



Christina (Chris) Ayasse
ROBS History Project
February 25, 2004 90

Christina Marie Ayasse was born in the Bronx in 1946. Her maiden name was Massaro, and her nickname is Christi or Chris. Chris originally lived in the Park Chester section of the Bronx. She lived at 55 Odell Street and went to St. Helena's Catholic School in Park Chester. Coincidentally one of her colleagues at Hemlock Park said that she also attended the same Catholic School, although many years later. Chris moved to Brentwood around 1956 at the age of 10 and attended Brentwood schools graduating from Brentwood High School.

Chris got married in 1968 to her husband, Ralph. She met him when he came home from the Navy. He was 21, and she was 15. He had come home from the Navy visiting his brother, Richie, who lived on the same block as her. On their first date, they went to Jones Beach, but she had to bring her sister as a chaperone. They got married when she was 21. She didn't want to get married until after she graduated from college. She said that Ralph always adored her. Currently they have no grandchildren.

They have a 32 year-old married son who is a music string teacher and has a progressive jazz band. Their daughter, Sharon, who is 25 yrs. old, is also a music teacher and plays the piano and flute. Her in-laws came from Germany, and music runs in their family. Their son plays violin, bass and mandolin. Ralph's older brother was a musician who played the piano and eventually

became a music teacher. Musical talent comes from her husband's side of the family.

Christine's mother Mildred's family came from New England. Her grandfather, whom she never met, died when she was 2 years old. He had a very tough life. He came from a very large family, so after his father died he was farmed out to someone, because his family couldn't afford so many children. He joined the Merchant Marines and came back to Adams, Massachusetts where he met and married Chris's grandmother.

Both of Christine's paternal grandparents were Italian. Chris's grandmother was born in America, but her grandfather was born in Italy. His mother came from Italy with him when he was a child. While she was on the ship coming to America, she met her husband.

What are Christine's childhood memories of her mother? When asked, Chris replied, "She was great!" Her mother always liked to have fun. She read a lot and was a stay at home mom. She always spoke her mind. Her father met her mother when she was very young. When she was 18 they ran away and got married, because her father was being drafted. Chris's father is a wonderful person who could fix anything. He always took care of Chris's mother who passed away.

Christine has 2 younger sisters, Antoinette and Marie, and they are very close. Her sister, Toni lives around the corner from her, and her sister Marie lives in Bellport. They see each other a lot. Since Chris is the oldest, they say she is the bossiest. She said that her sisters are wonderful people who always help each other out.

Christine was then asked if there were any adults besides her parents that played an important part of her informative years. Were there other people who influenced her? She said that there were some people who were helpful to her like teachers she had in Brentwood. In high school her social studies teacher Mr. Warner had influence on her. At Northeast Elementary she had Mr. Itscoff

who helped her a lot, especially with math. She also had Charlie Black in 6th grade. Her first year of teaching in Brentwood was Northeast Elementary, and Charlie Black was the principal.

Why did she become a teacher? There wasn't any one thing that made her want to become a teacher. While she was in school, when she had a good teacher, she would say to herself, "I could do that", and when she had a "not so good" teacher, she would tell herself, "I could do better than that." When she was in college, because of the money, she just studied from one semester to the next not really having a specific plan of study. She did know that she didn't want to get married until she graduated college.

What was her first paying job? Aside from babysitting at \$.50/hour, she worked at a dry cleaning store, Hills Supermarket and Kleins Department Store. In college, through the Work Study Program, she got a job in the Bay Shore Library where she worked as a children's librarian.

When asked what the most difficult thing she ever had to do was, she responded with, "The job of being a parent." "You never know if you are doing the right thing."

What were her interests as a child? Christine just loved to play in the backyard. They made adventures out of everything. She loved playing with dolls. Chris was 8 years old when her sister Marie was born, so she was like a toy to her. She was her own doll. She and the family also enjoyed the biggest family holiday of Christmas.

Christine is not much of a night person, and of the seasons, she loves summer. She said, "I think you can't lose your enthusiasm for summer and be a teacher". "Just when you think you are going out of your mind as a student or a teacher, summer comes, and there you go." One year after her son was born she was talked into teaching Head Start in the summer. She said she would never do that again. She really loved having her summers off.

What schools did she attend? She attended Brentwood Northeast Elementary, Village School, Ross High School, Suffolk Community College for two years and then Adelphi College.

What made Chris teach at Brentwood? She was in a program at Adelphi where you got credit towards a Master's Degree if you taught in certain school districts, and Brentwood was one of them. She did her student teaching in Fran Graff's kindergarten class, and her first year she taught 1st grade at Northeast. Mr. Graff then interviewed her for a Kindergarten position in Hemlock Park.

What did she enjoy most about Brentwood in those years? She said it was like a family. Everyone helped each other. Ruth Greco is one of the teachers she remembers in particular. Chris taught every grade from 1st to 6th. She had left when her son was born then came back as a Kindergarten teacher in a class split between Hemlock Park and Southwest. She went to Hemlock Park in the mornings and Southwest in the afternoons. She had to teach on the stage at Southwest because there was no room for her class anywhere. Helen Miller was the Assistant Principal at the time. Chris asked her if something else could be done, so they split her children between two kindergarten classes with a wall divider. Half went to Mrs. Mason's class and half to Mary Gray's class. She and the other two teachers team-taught both classes. Chris taught math and art projects to the students. Each year following, she would teach a different grade. She then had to teach 6th grade, and the other 6th grade teachers like Pat Lupo, John Sullivan and Irene Brown were so helpful to her.

What was her personal purpose for teaching? Chris responded, "I was there to help those children become life long learners." She feels that a teacher has a responsibility to make the day as comfortable and as interesting as possible. No matter how difficult the class was, every day was a new day. In order to be successful and to enjoy your job, you have to have what Chris calls "the Pollyanna Gene." "Everything will be fine." "You can't hold grudges." "You have to keep going."

Chris was then asked if she was active in the BTA? Chris was an Alternate Delegate for a short time. Chris feels that one reason that the Brentwood School District is as solid as it is with its teachers is due to the strong union that worked very closely with the School Board and Administration. "Anthony Felicio was the best."

Her first year's salary was about \$4000, because she was on a partial contract her first year through the Master's program at Adelphi that she was in. She had 27 children in the class that year. Teaching is hard work, and she is very proud of being a teacher.

Why did she retire? Christine retired in 2002. Her last assignment was 2nd grade. She said that she decided to retire mainly due to her health. She said she had Multiple Sclerosis. Retirement was difficult to get used to since she was no longer a teacher. She thinks she might like to do something that involved working with new teachers. She does see several of the teachers she had worked with who are now retired also. They get together and play Mahjong. She also gives tours in the spring and summer at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum in Oakdale. She is going to start giving tours at the Fire Island Lighthouse too.

Was there something that gave her the most pleasure teaching? She loved to have fun in the classroom, like telling jokes etc. She reads a lot and still goes into Hemlock Park School reading to the 3rd graders. That was one of the things she loved to do when she was teaching. She always read to the children, even her 6th graders.

Is there something she would have liked to accomplish before leaving teaching? Chris said, "I wish that I could have reached every single one of those children that maybe slipped through and I didn't get to." One thing that she tells her own children that are teachers is that they may have still played a part in the life of that one child that they thought they didn't reach.

What advise would she give to young teachers starting out? She would tell them to trust themselves. If they think something is

not the right thing to do they should trust themselves. They should start every day new.

Christine ended the interview by saying that it was a pleasure to be part of the Brentwood School District both as a student and as a teacher.