



Grace Marie Ausilli
ROBS History Project
June 14, 2001 70

Grace Marie Ausilli was born, not in a hospital on December 16, 1937, but in what she described as their first home on 42nd Street in Borough Park, Brooklyn. Her mother wanted to be home for Christmas, so she insisted she have no part of a hospital stay. Grace's first years of life were spent residing with her maternal grandmother and grandfather, her mom and dad, her aunt and uncle, sister and brother where she initially arrived one evening in her uncle's bed, surprising him with *"an unexpected package of joy"* when he returned from work.

It was during her initial years that her dad decided he'd had enough of married life and simply left. Grace heard it was because he loved money, found another woman with money and married her. That was all there was to it. She had to say that in all these years of so much divorce and what have you, she had a wonderful time growing up; there was no fighting in the house, and it was better she said, *"to have just my mom, my brother and I, without him than to have them struggle and fight all the time"*. Her mom, she said, deserves great credit for she was both mother and father, and she was both an at home mother and father. She gave her father credit for one thing, *"he supported us until we reached eighteen"* and for that she was grateful.

Her next family move was into an apartment house in Brooklyn where they stayed for a couple of years. It was by then, her mom and the three children. Her father, she eventually learned was quite ill with arthritis and other ailments and had moved to Arizona, where he eventually passed away.

She had had no contact with him whatsoever. Her mother died the very same year as did Grace's husband, and that was in 1998 only three years earlier.

Although she had been given the middle name 'Marie' by her mother at birth, Grace never identified with Marie. She explained she'd been named after her maternal grandmother Marie Grace. She had no nickname and strongly disliked being called 'Gracie'. Her dislike for 'Gracie' was *intense* --- she much preferred being called Grace.

She has three sons. The oldest is Fredrick, who was born in 1958. He works for United Parcel Service and is a law student who plans to graduate in December. He has a wonderful wife whose first name is Karen. They have three beautiful children and live ten minutes from Grace in East Islip. She remains in Brentwood where she has always lived and which she will always love.

Her next son in the order of his birth is Peter. He's also a lawyer working in Central Islip where he Clerks for Judge Wexler. Peter has a lovely wife named Catherine who just graduated from school as a Court Reporter. They have two children, Melissa, 19 yrs., and Patrice 4 yrs. Melissa is godmother for the baby and everyone asks - two different parents? No, No we're the same. There's a funny story with that if you'd like to hear it. Catherine married Peter, and she got pregnant while going to school for architecture. She left school before finishing, waited thirteen years before going back to school, thought she'd never get pregnant again -- so she might just as well go back to school. She pursued court stenography and became pregnant, delayed graduation for a year and a half -- God bless her, then graduated and presented us with -- Patrice.

Jim got married two years ago in August to an attorney. This time we were blessed with Joanne who is a lovely gal. You know, I have three sons, but I also have three daughters. I have five grandchildren, may they all be well. I have three sons who have chosen well. Their dad was a mechanic, a basic mechanic who loved working with his hands. He worked for Pan Am, became a supervisor but was let go before Pan Am went out of business, but there was life after Pan Am -- a long story. We'll pass on that right now, because he had a

heart attack when he was 39 years of age. All three children are married, and I can feel good about that, because they're my family. Jim, the youngest is in Larchmont, Peter is in Ridge, and Fred is in East Islip. There's plenty of opportunity for family and extended family visits, because their families are all lovely people. What I see in all of them is humor. It was part of my grandmother's family, my family, and my husband loved to laugh, God Bless him. The children find humor in situations. I do think the children are healthy enough and do find humor in a lot of situations, and I like that. I think that might be the thread that runs through the family.

"I loved when I lived at my grandmother's house. My uncle had a wholesale retail produce warehouse at the Hunt's Point Market. When he would come home, he would bring a bag of vegetables, and mostly every day he would have a different bag of vegetables. Then he would come in, and my grandmother would always have a big meal set up for him, because that was his main meal of the day, and I would always look out the window and say, 'Uncle Charlie's coming, Uncle Charlie's coming!' and she'd say, 'Good! Good!' Then one day he didn't have his bag, and I said to her, 'Grandma! Uncle Charlie's coming, but he has no vegetables. Don't cook for him today.' And I still remember that."

I asked her about her mother's family's background. Very interesting! Her grandmother and grandfather with whom she lived as a child came from Italy to the United States. Her grandmother was from Naples, *"we weren't sure where he came from."* They had an arranged marriage. He was about nine years older than she was. She was originally in a convent and came from very wealthy people in Italy. Grace's grandfather's people were architects who worked for the Pope. They were very highly educated, and he was a playboy. *"To hear my uncle tell the story he was sent out of Italy that's why he came here."* They were married there, came here and started their family. They opened an Italian sausage and cheese store and were doing quite, quite well. They had a beautiful home in Brooklyn. They had four boys and four girls. Of their eight children two passed away. However, during the Great Depression they lost the store. During the depression, they also lost their home -- which was a contributing factor in explaining how her aunt and uncle carried themselves the way they did for the rest of their days. That was quite an

experience. The depression influenced many more people than those who were of work force age. It also influenced children of that generation who were observers and were also impacted by the trauma they lived through. She mentioned the children, there was an Aunt Julia, the children called her Auntie. Next to her grandmother and her own mother this aunt was someone that became a role model for the kids. She had guts, and she was funny. She was a woman before her time. She was so strong and so good. *“My grandfather was not fair in the way he raised the children, “I’ll be polite” – and she used to work in the store, and she used to get up at five and go and open the store for him and he used to say, ‘I’ll give you a quarter at the end of the week’, but the end of the week never came. And she used to say ‘Daddy, where is my money, I’ve been doing everything for you’, ‘Oh, tomorrow, tomorrow’. Well one day, she took off and didn’t open the store, just went about her business, and when she got home of course, he was waiting.” ‘What happened?’ She said, ‘You know you owed me my money. When you pay me my money, I’ll continue my chores’. That was gutsy. I did admire her for confronting him.*

“My mother’s passion was cards. She loved to play cards. In the fifties and sixties the game they played was Mahjong. It was fun watching them, and of course I learned the game, but mom stayed at home. She took care of us, cooked for us and took care of our needs and all. She made a life. Since my father left us when I was six years of age, I had no further contact with either of my paternal grandparents. I really knew nothing about them. I knew he had a sister that was very, very poor and was married to an alcoholic, and she had four children. What was good about it was that our mom taught us another lesson: ‘She never, never talked about my father in a negative way.’ She didn’t admire him, but she never let us feel that there was animosity or anything. Mom took care of this aunt and fed the kids. Now, we didn’t have much ourselves, I mean, you know, but she taught me a lesson about life – If there’s a need –be there. When it went to court to terminate their fiscal affairs, this woman turned on my mother, and defended my father. That was a very difficult time, but I remember that. There again, my mother never said a terrible word about this person. Never! So she was a person to admire greatly, you know. I’ve had good role models. ‘You condemn the sin not the sinner.’

'Absolutely'. We all have our skeletons in the closet. Who knows why? Maybe they gave her some money and she needed it? Who knows? We won't judge.

I asked Grace if she had brothers and sisters. She said "Oh yes! There's Jacqueline and Tom and myself. Jacqueline was seven years older than I, Tom is two and a half years older, and I am the baby". My brother is not close, because he lives Upstate, and it's difficult, but I'll be seeing him at the end of this month. My sister and I get together quite frequently. Jacqueline has a son, a beautiful daughter-in-law with three children and three grandchildren. Tom had three children; two boys and one girl. The girl has William's Syndrome, but God bless her, she graduated from high school this month. One of the boys is married and has two little girls, and his wife Diane is splendid. You should know this about me right off the bat. There are very few people in this world I don't like, so if you hear me say, he's nice or she's nice, I didn't really mean that. You know, some people like me and some people don't like me, and that's okay. That's how I am in life. I haven't met a person I didn't really ---- they're all Gods people. Our culture much like life itself is cyclical. I think a great deal of this is up to the families themselves; whether they make time for the closeness they once enjoyed to survive or not is up to them. People travel a lot. Planes and trains and automobiles have separated families. That and the amount of money available have facilitated our separation from one another. The multiplicity of available choices to us have become a complicating factor in all our lives. Money has separated people. Children can't afford to live on Long Island, so they move. It's heartbreaking for parents. However, there are those that are near each other. I have a very close family. I see the children. I don't tell my daughters-in-law how to live. I don't want them to tell me how to live. Years ago that was the difference. Your parents thought that they could run your life. Their parents thought they could run their lives, and I don't want that to happen. I want the children to enjoy their freedom to learn and I want to be a model; a role model, not a tutor. Okay? Closeness is what you do with it. You can be next door and be very far apart, or you can live very far apart and be very close". Grace learned an awful lot through her experience being a child of her own unique family. Far from being idyllic or representing a wonderful childhood experience without her dad's presence in her life, Grace remembered the sadness; the times when she was in school having to deny herself that he really wasn't there. She remembers acknowledging the hurt of

other people having their mother and father with them, while she had to accept that she couldn't make that claim. What she decided to do under those circumstances was this. She used that. She used simply watching them in their marriages. She had an aunt that divorced, she had another aunt that divorced, she had a mother that divorced, and she said *"That's not going to happen to my family--Not if I can help it. Life does send you curve balls. I watched good marriages, and I watched poor marriages. And I tried to garner the best for what I could do. And we had our ups and downs but we had a hell of a lot of fun along the way."*

"First of all I lived in Brooklyn in an apartment. Everybody should live in Brooklyn in an apartment. It's a melting pot. You're with Italians, Jewish, Blacks White, It's wonderful. You learn people. I was uncontrollable. Mom would say, you know you really should be careful when you talk to those people, and I couldn't listen to that, because they were just people. Mom said we were out shopping, and we saw a Chinese couple, and they were so interesting. They were talking a mile a minute. I had no idea what they were talking about, but I followed them. And of course I got lost, and mom had to pick me up at the precinct. But at any rate, that's the kind of thing that happened, and you're in an apartment, and you hear the people's stories in their lives. There was one particular young fellow. He lived downstairs, and we were in a courtyard, and his mom used to love to play Gin Rummey. And his mom and dad were what I would call a wonderful couple, and I loved them dearly, and they influenced me very heavily in that they had the kind of marriage I wanted mine to be. So yes, there were other people who influenced me and helped to make me into the person I am today. But yes, I was sad to be poor. I was sad I didn't have a father. But I was also always very curious. No one could ever accuse me of being nosey, but I didn't stick my nose into anybody's business. I'm an observer. I'm a people observer, and I take what's good from all that I see in other people. 'What did I love doing as a little girl?' Everything. That's why I didn't grow up until I was thirty-seven. You see, I liked to bowl, and if I bowled, I liked to be the best. If I played baseball, I wanted to hit the home run. In school I wanted to be very, very good in school. I didn't know what I wanted. I wanted everything. I wanted it all. I wanted to be good at it all."

“When I graduated from Elementary School, St. Rose of Lima in Brooklyn, you had to fill out this little album, and it said ‘What would you like to be?’ and I said, ‘a Math Teacher’, because I had a phenomenal mind with numbers, numbers - don’t move to algebra, don’t move me to calculus, but give me numbers. So I wanted to be a math teacher. Okay! The years pass and I went to high school, I married, had a family. My career came to me. I didn’t go to my career. Okay? I was reading a paper in the Church Bulletin, and it asked for help in Special Education. I thought, Well, Jim is going to go to Kindergarten. He’ll go on the bus. I’ll have two hours a day. Why don’t I? So I went to the building that used to be the library and the Administration Building in 1972, and the paper said to see Mr. Brodsky. He was the Director of Special Education. ‘Loved him;’ I knocked on the door and said, Hello, my name is Grace. Where can you put me? You’ve got me two hours a day for five days a week. He looked at me, did a double take and said, ‘Are you for real?’ I said, ‘Honest! You can have me two days, two hours a day, for five days a week.’ He took me over to South Elementary to the Principal, Pete DiMento, and said, ‘This lady will give you two hours a day in a Special Ed Class.” He put me with a lady called Lynn Evens. Lynn Evens was the lead singer for the Chordettes. She sang “Mr. Sandman”. Great gal! Also went into teaching much later in life. So I worked for Lynn Evens, and I worked for an ex-nun Ann Cullen. I went for two hours a day for two years until I got a phone call. ‘Grace, how would you like to be paid?’ ‘Paid for what? I’m loving what I’m doing.’ He said, It’s for an Assistant’s job”, I said “Oh, that’s great Mr. Brodsky”, went home, talked to Al, and he said, ‘Sounds good to me. It didn’t interfere.’ You know we were home parents. So Al was happy. He didn’t care if we didn’t have that much money, but he said, ‘Let’s stay with the kids’. He worked two or three jobs, ‘but let’s stay with the kids.’ So the hours were great, ten to two, and in the classroom. So it was really good. I worked for a woman called Janet Carole who was and is a splendid gal. She loved teaching; taught for about thirty-six years before she retired. A hard worker; not allowed to talk during work. One day I was working with a child when she looked up at me and she said ‘Grace’, I said, ‘Yes!’ Very surprised! She asked, ‘What is a smart girl like you doing in a place like this?’ ‘Go to school.’ We didn’t continue to talk, we just went about our business, but she planted a seed. I went home and talked to Al, and I registered for one course. In between Al had a massive heart attack; fortunately, I was home and brushing his shoulder he said, ‘I have a massive pain over here, but when I lie

down I feel good. 'Are you saying you're having a heart attack', I asked, and I don't know where that came from. I called up the doctor and said, 'Al's having a heart attack I'll be there in two minutes.' He said, 'Grace, How do you know that?' and I hung up on him. I don't know how I knew it. I just did it. I said, 'Get in the car.' I dragged him to the car and drove 70 miles an hour down Broadway, went through a Seven Eleven, up on the grass of the doctor's office, passed a red light, kept shaking him, 'Don't go to sleep, Don't go to sleep'. Brought him into the doctor's office, and the doctor administered to him. He had experienced a massive heart attack. I talk about things because they fall into place. We have to believe that when things happen they happen for a reason. Our dear friend was John Crane. He was a priest in St. Ann's parish. He was on vacation that week. I tried to get hold of him to come to the hospital with me. 'Hello, Is John there?' 'No. We haven't heard from him. He's on vacation.' 'Please if you hear from him' -- and who walks in the office then? John Crane. He rushed to the hospital. Why was he there? Who knows? Why did Al have a massive heart attack? I got a full college education. He recovered. He did recover thank God. He had twenty-five more years after that. I knocked at the college door and I said, 'Hello, My name is Grace'. I said, 'I don't have any money, but I have a very good brain. Can you help me?' And they said to come right in. They set me up with Suffolk Community. I took one class, because I had never been in a college. I was petrified. But you know I have a lot of fear, as does anyone else. You know what? Walk through it. Don't let the fear take you over. So, at any rate, I took the one course and got an "A". There's nothing better than getting an "A". And you know my high school graduation it all came back to me in college. It was good. And I took five classes and proceeded to graduate in sixteen months instead of two years, and then you went back and knocked on the President's door. I needed a scholarship. I couldn't afford to go to school. How do you go to school and raise three children with a husband on disability? There was a President's scholarship at St. Joseph's, and I knew I wanted to go to St Joseph's. So I knocked at the door, and I said, 'My name is Grace, and I'd like to talk about the President's scholarship.' 'What is your average?' 'Three nine'; 'Oh sorry we need a four.' Whoo I said; 'Hold on. Hear my story.' So she said, 'What's your story?' I proceeded to say I was taking five classes, my husband was ill, I had three children to raise, and we were doing this on a disability income. Look I said, I got a 3.9 but many people get the scholarship because they take one or

two courses and get straight "A's." I'm not knocking them. That's what they're able to do but I said, I think I deserve it. And I did get it. I got the President's Scholarship, and I graduated in two years from St. Josephs College. I graduated on a Friday, and when I said things are meant to be, a teacher was in a car accident, and they needed someone to fill in, and I went to see my boss just that day and said to him a couple of days before, I'm graduating; any jobs? And so I got a phone call. He said, 'Get in here.' He went upstairs and talked to G. Guy DiPietro who was the Superintendent of Schools at that time, and he said, 'Wait here and I'll find out if you have a job'. He came down and said, 'You start Monday'.

"Brentwood is good to its people. I love the Brentwood School District. I love it. It's got heart. It's got spirit. I've had a wonderful career. Wonderful!"

Strange as it may seem at this juncture I enquired of Grace if she had maintained any contact with her elementary school colleagues. "Absolutely", she said. "I have high school and grammar school connections. We went back to St. Rose and we had a great, great big party as St. Rose was celebrating its 125th Anniversary. Beside that I still see people that I went to school with when I was six years old. I have a great old saying that I love. 'Make new friends but keep the old ones.' Isn't it wonderful to be able to talk with someone who you haven't seen for decades and you call up and say 'Hi', and it's as if you saw one another just yesterday. Isn't it great to talk with someone you've known for almost your whole life when you remember that they know things about you that even you may have forgotten. You know what? There's room in our hearts and room in our lives for everybody. Everybody fits. I love to talk to the people from back then.

Did you have chores to do? "I was terrible. My sister Jacqe was really responsible for a lot of who I am also because she helped my mom. She didn't graduate from high school she went to work and helped my mother pay the bills and all and they made sure that I got my – I had a free high school at St Brendan's – I did get that score to get into St Brendan's and it was the last class of free tuition and Jacquie wanted to make sure I got that education. And that was on Coney Island Avenue and Avenue O. It is today non-existent but she helped me and she helped my mom a lot and I was a brat and If there

were dishes to be done, I'd disappear, but to be very frank with you, I didn't like where I was living. It was my mom and three of us in a three-room apartment and I was not a happy camper with that. I think the more I could be out of the apartment the better I liked it. That experience also gave me the ability to relate to kids who later on in my life I'd be expected to teach and to work with; because of my compassion I would know pretty much what it was like to see myself being in otherwise totally foreign situations.

She remembered that her first paid work experience, besides babysitting, was as a salesperson in Woolworth's 5 and 10 Cent Store. Everybody went to Woolworth. She was assigned to the Candy Counter and fortunately for her was not a sweet tooth candy consumer. She didn't grow into her curvaceous self until much later on. Her first job was Woolworth; and it was great. She loved numbers, so the cash register was a blast. It was okay. You know; and she also loved meeting new people.

Growing up, every Sunday was Grandma Day. *"You know how in Italian families you all got together on Sunday. The extended family, yes it was serious eating but eventually it became serious fighting all about who wanted this and who did that. There were simply too many people all the time. There were at least twelve or thirteen first cousins when we all got together. My husband had nine sisters. He was the only boy in his family. He really learned about women as he grew to adulthood. He was the most unselfish person I've ever known."* Grace admitted to being spoiled by him.

"I've been blest with great energy. So, I can get up and wash a floor as opposed to first having a cup of coffee. I can stop and be quiet, but I can also go throughout the day at a great pace and enjoy it. I was always a day person and into bed at night around 10 pm – 10:30. In retirement we won't talk about the change. In retirement you can re-create your life and all bets are off. In my case, especially being a widow, I feel as if, I've gone back to being eighteen years of age again and accountable to no one. I've never had such freedom since I was eighteen years of age before I was married. Oh yes, I have responsibility, but I do not shrug that off. You know, my life is a blank canvass. If I want to watch a movie that's coming on at three in the morning, I watch the movie."

"I love readers' theater. I love the theater. I've extended that into my family". "You asked earlier about the thread of connectivity and skill that runs through generations of our family; I believe this is it. My son (one of the lawyers,) does theatre work, he sings, he dances, and has a great mind, so he remembers all the lines. I on the other hand love theatre, but I like to read the script, I don't have the memory for --- I get too nervous, memorizing lines in front of a camera. For adlibbing, reading I love theatre. I did it in college, and it was a lot of fun. I was going to Suffolk Community College when I was first introduced to it." During the 1970's Hank Salerno – the Director of Instructional Media for the Brentwood School District partnered with Hofstra University and The Maslow Toffler School of Futuristic Education to bring Children's Readers Theatre to Elementary Schools of the District but thanks to Bob Primavera and students of the Performing Arts Center of MT the concept from Hofstra was then shared with Suffolk Community College. It became wildly popular in the district's elementary schools.

Here I invited Grace to share an aroma with which she is familiar that has in the past demonstrated an ability to move her through time to a moment and a place far removed from the present where time has remained unchanged...constant. She said, *"When I smell bacon, I go to Connecticut; Even though we were not wealthy, my mom was just able to take care of us -- my Aunts and Uncles were all well to do, very well to do. One of my Aunts, Julia, rented a home in Connecticut on the water every year and we all went. So we could be forty, fifty people in this house in which there were nine bedrooms. When I smell bacon I think of the breakfasts, making tons of bacon and eggs takes me back to Connecticut."*

Did she have a favorite season? She said she had just recently become aware of that. She called herself a "very late bloomer" because she had just come to know and recently discovered she preferred winter to spring or fall because, *"Did I know the trees are bare and everything is open? In the spring, fall and summer everything is closed -- covered by trees. It's very beautiful but they also hide things. I like openness. I think I like openness in my life and who I am in my world. 'There's an honesty about winter, isn't there?' "Oh, I think so"* Grace said. *"I think so. I write poetry sometimes and I once wrote a poem*

about spring. It has to do with welcoming spring but with winter's dormant hours. 'Was there time for writing poetry in her life while she was working?' 'You know', she said, 'We're all insecure when we're young and unless you have people to model for you, it's difficult to know where you're going and what you're doing. I wrote from the time I was seven – to thirteen but I tore them all up. I didn't know that anyone else would ever want them – or that I would want them. And I think that if I didn't get married I would have gone into the theatre—I would have gone the theatre route. But it's never too late is it? No. I'm pursuing reader's theatre. I have feelers out'.

"My Granddaughter who is nineteen does lighting for theatres. She does it out in Coram. Oh, I took her to her first play; I took her to her first cruise. I took her to her first opening of 'Victor, Victoria' together. We had opening night. What a great experience it was. You know, theatre has been a part of our journey together; my son loves it, my granddaughter. So, that's a thread but her favorite subject in school always encompassed numbers; arithmetic; always math. That was always her passion."

"Al always said, 'I can't get my wife to move from Brooklyn to Queens. Look where we're going, we're going out to Long Island.'" "Grandma was hysterical when I told her, 'Look Grandma, for \$10 down I bought a house in Brentwood.' We broke up the family. We were actually the first branch of the family that moved out to Long Island. Then my sisters-in-law started to come out. My mother in law used to say, 'Who's going to go out past the water's edge next'? That was what everybody in the country was doing at that time – moving to the suburbs. And it seemed that everybody who lived on Long Island came originally from Brooklyn at that time. "Now, all the Brentwood people have moved to Florida. So now you go to Florida to see your friends. You went from Brooklyn to Brentwood and now you go from Brentwood to Florida." What brought you to Brentwood in 1965? "Ten dollars down! - A friend bought a house around the corner from us; told my sister-in-law about it. She called me and said, 'Grace, you know Elaine just moved to Brentwood. Why don't you look there?' She paid \$10 dollars down and you know. We did. We came out and we found this home and it's in the Loretta Park School District, and it's off Spur Drive North and it's still a lovely area and my neighbors are great. It's

within the Brentwood Postal District, and in fact when I student taught, I walked to Loretta Park.

Talk about that part of it now. You mentioned earlier how at a certain point you walked into Howard Brodsky and offered yourself as a volunteer which later became a paying job, which later became a teaching job in between after you became a clerical and Al had a massive heart attack *“and how the day he was in intensive care I was scheduled to take a Civil Service test and I had to take it because I needed benefits. Al’s heart attack occurred the day before his insurance ran out. “God is good”. We had insurance but for me to then continue with insurance, I had to have a clerical job, and I passed the test, and thank God Brentwood, I got a Clerical’s job. This wonderful district gave me a year off to go to College, and so therefore I was able to keep my insurance. I paid for it but I worked for the district, they allowed me to take a leave of absence and that’s how I was able to graduate. How could I not love Brentwood? They put three children through school who became lawyers; We’ve had a wonderful life in Brentwood; wonderful! St. Ann’s Parish is a wonderful Parish. Do you know what those people did when Al had his heart attack—these were people I didn’t know well – I would come home and find money put in my mailbox; just anonymously stuck in my mailbox—for the family. He was a great community person. He helped build Pronto. It was the structure they needed to store the clothing and he helped build that. The people didn’t forget. People were wonderful. Can I pay our phone bill? You know, you don’t do things in life alone. Whether you think you do—but you do it within a Community. You have everybody there to help you. The Brentwood Schools helped, the Community helped, Saint Anne’s helped. How do I leave? “* So you didn’t have a formal interview with Mr. Brodsky then did you?

“Can I use the word perfunctory? Over the years he knew me. I got letters from everybody that I worked for and I was fortunate.” You remind me of what I’ve often heard said of Brentwood in the larger sense. It is like a microcosm of our entire country writ large. Would you agree with that? *“One thousand percent! There is such heart here. There’s heart in the community, there’s heart in the School District. Look at the children we serve, look at the children we serve, and we service them as best we can. And we have dedicated people. Perhaps they don’t all live in this community. We can’t all live here in*

this fine community as much as they may wish to. That's their prerogative, but they choose to stay here, because it's a fine, fine school district. You know? Administration and teachers, they'll always have their days and nights, but in the end they work for the children".

"And then I went on the other side. I got my Administrative Degree from C.W. Post. I did go and get that. In one year I did it all. In fact they told me I'd have to take a national test, and I said no way I'd graduate before I'd have to do that, so I did it all in a year, and although I did not get per se an administrative position, my friend Janet was the Committee Chairperson for Pre-school. She retired and went to Florida. I got a phone call after I set my room up to go back in September. I got a phone call could you please come. I'd like to talk with you about Committee Chairperson. Well then I worked in Special Services, and I saw Administration. You know what? Great! You get a sense of what they go through. You know, you're in a classroom and you complain. They don't give you this and they don't do that. Go over there and see why they don't do this or why they can't do that. So you don't judge as quickly."

You've also taught in a number of different programs where there have been different hats that you've worn. Why don't you walk us through how you started as a resource room teacher in a building that was then closed (the original Village School), *"I then went to North East Elementary, and I was a resource room teacher there, and then they needed to have only two instead of three resource teachers so as low man on the totem pole, but Mr. Brodsky said how about Early Intervention? And I said you've got to be kidding? What am I going to do with three and four and five year olds? But you know what? I was good at that. I was good for that. I was a good early intervention teacher, because I didn't have to deal with history and math and science in that way. I could teach children how to love themselves. You know? I could teach children how to be proud of themselves. I can mend broken children and I have a gift for that. I did it for fourteen or fifteen years before I became the Pre-School Committee Chairperson. But I took little broken bodies and I made them whole, and I had an opportunity to work with parents. I used to say to them, you know I have your child for two and a half hours I can't do it all. Please help me.*

They need you. And you'd be surprised when people are needed how they come forward."

South Elementary is where you volunteered. That was where it all started, and eventually that building was closed. That was where Janet once said to me, *"What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this? Go to college". So that building closed and I'm still here. I can tell you about people who I thought were tremendous teachers; people who I thought were not tremendous teachers. But they affected children's lives and they helped some children. So, no teacher is not a good teacher. Okay? I'd like to clarify that. Maybe this child is not helped by me, but another teacher IS helping that child. In other words, every teacher is some student's favorite teacher. I may not agree but so what? It doesn't matter, you know? Some teacher touches some child and that's important."*

"Janet Carol. Great! Anita LoPiccolo. Different. Different style. Her style and my style? Night and day. Is she good? She's great. Going back to Lynn Evens, who I watched in the beginning. Terrific! Cara Falk, a teacher I still keep in contact with I'd like to mention a Psychologist, Drew Robinson – the best! The best; they don't make them much better, with heart and knowledge and just a great guy. Administrators occasionally take a bad rap, Mr. Brodsky always took a bad rap, let's be honest, half the world hated him and the other half loved him. I considered him my mentor. He never liked me to say thank you but I always said Thank You!

He didn't want to hear that he helped my family, but he helped my family...Very much so. Who else? My husband. Without him, I couldn't have been anything."

How did you meet your husband? *Oh, I didn't like him. He was horrible. My sister knew him when he worked in a supermarket in Brooklyn, and he said to her, 'There's a girl named Grace, and I'd like to go out with he'. He didn't know that we were sisters. She came home one day and she said, 'Grace, he is so nice why don't you go out with him?' I said, Please! I don't like him at all.— but he left the supermarket and he went to work at Borough Offset Printing in Brooklyn; Downtown Brooklyn. And they had a Christmas Party. Well, he saw my sister and didn't know we were sisters, but he asked her if she saw me*

could she ask me if I would go with him to his Christmas Party, and I agreed. And we had a lovely evening, and it was twelve o'clock and it was held in a hotel in New York and I said, 'Al, I have to go home.' And he said, 'Home? – How old are you?' I said I'm sixteen, and he said, sixteen, I thought you were twenty. He was twenty-one. But he did indeed take me home. I told my mom he had nine sisters and her friends said, drop him – drop him."

"I had a great mother-in-law. I never met my father-in-law. He had passed away before we were married. We were married for forty years. Let me tell you about it. The marriage itself was super, because he was super. He was the glue even though he would deny that. He would say I was. A very hard-working man...A very good man. No one in this world will ever like me and love me the way he did. He was a great friend. Without him I would never have made my schooling or anything else. And in a very real sense he is with you even now. Always. Always."

The celebration of our 40th Anniversary: The children took us out to a restaurant. We had dinner together and it was fine. It was December and we were married on December 28th. So in the month of December they took us out. I had always said that on my 40th Anniversary I would really like to have the whole bridal party together, and how good that would be. But I had said that over the years and never gave it much thought. In February James was going out with Joanne and he said to me, 'Mom, how would you like to go out to dinner with Joann's mom and dad, and daddy will come, and we'll meet them'? So I said, 'That sounds very nice.' So we went over to the Bonwit Inn, and we went upstairs and the whole bridal party was there. So it was wonderful, but he died that May. It was also in that year that a lot of other decisions were made. We had spoken of making a trip in the summer to the Grand Canyon. Al had begun sending away for booklets and brochures from every state and we'd spoken of retirement. I was with the school district for twenty-seven odd years technically it was twenty-three as far as the profession was concerned so we were preparing everything and financially we were able to do it and we wanted to spend time together. So we did we made the decision to retire. However, he decided to pull out in May and came June I still decided to put my papers in. The reason being was that I loved my job. I loved it and I was good at it. I had made great friends in it and the parents were very happy with me and I was at

the top of what we like to call "my game". But you know what? It's good to go out on top, before they start to say, 'You know she's slipping, or she doesn't remember the laws anymore.' I went out at the top of my game and I haven't looked back."

She always had a job description regardless of the various assignments she might have been addressing at any one given point in her life but regardless of those institutional responsibilities she'd accepted she no doubt had personal reasons for doing what she did year in and year out so I asked Grace if she could put her own personal philosophy of her life's mission into words for us. She asked us, if we would permit her to answer the question by sharing a poem she had written. Of course, we invited Grace to be so kind as to share it with us –

*"Life is something we should live with open eyes each day.
For each of us is special in his or her own way.
So go and find that something, and thank your maker for it
And never let a single day go by in which you will ignore it".*

"I just wanted people to become aware of how special they are. That's it."

"You have certainly touched a lot of lives and some of them have reached back to touch yours haven't they?" "Oh, they sure have." "I was always as active a participating Union member in our educational community as I was able to be. My plate was quite full as it was but I never wanted to give less of myself than I was able. I was a voting / participating member of the Union and was a member in good standing of NYSUT (New York State United Teachers from the time I came to Brentwood and joined the BTA (Brentwood Teachers Association)." "I would attend monthly meetings but basically I had Al with whom I was concerned and aware of his heart condition, I had the three boys to raise and with that full plate was the first lector at St Ann's Parish, a Charter member of the Ladies Auxiliary in the Knights of Columbus, and there were many groups in the Community that I gave time to without "cheating" any of them." "You can't be too thin (she said), that's cheating; you cheat yourself and you cheat them. I did what I could do and I gave where I could

give. From what you've described you were greatly involved with your Parish and with Pronto and a prayer group with which you are still a member after thirty years. Just a few days ago a ruling came down from the courts that would allow parochial school to avail themselves of meeting rooms in the public schools for purposes of networking and open communication in neighborhoods." She agreed with that decision and said that any separation clause must take into account that we in education who believe in educating the whole child are committed to the body, mind and spirit of each youngster and there's no artificial separation there.

You retired you said, in 1998. During the almost three decades of service to the children of Brentwood was there any one accomplishment upon reflection you can claim to have felt the most proud? She smiled a broad smile when she answered in the following way. *"I think a little child once told me what was the best thing. I had a class of ten little three year old children, and this one little child was leaving to go to Puerto Rico and she said to me, "Mrs. Ausilli, please come with me to Puerto Rico. And I said, "Aw, I'd love to but I have to go to work." And she said to me – "You work? Where do you work". And I think that may have been the greatest accomplishment of my working career. I never went to work. I just went to school.*

The last assignment you were given was as the Pre-School Committee Chairperson of the Brentwood School District. The number of years in total you served came to twenty-seven years including your time as a Clerical, a Volunteer, an Assistant Teacher and your salary during that first year of service to the District was \$11,900. *" My responsibilities for family members didn't abruptly come to an end. What happened was I had my mother with me for seven years while she was suffering with Alzheimers Disease. I had an Uncle who was ill and I had an Aunt who was currently afflicted with cancer and I had to take care of her. I also had my husband Al with his heart condition and then I had my own family. But I've traveled; I went to Europe, I went to Assisi, I went to Switzerland, France, Germany, I take four days here in Washington and Virginia and four days there, you know. I do that just to put myself together so I can go back and do the things that I have to do; to re-energize myself. I've been fortunate in that I can stay by myself. I love people but I can be alone, very much alone with myself and still be comfortable. I've baby sat so that my*

daughter-in-law could get to the court stenography course because he she was with the baby. The baby kept me going when Al passed away. She gave me new life. She put meaning in my life."

If you had your life to live over is there anything that you would like a chance to do differently? *"It's probably very easy to say I would have gone into theatre or I would have done this or that but you know what, I've had a wonderful life -- I've been blessed. I've been lucky, I've been unlucky but that doesn't make for a bad life. Because people get sick around you or you can't do something you wish you could do, does not make a bad life. I've had a very fine, full life. Teaching was a great part of it. I'd never regret one day in the classroom".*

You've been a reader. What are you reading now you that you can tell us about? *"I'm reading a book now called, "The Holy Longing," by Rochheiser. It is a magnificent book for everyone to read. I believe he was inspired to write this book. It is a fantastic book. We do it as a monthly Chapter for the Prayer Group, but we can barely get through the chapter. On the light side, I loved "Auntie Mame." On the dark side, I loved "Angela's Ashes'. I've read about Spenser Tracey and Catherine Hepburn and I was sorry because I don't like them as much after I've read about them. I had such respect for Catherine Hepburn until I read about how she allowed herself to be used by Spencer Tracy.*

"I do love biographies. Who is my model to most want to be like? Eleanor Roosevelt. Oh, I love Eleanor Roosevelt. God put her here to serve and she served.

What a wonderful gal." What did Grace most miss being retired? Grace most missed the fun stories with the children. Early Intervention is a very special place to be but you must love, three, four and five year olds or please do not go there. Please don't, because you see them change every day. You watch them grow.

"I told you I like to be called Grace. I think Grace is a very heavy name. That name carries a great burden. And I think serving those children allowed me to witness that. That's what I miss; the interactions with the little three,

four, and five year olds. They were so good.” At the end of the day she said, “I am content. I am content.”

“I think we have to look into families more. I worry about my own family. And they’re pretty good they are not dysfunctional to my way of thinking, we all have dysfunctional moments in all our lives. How hard they work. The mothers run around, they’re taking this one here and that one there. I’m concerned about that. I think we have to slow down a little. I absolutely feel that a teacher is not a mother, a father, a church a family. A teacher has a job to do. You want to bring intellect to the children. You want to be there for them emotionally and spiritually. But you and they need their parents. They need their families. A teacher can become your best friend and can help you in so many ways. But he/she is not your family. It’s all in the family. That’s what concerns me. The United States is the biggest family. Then you have the States of the Country. Then you have the real schools and Communities; their families. I look at all organizations as families. Yet nothing can ever do for you what your family does.”

“No one will ever do for you or care for you or love you as your family does. To all the teachers today I’d like to say – go in there and love it. Sometimes it’s not easy. When you look at a child try to look at one thing that is beautiful about that child, because I did not like every child that came to me, I mean we’re human beings after all. Some clash with us; some don’t. Look for something in that one child, particularly that one child that you think you don’t care for and then teach that child; teach them with all your heart. Give them all you’ve got.”