



**Cathy Gerolemon
ROBS History Project
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Cathy Gerolemon was born Catherine Baciocco in March 1944 in St. Catherine's Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. She was not given a middle name. When asked how she got her name, she said it was a funny story. It is the Italian tradition to name the first-born child after the paternal grandparent, so her mother asked her mother-in-law what her real given name was, and she said, "Catherine". It wasn't until after Cathy was named that they found out that her paternal grandmother's real name was not Catherine, but Maria. It's just that she wanted her granddaughter to be named Catherine. Nobody knew why. When Cathy was very young she was given the nickname "Chicken", because she was very skinny, but she said, with a smile, "Not any more, but I was at that time".

Cathy lived in Williamsburg section of Brooklyn for about 7 years. She lived right across the street from St. Mary's Church.

When asked what her current family situation is, she said that at the current time she and her husband, Andrew have an *empty nest*, and *it's absolutely wonderful*. Their 3 children are all married, and they have 6 grandchildren ranging in ages from one and a half to sixteen...3 boys and 3 girls. She was asked if she noticed any of her grandchildren with any particular family traits. She said that her 4-year-old granddaughter is very coquettish and absolutely beautiful. She knows how to wrap you right around her finger. Cathy said that she got that trait from her mother, Cathy's daughter.

Cathy was then asked to speak about her children. Her daughter, Linda is married to Pete, and they have 2 children, Joshua who plays football and Julie

who plays soccer. Cathy said they are both very athletic and *“growing like weeds...they are beautiful”*. Her son David is married to his wife Michelle. They live in North Carolina and have 3 children. Eli is 9, Michaela is 4 and Sadie is 1 and a half. *“They are absolutely gorgeous...every single one of them. Eli is a very smart little boy, Michaela is very coquettish and Sadie just yells a lot right now.”* Cathy’s youngest daughter is married and lives in Massachusetts with her husband and a 2 and a half year old boy who doesn’t like women, so Cathy said, *“...therefore Grandma is not one of his favorites.”*

Cathy said that there is a lot of contact with the immediate family. They all get together at Christmas time. Every few years they all get together for a vacation too. The year Cathy and her husband were celebrating their 40th anniversary they all went to Turks and Caicos . This year 2 of their children were celebrating their 10th year anniversaries, so they rented a house out in West Yellowstone, Montana for the whole family ... all 14 of them. The kids especially loved that trip, because they had horses and a mule in a corral where they were staying.

How did Cathy and her husband meet? There used to be a county club in Whitestone, Queens called Cresthaven Country Club where they attended a CYO Dance. Her husband asked her to dance, and *that was it*. At the time Cathy lived in Ozone Park and her husband lived in the Bronx. They were married in 1966.

Cathy was then asked to speak about her parents’ family histories. Her mother’s family comes from Sicily where her grandparents were married. Their first 4 children were born there. Her grandfather came to America first, and then 5 years later her grandmother followed, and they had 5 more children. Cathy’s father’s family came from Northern Italy, in the mountains of Genoa, and her grandparents met and married when they came here to the USA.

What are the earliest memories that Cathy has of her childhood? She remembered that her parents both worked, and her neighbor watched them during the day. She remembered tripping at her neighbor’s house on a piece of linoleum that had curled up on the floor and falling and getting a bad cut above her eye. She said that she still has the scar. Cathy said she was the baby in the family with 2 older brothers. Her oldest brother was 6 1/2 years older than her and often babysat for her. When they were living in Brooklyn she remembered

playing Cowboys and Indians with her brothers. They would capture her and tie her to the bedpost at the foot of the bed and then just leave her there while they continued playing without her.

Cathy was asked to speak about her parents. Cathy said that her mother loved to do needlepoint, crocheting and knitting. She was very much into this. Cathy said that she likes to crochet too. She said that her mother was the most influential person in her life. Her father worked very hard as a truck driver. He would get up early every morning and have a small glass of Marsala with a raw egg in it then leave for work. That was his starting of the day. She especially remembered him working in the cold weather. Her parents passed away within 8 days of each other when her mother was 83 and her dad was 86. Cathy believes that her father passed away *from a broken heart*.

Aside from her parents, there were other adults that had an influence on who Cathy is today. Cathy said, *"We had a couple of nuns in high school who were 'characters' and kind of taught you that you had to laugh. I had one nun who was Sister Francesca. She was a short, chubby little lady. She had this saying that I can't remember the beginning of but the last part of it was, '...and here I am without a man'. She'd be going through the hallway (throwing up her arms) shouting '...and here I am without a man.' A nun! Who would have thought?"*

What gave Cathy the idea that she would make a good manager or good administrator? She said that part of it comes from her father who used to keep good journals of everything. He wrote everything down. She also said that a lot of it came from her parochial school education with the nuns. She recalled several of the nuns that she had. There was Sister Mary Dasalis who was her homeroom teacher for a couple of years and was really a good woman. Sister Stephen taught business math. She also had a lay teacher for business math, but she was not that good at teaching the concepts. Over half the class failed the final exam the first semester, so they brought back Sister Stephen to teach the class the rest of the year, and they all passed the regents exam. While in school, her least favorite subject was biology. She said that she just didn't like science.

One of the most difficult career decisions that Cathy had to make was when she was working at West Middle School. Nick Geraci, who was working there at the time, said to her, "You need to get over to Administration. You're wasting

your talents here.” But, Cathy said that she didn’t want to go. He insisted and told her that there was an opening in the Business Office and told her to go for it. He said it would not be her final destination but a stepping-stone. Nick really pushed her to make the move. She did, and was working under Ken Stubalo, who she felt was a difficult man to work for. When she worked in the business office, she handled the student accidents, work on the budget, tuitions, bus transportation and Workman’s Comp. Cathy started at North Elementary School first and then West Middle School. At West Middle she worked for the disciplinarian and also in the Guidance Office.

Cathy’s first paying job was when she worked for the New York City Youth Board in a 5-week summer position. She was a stenographer, and they would dictate the cases to her. She remembered one caseworker that would apologize to her every time she took a dictation saying that she was too young to hear these things. She said that they should have sent an older girl.

Her family’s favorite holiday was Christmas...Christmas Eve Midnight Mass, Christmas Day and the good food.

She was then asked what was the aroma of food that would bring a host of memories for her. Cathy immediately answered “*Homemade pizza, a good tomato sauce cooking and a pot of stew*”. She said that her mother made really good pizza.

Cathy’s favorite season of the year is winter. She remembered an aunt she had who lived around the corner, who was in her 60’s and “*a little on the crazy side*” but a lot of fun. She had come over to Cathy’s house one Friday night, and knocked on the door. When Cathy opened the door, her aunt proceeded to throw a snowball at her. So, that night they all got dressed, went out and had a snowball fight.

Cathy is a morning person. She likes to get up and get going right away. By 6:00 pm she gets dinner on the table and then she’s done.

Cathy went to St. Mary’s in Brooklyn for Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades. When she moved to Queens she attended Nativity on Rockaway Blvd. until 8th grade. She then attended All Saints Commercial High School in Brooklyn, where

she graduated with a Commercial Regents Diploma and then took some night courses. After graduating she worked for a few insurance companies and then was in a steno pool where she started working for the Farm Patent Attorneys section and then moved with her boss to American Home Products, where she worked for a while until he left the company. She then had to take a typing and shorthand test and got a job in a small patent firm. After that she worked for Mobil Oil and stopped when she and her husband moved to Bay Shore and started their family.

Cathy did a lot of volunteer work for Girl Scouts of America. She was a leader, co-leader and organizer for Southwest Elementary School and Hemlock Park School. A friend told her that she should do work that she would get paid for and not just volunteer. She then went to the Brentwood School District and signed on as a call-in clerical. She then took the Civil Service Test and got a job in the Smithtown School District for 2 years. When she went to Brentwood, her first interview was with Al Grabowski, Austin Harney and a third man that Cathy couldn't remember. At that interview, she was not offered a job, because, Al Grabowski said she was overqualified for the IMC position, and Austin Harney did not want her working at Southwest in her home school where her children attended. She then interviewed with Jo Silva for the North School Annex front office secretarial position and was hired for that job. She started working at North Elementary in 1985 and was there until 1988.

She was then asked what her first impressions of the people she met in Brentwood were. She remembered her very first day there in the Annex of North Elementary, and Phil Tache, a 6th grade teacher, had sent his kids over to the office through the school yard instead of having them come around through the building. Cathy was told, "Do not open the back door!" So the kids were banging on the back door, and she said to go back. She said she wasn't letting them in. They looked like older kids who could be coming from the junior high or high school. Phil called her and was very upset with her, yelling at her to the point of bringing her to tears. Diana Grabowski, Al's Wife, got a hold of Phil, and after lunch he came in with a rose for Cathy and apologized. He said he didn't realize it was her first day. They eventually became good friends. Some of the people she worked with that first year were Sue Weiner, Bev Bienaman, Fran Brida, Susan Arzillo and Nora Curtahy,

She was a member of the BCA (Brentwood Clerical Association) and worked on one of the committees on equal pay. Terry Wolf was the president at the time.

Was there anything that angered her at work? The only thing she mentioned was *"incompetence more than anything else"*.

Cathy worked in Administration for Les Black from July 1995 until she retired in March 2006. When asked what was one of her most proud accomplishments, she said, *"Working for the district Superintendent for 10 years is absolutely 'A' number one on my list. He's a great man to work for."* When she turned 62, she thought about retiring.

What was the most fun part of her job? She responded, *"When I got up to the Administration floor, whenever I went up there everyone was very solemn and quiet, so I used to get these bags of confetti for either Valentines or birthdays or whatever. Well if it was Valentines Day, you got them all over your desk...every desk. It didn't matter. If it was your birthday your desk was full."* She said that it brought a little levity to the situation up there. She felt people needed to lighten up. *"Life is too short."*

Since retiring, the thing she misses the most is the camaraderie. She had a good time with her coworkers. The one thing that she would like to have accomplished before leaving was to get to clean out the archives. They did some of it but didn't get it all done.

Did she ever have a favorite year of all of the years in Brentwood? Cathy said, *"I think my first year at North Elementary only because I loved the little ones."* *"There was one little girl especially who was an absolute sweetheart. She had gotten lice in her hair, and of course she had to go home."* *"She had long beautiful thick hair, and she comes back to school after her mother had washed her hair and things, and she gets them again. Mom decides she's going to cut her hair. I get a call from the front office, 'So-and-so is coming down the hall, and she's in tears'. I said, 'Not a big thing. I'll take care of it.' So, I go down to meet her in the corridor, and I bend down to her size, I open my arms, and she grabs me and hugs, and hugs."* The girl was so upset, but Cathy assured her that her hair

was beautiful. Cathy said that this was the type of thing she enjoyed while working in the elementary school. She loved the young children.

What advise would Cathy give to someone new coming into the field? She said to learn as much as you possibly can about the job. *“Be diligent. Be thorough. Don’t leave anything to happenstance. You have to keep watch over everything that is going on”.*

Since her retirement Cathy still keeps in contact with several of the people she worked with in Brentwood.

Cathy was asked to complete the phrase. “Brentwood is...” Her response was *“...a great place to work, a great place to get an education if you have people behind you pushing for that education. The thing that we see a lot in Brentwood is the ins and outs and ins and outs.”* Cathy said her own children graduated from Brentwood High School and were very successful. *“There are some very caring teachers there.”*

She was then asked to complete the phrase, “Brentwood teachers are...” Her response was *“...caring”*. And then the phrase, “Brentwood students are...” Her response was *“...overall they are good kids”*. *No matter what district, there are always going to be the good kids and the not so good kids.”*