *going out to the country*, which is what they called it at the time. They loved Bay Shore. It was home. Brooklyn was the place where they had to live from Monday to Friday.

Carmela's father had work in construction. He worked on the Empire State Building and the United Nations when they were being built. The living room floor in the house on Walbridge Avenue came from the UN. When he first came to the United States from Italy he came to live with one of his sisters. His brother-in-law told him, "*you have to go to work.*" The only work he could find was in construction. One of his first jobs was the Empire State Building. Eventually he worked his way up to foreman. He worked on all kinds of big jobs. He joined the cement workers union. The last big job that he was assigned was the construction of the government buildings in the State Capital at Albany.

His dad was sixteen years older than her mom. Her parents had bought the property of Walbridge Avenue in Bay Shore in the 1940's even before they got married. The only means of getting to their property at that time was via Sunrise Highway or Montauk Highway. Fifth Avenue was a dirt road. One when they asked for directions a man wgi waved his hand pointing in a direction and said, "*Walbridge*

Avenue is over there somewhere." Her dad realized that people were going to be moving out from the city to the suburbs. That area of Bay Shore was comprised primarily of large tracts of land. Everybody had either an acre or more. They had two acres. Her father give a half acre to his best friend to build his own house. That friend was a plumber by trade so he did the work required on her father's house.

Carmela's father had designed an octagon-shaped poured concrete house. It had a flat roof with cement pillars connected by pipes. She said, *I would go up the staircase and follow the sun. Becoming a veritable sundial. It was great. Before he completed the roof of the detached garage I could see the drive-in theatre on Fifth Avenue. He bought us a telescope and on summer nights we would wait until dark, go upstairs to the roof and watch a movie. It was wonderful.*

Insert by editor: It was a bit ironic and something the Criscione family may themselves have not been aware back then, how part of the Bay Shore/Brentwood story intersected with the name of Orson Fowler, forever associated with architectural design of their home and the beginnings of modern psychology. Coexisting with Modern Times and prior to the naming of Brentwood-in-the-Pines, he introduced the eight sided architectural design of their Bay Shore home to the world. Fowler posited that people were influenced and changed by their structures. Echoing a similar view years later, Winston Churchill once said it this way, "Man makes the buildings and then the buildings make the man". Several surviving examples are found in the Brentwood of today. The original Modern-Times one room school house (1853) serves as one example, of school, family dwelling and historic touchstone of the long gone, far from forgotten spirit of Modern Times. In Jason Klosowicz's book, *Images of America - Brentwood* the Criscione round house can be seen on page 123.

As we talked Carmela reminisced about those times as a young girl filled with an emerging sense of history she would let her imagination take flight. She'd muse about the future and what might happen when in one or two thousand years archeologists came to Bay Shore and discovered the gigantic brick barbeque her father built to hold twenty pounds of charcoal, a cement patio and cement table where they would have barbeque feasts. *They are going think the round house is some kind of mythological structure like Stonehenge and the table which had a hole in the middle for umbrella was used for human sacrifice. They'll say "we found bones in the barbeque pit." They will have missed it completely.*

Her father started working on the round house in the 1940's. He began building the real house in 1954. At first it looked to her like the Sahara Desert and she was an archeologist, and then it was Algeria and they would play French Foreign Legion. The whole family worked on the house. Brentwood then was pretty much still country. A lot of houses were starting to be built with only basements completed. People would live in the basement while the first floor was being built. You could still see them every once and while. It appeared that some people never quite finished their houses.

Her father taught Carmela's brother all manner of building trades. Her mother and she were responsible for the ceiling. Her brother hung the doors. They all helped him with brick and cement work. It was something they did on weekends. They lived next door to Guy DiPietro's in-laws, the Louis Scavo family. Their three story brick house was already there. They lived there all year round even before the DiPietros came to Brentwood. If Louis needed to do something, he'd walk over and borrow her father's tools. If her father needed something he'd walk over and borrow one of Mr. Scavo's tools. If there was something big being done, like the roof being raised, everybody in the neighborhood would come to pitch in and help.

One of her father's projects was the New York Coliseum in midtown. She told us how one day when they were still living in Brooklyn, her mother called the kids into the house from where they were playing outside. *Why, it's still early and we wanted to play. "No, no, you have come inside." We'll turn on the television.. "No, I don't want you to turn the television on.' But we didn't do anything!* It seems the whole project had collapsed. Her father came home with two FBI men. They didn't know why it had

had happened but her dad might have answers. Her father told them that he had to go home because his wife would be having hysterics. He explained to them that Carm's little sister was handicapped both physically and mentally and her mother was very nervous. Her dad had to go home to reassure her as well as his children. She remembers how her father took her mother into the kitchen to explain why he had to go back with these men and help them make sense of the reason for the collapse. Meanwhile she and her brother were sitting in the living room staring at these two very uncomfortable FBI men.

She described her dad as a very patient, understanding man who was very tolerant. They lived in Flatbush, Brooklyn during her early years. It was a close knit community. He built the house in Brooklyn too. There were probably three or four styles of houses on the block with theirs being the one-stand-alone design. Their next door neighbor was black and the other next to them were Chinese. Everybody else was Jewish. Carmela could not remember a single problem among the neighbors while they were growing up there. The one thing they did experience, however, was due to the general ignorance of matters related to the handicapped, concerned her youngest sister who as brain injured at birth and suffered from a hole in her heart. There were some parents who did want their children to play with them. There were some relatives, cousins at the time *who fell off because it was in the family*. Her father had a simple rule, *If you want the Crisciones you get all the Crisciones. If you don't want all the Crisciones, who don't get any of the Crisciones*. They learned about compassion and responsibility. They learned about tolerance and how in this world you have to accept people and be understanding.

There was a young man who lived further up the block who had muscular dystrophy. It was very difficult for him to speak. Every day when she would come home from school, Carmela would stop and say hello to Michael. But sometimes, she would be tired and come home by way of the other side of the street. And on those days she would say, *"That's rotten"*. And then she would cross over the street and say *Hello* to Michael. On High Holy Days her brother would go over and wheel Michael to synagogue because his parents couldn't. *It was a given. It was what you did*.

One of the things about the Brentwood Schools that impressed her when they came to the District was the Special Education Program. Her sister was considered too handicapped to be helped. The Director of the time, Gabe Simches, came to the house and evaluated her. He was very kind. He told them that there weren't any services available that if her mother needed help at any time he could be called upon.

That's also when she realized that there was a Bilingual Program. In Brooklyn she hadn't ever known a Hispanic in school and she went to very big schools. She came across very few black kids at the time but didn't think there were any Hispanics. There was a smattering of Italians but Flatbush was predominantly Jewish. When she came to school in Brentwood it was to a much wider spectrum of students. She felt it was a better preparation for the world she was going to be living in. She thought that because when you leave your world you are joining a much bigger world and neighborhood in which there were many different types of people. It then became home.

Her mother, Mary, was a very funny lady. She always had a good attitude. Carm's sister-in-law's father sometimes didn't have a very happy personality and she once said to her, *"Gee, it's a shame, your father must have had a really difficult time growing up during the Depression."* *"No his father owned a barber shop. He had plenty of discretionary money growing up."* Carm then said, *My mom had to quit school in the eighth grade. She had to help earn a salary. She told me that when she was little girl she walked the railroad tracks with her cousin picking up coal to bring home to supplement the heating. They lived in a three story house with her mother's youngest brother and his family. Nobody lived on the top floor because you couldn't heat it. The men would go fishing in the winter and come home with the catch. The women would go up to the third floor and hang the fish by the tails on clothes lines because it was like a cold storage.*

Her mom didn't work after she married. They had two houses and decided that they were going to come and live in Bay Shore. It was early 1963. The high school was on split session. Carmela was in the middle of her junior year when they moved from the city where she had attended Samuel J. Tilden High School. Her mother knew only how to sew. Split sessions worked out for them because Carmela would be home in the afternoon, her brother was home in the morning to care for their sister. Her mother worked in a sweatshop just past the railroad tracks on Wick's Road. All they had was Social Security so her work there was off the books. She got cheated a lot but couldn't complain.

Once Carmela started working and opportunity presented itself for her mother to call substitutes. She was the Sub Caller for the elementary level for twenty-eight years. She had a regular routine with them: give them the morning forecast, the skinny on the class that they were going to be in. They would confide in her about things. It was through her recommendation that some regular subs got jobs. *When she passed away the number of people who came was very touching. They all had stories about her. She had touched a lot of lives.*

Her brother became an engineer. He had a hard time because it was during that period when positions were few and far between. He now works for a medical supply company and designs instruments he helps test. Recently he required surgery. He asked his surgeon if he used Miltech surgical instruments. If not, he assured his surgeon, he would supply them. He learned that fortunately they did use Miltech instruments.

Carmela and her brother both graduated from Ross Building. She attended Ross while Sonderling was still under construction. He graduated two years later but also attended classes in and graduated from Ross.

She had never known her father's parents for they stayed in Italy. Her mother's parents had emigrated separately and only met after arriving in the US. Her grandmother was born in Ragusa and her grandfather was also from Sicily but a different town. Her grandfather also worked in the building trades but later found work in a shoe factory. Carmela loves shoes and to hear her explain it's because he would always bring home samples for her. She was just a little girl of three or four when she told her grandpa that she wanted taceddi (high heels). He took a little wedge of wood added a little strap across her instep. She was thrilled and went to show her grandma. She fell and tumbled down the stairs. Grandma said it wasn't Carmela's fault for falling but her Grandpa's for making the shoes.

Carmela's first job was working for the Brentwood School District. When her dad died she decided it would be better if she got a job and contributed to the family income. One of them would go to college. She says both could have gone but it would have been very difficult. She decided she'd get a job and hereby help the family finances.

When her dad died it was without leaving a will and her mother went to the only lawyer they knew who asked her *"What assets to you have?"* Her mother answered, *"I have two houses."* *"How much are they worth?"* *"To me? They're worth five hundred dollars"* (ed note: remember this is 1962). *"Oh, you have an estate of five hundred thousand dollars. Because you are a client of mine I will charge you only ten percent to process your husband's estate. And we have to be very careful about this because he left no will and you have minor children. If we don't do this right your two older children will go into foster care and your little girl will go into an institution."*

Carmela, who was fifteen years old and her brother thirteen said, *Mom this is wrong.* They sought help from Legal Aid. They referred them to an attorney in the same building as the one her mother had spoken to. Her mother didn't want to go see the Legal Aid attorney but Carmela said *We have to. This is*

ridiculous. They walked up all the stairs because her mother didn't want to bump into the other lawyer in the lobby. The new attorney listed to them and then asked "Do you have five dollars? They gave him the five dollars and he told them to go to lunch giving them the location of the best pastrami sandwiches in Brooklyn. When they returned at the given time he had all sorts of papers drawn up and said, "With your five dollars I went and applied for your mother to the Administrator of your father's estate. No one is going to put you in foster care. No one is going to take your little sister. The State, because your father died without a will, is going to appoint a co-administrator who will be a judge. But nothing bad is going to happen."

How much will we have to pay you? "I can't tell you. The court will decide how much I will get." He was paid very little. *This man worked for years and all he got was a pittance. The other attorney received a very token amount for the very little he had done.* It was at this time that Carmela decided she was going to work at something that would help people. She knew she had a facility for working with paper, dealing with bureaucracies and a logical type of mind that could follow through and she was very organized. She realized that at a time when you emotionally involved you can't be bothered with paperwork but you need someone who can help.

The very nice thing that this attorney did for them was a very long time ago but it affected what she would do with her life. But when she as eighteen years old she wasn't very sure how she was going to be able to implement this. She only had one year of typing with Bernadette Urbanchick. who would yell at her because she put her elbows on the table. *Clark Kent types with his elbow on the table, and it works for him,* she thought.

She decided to take the Civil Service test because she knew if you don't screw up for six months they can't fire you. She went to the Soldiers and Sailors Hall on Main Street near Mars Automotive and took the test. It took a few months before she got called. She was called by the police department but she didn't want that. She was called for Social Services but she didn't want that either. She was only eighteen years old, had never worked, and school was the only thing she knew. Family and school was all she knew. For her it had been a nurturing environment. Once upon a time she wanted to be a Social Studies Teacher so she could still remain in the school system. When Frank Mauro, the Business Manager at the time, interviewed her he saw she had no experience so he asked about her family and school. He then asked her two questions. "Do you know who Rita Brooks is? " No sir, she replied. "Can you start on Monday?"

Rita Brooks was District Principal Eugene Hoyt's secretary. District Principal was what they called the Superintendent of School at the time. Rita was known to be a difficult person. The girl who had been there before left on a Friday, watered the plants and said "Have a good weekend." and never returned. He needed someone who didn't know Rita Brooks...fast. Rita Brooks became one of Carmela's two major mentors in the secretarial field. She taught Carmela what **not** to do. Mary Villar taught her what **to do**. Mary never gave her a job that she would not do herself. At the time there was no Business Experience program where students helped out in offices. Carmela said," *Back then we were eighteen year old clerk typists. We got all the crummy jobs. While I was told that everyone took a turn making coffee and cleaning out the pot it was somehow always my turn. Washing out that huge coffee urn was a horror. The mimeograph machine and ditto machines were all mine too. When I came home my mother would wonder if I worked in a garage and not an office"*

Rita was Gene Hoyt's secretary. Mary was Leigh Stuart's secretary. They sat in a little office, there was a small hallway then Joe Dionne's office with his secretary and Carmela facing each other. She would look straight ahead and see Rita.

Rita would say, "Carmela", and she had to get up. "Would you hand this to Mrs. Villar?" She was right there sitting at the next desk. But they did not speak. So Carmela would hand the paper to Mrs. Villar. Mary never called Carmela. She'd wait until Rita went to lunch and put in on her desk.

One of Carmela's jobs was typing reference forms to be sent to the people listed on applications. Five references to an application together with a cover letter, and a business reply envelope. She had done a lot and they were all neat and stacked ready for the mailman. Bernadette Urbanchick had taught her well

Rita looked at them and said, "Oh, Carmela, you did these all wrong." How did I do them wrong? Miss. Urbanchick said, if it's a four line address it's single spaced and if it's a three line address it's a double space. They're perfect. "The state had to be capitalized". They are. "Oh, dear not capital N, capital Y. The whole state had to be capitalized, NEW YORK. I don't care how you were taught to do it in school. This is the way I want it. Do them over." Another time she asked that data cards be pulled. She gave Carmela a list. She couldn't find one. Kathleen O'Neill. She looked in all the O's, the N's, even the K's. She looked in her personnel folder. No Kathleen O'Neill. Rita said, "You must have misfiled the card, dear. You have to look through all the cards until you find it." Carmela found it under Zorn. The name had been changed in Rita's handwriting. She waited two or three weeks knowing how to approach her and said, "You know there are so many new teachers and they're all starting to get married and I forget the new names. If I kept a list with their married and maiden names I could look them up. "Well, if you think it will help you dear." They are still using an aka list in the office today.

They were great times. They were wonderful people and they taught her so much. She gave the district thirty-six years in all. She says the job she was hired for was the job she had when she left. They just kept adding things to it. She honestly believed, that she had *hit an inside the park home run with loaded bases, the first time at bat on the first pitch.* She said this in no uncertain terms. *I loved my job.* She loved the people she came in contact with and she loved being able to help people.

What she liked about working with difficult people was that it made her find something within herself that would put aside any animosity in order to do what was right. She couldn't help people she liked and not help people she didn't like. Carmela wanted to help everybody. She was so happy when the Human Resources Office was expanded because prior to that personnel record keeping was done all over the District. Clericals had personnel folders, B&G had folders but they were tack-ons to what was already being done in those offices. There was no one office to take care of the personnel needs of all those people. The office was expanded when Elaine Levy came and created the Support Office and made it fly. She knew that as carefully and comprehensively as she handled the teacher's records that same thing was now being done on the other side of the office and she was very happy.

Carmela had a great crew, she said with Eileen Kelly and Adrienne Eastman. They ran the office together and could read one another's minds. Each was there for the other and the employees. They became life-long friends; friends that were like family. The quality of the teamwork created in the Office could not be over stated.

Tom Hastings was the first Personnel Director and a wonderful boss. Guy DiPietro was marvelous. Early on in her career she remembers coming home and being asked by her mom, "Well, tell me. What's it like?" She answered, *It's like a Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland movie. Let's get a barn and put on a show kids.*

Leigh Stuart was the Assistant District Principal and had been in Brentwood since the 1930's. He was a wonderful man. *He used to come around the day before Thanksgiving and ask all the secretaries, "Do you have a turkey to stuff tomorrow" When they answered yes he's tell them to go home. "Do you have*

a turkey to stuff tomorrow?" he asked me. My mother does all the cooking and he said, "Why don't you go home early and help her."

There was a freezer chest in the basement of the old Administration Building. Martha Enright, school lunch director before Sy Lotvin, would stock it with Dixie cups of homemade ice cream. On hot summer days he would give me the key and ask me to distribute ice cream for all. It was super!

Back in 1968 when the Taylor Law was passed in Albany, Carmela went to the CSEA Union meeting. It was the only union then possible for non-certificated employees. -- the Civil Service Employees Association. Frank D'Andrea was president. They distributed union pledge cards and then he asked for volunteers. Nobody volunteered. *"Just a newsletter. That's all I need, just somebody for the Newsletter."* Finally it was Carmela's hand that went up. Somebody's else hand across the hall went up. It was Audrey Competello who became one of her very best friends. They became the Newsletter Committee, the Grievance Committee, the Negotiating Committee, the President-Needs-Something Committee. They were involved in negotiations and it was a wild and wooly ride because no one had taken course work in it, everyone (including administration) was just doing it by feel. *It was marvelous. We loved it and it was those first contracts that still contain rights and benefits today. Even before the Union there were certain benefits that were in it that were givens. They became codified in contracts and then things got built on to them. It was always a good place to work. They always took care of the people. It was always compassionate. When there was a particular problem you look at the person, what can we do for the person?*

She remembered one of the administrators going to a personnel meeting (this is before she became an administrator) coming back and saying Commack had this question and Lawrence had this question, Dix Hills had another question. He said that was the real world. Carmela said, *Oh, no. If you think that's the real world then this is a MASH unit. Listen and you can hear those helicopters coming in. We've got to deal with the problem and we've got to deal with it fast. AND we've got to deal with it right. And we did! Everybody else in the State copied Brentwood. We had the burgeoning enrollment. We had to deal with buildings bursting at the seams. Then we had declining enrollment and we had to come up with a way of excessing people. Yes, there were some people who lost their jobs but we created RCT Labs and we created all sort of ways in which they retained their jobs. Tony Felicio, the Brentwood Board of Education President for many years, spoke about Brentwood being a mosaic. Brentwood was a fifteen hundred piece jigsaw puzzle and we made it work. It was darn hard. Other school district would cry in their beer but they were following us whether it was bilingual, or special education or declining enrollment, whatever it was we wrote the book on it.*

They invited Paul DuPuis, Assistant Superintendent of BOCES III and presented him with a list of questions, problems and solutions. They asked what he thought of the solutions because they were flying blind. *"Your instincts are fine. Can you back up all of this?" Yes, we have all the records. We were meticulous about it. "Everything is good." We never called on any kind of problem. We solved them ourselves.*

Years later, when she would sit in on Personnel Directors of the Islip Schools meetings, they would talk about this kind of problem or that kind of problem. She would hear about the restrictive way in which they treated people, whether it was leaves of absences, maternity leave, probationary appointment, replacement positions. When she told them what Brentwood did they would say, *"Oh, Brentwood, You do everything large." Yes, we do!.*

In her last year, Carmela said they issued a special edition of the Brentwood Newsletter in which they listed every Brentwood graduate working the District regardless of their role. They had a group picture, just like the High School Senior Year picture taken. As many as could attend went to the Freshman

Center, sat in the bleachers and had their picture taken. Whether someone was a monitor or an administrator didn't matter. Twenty-five percent of the total staff were Brentwood grads. *We're very proud of that. Brentwood takes care of its own.*

Being a teacher is a marvelous and very demanding profession. After Les Black became Superintendent we changed Personnel to the Human Resources Office because we wanted the message loud and clear that it didn't matter how you were employed or what your position was, you were equal in the eyes of the Brentwood School District. Our job was taking care of the employees. All of them were going to be treated equally. They could breathe easy knowing we would take care of your salary agreements, certification, tenure, leaves of absence and retirement. It was all being taken care in such a way that everything you were entitled to you got. All you had to do was your job. If we didn't know the answer to a question we would find the answer for you. My philosophy goes back to the very good deed that Harry Krakower did for us back in 1962. Without him we probably, eventually would have found out that we didn't have to pay the lawyer fifty thousand dollars, and we weren't going to be taken away but there would have been lots of aggravation, lots of tears and God knows what else. Here was a man who took the time to say "It's going to be okay." And it was.

Every season has its own beauty and brings with it its own pleasure. The season Carmela always liked the least was winter because with the forecast Adrienne would go into her snow dance and Carmela would say, *PLEASE Adrienne STOP, I have a one hundred and thirty feet of driveway to clear. And she would say "But we can sleep late." And I would reply I would still be shoveling. Now my driveway is only 20 feet long so I don't mind the snow so much.*

Aromas of food and cooking have the power to transport us to an earlier time. Carmela was telling us how her mother was a great cook. She talks about taking her to Niagara Falls and stopping at a supermarket...they always had to check out the supermarkets. She found her in an aisle where she had placed a half a dozen cans of Primo Tomato Sauce in the cart. *What's this? Canned tomato sauce?* Her mom said, *"I saw a man in the aisle and he asked me if I liked basil. Yes, I said. Do you like cheese, he asked? Yes. And do you like tomato sauce? Of course. This is great tomato sauce." Mom, this total stranger in Canada tells you this and you buy six cans? "Well, I would have bought more, but I knew what you would say."* They go home and Carm goes back to work. She's coming home soon after and as she walks up the driveway *this absolutely marvelous aroma is in the air and I say, Please God, let that be coming from my house.* She goes inside and asks, *Mom, what are you cooking? "Well, it's the sauce you didn't want me to buy.* Carm had to drive her up to Niagara Falls three years in a row. They would come home with her trunk filled with the stuff. Her mom would write letters to the company. They put her in their company's newsletter. They sent her an apron. *We sent a picture of her surrounded by cans of Primo Tomato Sauce and funny stories about her cooking.*

Her mom passed away in 1998. This past Christmas Carmela made her struffoli recipe (honey dough balls) and cochidado (a fruit filled pastry). She waited while her brother took a bite and said, *"As good as Mom's."*

She remembers the first book she ever took out of the elementary school library at PS 208. It was a book on mummies. She remembers the teacher asking her, *"Are you sure you want to take this book out?" Oh, yes, she said.* Even before she could pronounce the word, she knew she wanted to be an Egyptologist. She knew it was impractical but she wanted it nevertheless.

If there were days that she was really frazzled at work, and there were, she would just go to a book store and the sight and smell of the books would calm her down. At any one time she had to be reading three books and have at least six in reserve, otherwise she would become antsy.

She became President of CSEA as well as Chair of the Grievance and Negotiating Committee for six or seven years. As she said it was a wild and wooly time when nobody knew what they were going. She negotiated against the District's Committee of Gerry Smith and Frank Mauro. They had previously had a team of twelve people but that was whittled down to Audrey and Carmela. Dr. Nannini was superintendent and it was late spring. The contract was over in late June. Long sessions, some of them late in the evening but they got a contract.

When Carmela began working she reminded us that they still offered Drivers Education. She took Driver Ed in her senior year but didn't go for the road test right after that. She was very shy, very nervous and actually asked her insurance man if she could buy special insurance in case she hit a squirrel. She kept renewing her permit until she had twenty-one permits. She signed up for Drivers Ed in Adult Education. Fred Weaver said, *"My God, how many times have you failed the driving test?" I never took the driving test,* she replied. Somebody always drove her to work and she was always there early. Leigh Stuart always was there. She did not need to be there until 8:30 am. Charlie Walter, Physical Education Coordinator, was also there early. *Charlie was a very nice man but he had a problem. If you needed to speak to him it had to be early because by the afternoon he was hopeless.*

Being there at 7:30 meant that I would not be allowed to start work. Mr. Stuart and Charlie taught her all about baseball. She loved the Yankees especially one, Phil Linz who was the replacement shortstop for the injured Tony Kopeck. Linz was one of the worst ball players in the world. He once made five errors in one inning. Carm loved him. *The Yankees went into a fifteen year decline because she watched them. She had to give them up for their own sake.*

That year (1965) Brentwood opened three elementary schools and East Junior High School. The District was hiring teachers. There were times when people would come in and start their applications. Before they even finished they were sent for interviews. They'd come back with the interview form in an envelope and would be issued their salary agreements. There were lots of them.

There would be huge teacher orientations at which the District was hiring two hundred. One hundred and fifty people might leave in a year but by hiring two hundred we were gain fifty, year after year.

There were some Brentwood characters that were just too marvelous. Her brother was two years behind her and would come and say something like, *"Oh, the principal at South Junior, Mrs. Nash." No, Mrs. Nash is not the principal. Mr. DeBellis is the principal. "Well, she sure sounds like the principal".* She ran the building.

Dr. Hoyt could never get Carmela's name right. She was invariably Carol to him. Mrs. Betty Hoyt worked in the basement of the old Administration Building with the Ford Foundation (the ancestor of Funded Programs) with Ray Fournier, Vince Presno, Mary Lou Reece, Matt Melillo, Norm Michaels and Gerhardt Roberts. She supervised two sets of secretaries. She also could never get Carmela's name right: Marcella, Clarisse, Cassandra. *Finally she went down one day with a paper cup with little pieces of paper. She asked, "What's this, Marcella?" Carmela replied, it's my name for the day Mrs. Hoyt. Just draw one and call me that all day. She was tired of telling her it's "Carmela".*

The unification of all human resources services for all Brentwood employees was, in her opinion, the single most important accomplishment of her career. The institution of certain procedures and programs for the staff, one of them being Retirement Information Day, the gathering of a representative from Social Security, the talking about the exit package which included sick days and monetary incentive monies, health benefits into retirement, notary service, giving them refreshments and answering all their questions at one time. Talking it over with one might have up come up with a question for another person and it becomes a domino effect. When everyone is in one place at one time it's a way of

providing them with closure in a way comparable to the manner in which on Orientation Day they were welcomed into the District. *We need to say thank you and they needed to hear it.*

It was from that institutional perspective the accomplishment for which she had come to feel most proud. Also, when she began working she says she had no skills and can laugh now about her comment about *"not screwing up for six months so they can't fire you.* She had never used an electric typewriter. All the high school had were manual machines. She thought it was broken. She went to Mary Villar and said, *There's something wrong with the typewriter. "Did you turn it on?" Turn it on?*

She had never seen a phone with buttons. When she would type letters she would take home the papers that she had made mistakes on because she didn't want them to see how much paper she was wasting.

In time she became the youngest Senior Clerk Typist, the second Principal Clerk. That title being the Superintendent Secretary's and there could **never** be another. *I'm sorry but I am doing that caliber of work. I became the second Principal Clerk. Now there are many Principal Clerks in the District.* She became the first female operational supervisor and Administrative Assistant. She led the way for the Transportation Supervisor, Payroll and Accounting Department Supervisors. She derived a great deal of satisfaction from that.

She retired in 2001 following thirty-six years of dedicated service. Her last title was that of Administrative Assistant - Human Resources Officer. The first year as a clerk typist she earned \$3,200 and happy to get it. She began working for the District when clerical salaries were very low. They didn't come until up until much later. They were dependent on the whims of Board Members, like Ed Sonderling. If you said to him that custodians were getting two hundred dollars more than secretaries, his reply would have been, *"Yes, but they clean toilets."*

One day when she was in early she heard noise coming from Mr. Stuart's office. She went and looked and a man she didn't recognize going through the file cabinet. *Excuse me, may I help you? "No thank you. I don't need any help."* Again she said, *Can I help you? This is Mr. Stuart's office and he isn't in and no one should be looking through his file cabinet. "Little girl, do you know who I am?" No, I don't. "I'm Frank Ramie." I'm Carmela Criscione and I belong here. "I am member of the Board of Education." I'm sorry! These offices are Mr. Stuart's and no one should be in his file cabinet if he is not here.* He left grumbling and then complained to Mr. Stuart and Dr. Hoyt. She got called into Dr. Hoyt's office immediately after the incident and he told her, *"You were right."*

One day we came into the office and there was Security all over the old administrative Building. The phone is ringing off the wall but I can't go into the office. Mary Villar comes out and says, "Go downstairs." What's happening? "Just go downstairs. Finally Mr. DiPietro calls me into the office and tells me that at the Board Meeting the night before Gerard Arthus went off the wall, all kinds of things happened and he cut the wire of Eileen Kelly's phone with a pruning scissor. Believe me, if you can make it Brentwood you can make it anywhere.

Towards the end of her mother's life she said to her, *"Gee, you know, I'm really sorry you didn't get to go to college."* To which Carmela replied, *I'm not, Mom. I've had the time of my life, I've met the most marvelous people and like I've said, I think I hit a bases loaded inside the park home run, first time at bat on the first pitch. I couldn't have been happier with my life choices.*

Asked what she's been doing during this past year she said, *Anything I want.* And how did it feel? *Very good, as a member of the ranks of Retirees of Brentwood Schools I can't tell you on any given day what I do. There are some days that are more interesting than others. In the office when people came to me to*

drop off their retirement papers they sometimes needed reassurance. I'd say to them: you were a good boy/girl all your life. You obeyed your parents, ate your veggies, picked up your clothes, put your bike away and did your home work. Now this is dessert time. You don't owe anybody an explanation. You do what you want to do. And if you were an interesting and vital person during your working career, that's what you're going to be when you've retired. Don't worry about it.

Carmela enjoyed working with people and she can still do that. There are certain things she wants to do like, travel and all kinds of other things but whether she decides to volunteer or work at something else, she will always be involved. She'll always be interested. She is curious about so many things. As a voracious reader, Carmela declined to mention any one book that had influenced her more than any others, instead she left us with this thought, "I've read many books in my life, many of them more than once. While I won't give you the title of one book what I will tell you, regardless of the book, in rereading it I find it different. There's nothing different about that book and what the author put down when he or she wrote it. What is different is...me. Each time I re-read a book I always find something new. It's not only something new that I've discovered in the book, it's something new that's I've discovered in me".

To me, Carmela has always represented the person Alvin Toffler was thinking of when he pointed to *life long learners* being examples of ideal democratic role models for the future, or Abraham Maslow cited when he conceived his Hierarchy of Needs identifying Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Mead as ideal examples of self-actualized human beings. Brentwood Schools will forever have the example of such a person left them by Carmela Criscione and her own *marvelous* legacy.