



Rosemary Moriarty
ROBS History Project
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It was a bitter cold day in December of 2009. We arrived in the television studio of Brentwood High School on this day to meet with a colleague that in so far as I knew I'd never met. All I did know was that we'd taught in the same District for decades with this being the first time we'd likely ever spoken. To my complete surprise I learned then and there that she was the married sister of our loved and highly respected Board of Education President, Tony Felicio. Now I was really looking forward more than ever to hearing what she would have to say.

Initially we invited her to give us her full name. She said it was Rosemary Moriarty. Her last name was gifted to her by her husband, Robert (Bob) Moriarty when they married in 1973. He was obviously of Irish heritage. Her mother of course, was a descendant of parents of Italian lineage. Her parents dubbed her *Rosemary*, after her maternal Grandmother's name which had also belonged to her Great Grandmothers; Rose and *Mary or Maria*.

Two of her grandparents were born in Italy. Two were born in America. Her mother's father originally came from Naples. The family story was that her mother's father had known one of her uncles'; who was the brother of her grandmother. His name was Pasquale. Rosemary's grandfather then asked him if his sister had remained in Naples. She was fifteen at the time. Shortly thereafter her Grandmother followed him to America where she and her grandfather were eventually married. They were blessed with five children and both families had known of each others existence before they left Naples to come to America. On one of Rosemary's visits to Ellis Island she and her husband found their names' on

a ships register and she said it was all very exciting. While Rosemary never knew her Great grandparents' she had actually known three of her four grandparents.

She remembered learning that her mother's father died when he was very young. His name was Antonio and he was the one she didn't know. She thought he may have been about fifty-six when he died. When he first arrived in this country he taught himself how to speak English and how to read and write. Her grandmother really didn't learn very many of those skills. She was still speaking broken English when she died at eighty-seven.

"The family always thought that my grandfather had come from an aristocratic family because he was born in an orphanage. He had a grocery store, and he was a cobbler. He did all the things Italian immigrants did when they came to America. Plus he settled in a Brooklyn neighborhood near the Gowanus Canal.

Rosemarie was born February 26, 1940 at Mary Immaculate Hospital in Jamaica, Queens. At that time her parents were living in East New York. She was three months old when her parents bought their first house. That's when they lived in Tudor Village in Ozone Park. It was a wonderful place; a three story brick building. She was the youngest of six (actually seven, because the child before her died when he was only ten days old. He was very ill.)

"Where we lived then to me always felt like a home. I can remember as far back as three years of age. There are many things that happened then that I can remember seeing and experiencing. I remember when my father's mother died. I was brought into the funeral parlor and my father saying, "Come on up and say goodbye to grandma". And he picked me up, and I'll never forget it as long as I live, he held me up and I kissed her right here on her forehead".

"That's one of the recollections I have from that time. It's a beautiful memory because some families put a fear into children of someone who's deceased. Clearly that was not the case with me. I wasn't the least bit frightened."

To talk with you about family I have to start by telling you about my oldest brother Anthony whom you probably know. Anthony in Brentwood was always known as Tony; his name was Tony Felicio and he is my hero. He always was.

“One of the fondest recollections of my brother is that when he was a young man of about eighteen he and a bunch of friends took me to the Bronx Zoo. I remember being three years old and we were in the Bronx Zoo and thrilled with all the attention I was getting and of course, I was with my big brother. We went into the ape house and I remember being so frightened. I still remember being picked up and held and feeling protected; that type of thing. We always had a special bond, the oldest and the youngest in the family. We were close. We could talk to each other. He was a very special man; really and truly. He gave the greater part of his life to the people of Brentwood through his dedication. He was fifteen years my senior. The sister that was closest to me was born four years after me. Joseph was born two years after me but he died. I have my brother Anthony, my sister Louise, and if he were alive now my brother would probably be seventy-nine. I’ll be sixty-four at my next birthday, then my sister Louise, at seventy-six, my sister Pat died when she was sixty two, my brother Frank (they all called him Duke). He’s someone who’s difficult to talk about because he’s sort of the black sheep of the family, unfortunately he had my father’s name but he was nothing like my father or anybody else in the family. Then there was my sister Theresa and myself. It’s always been my brother Anthony and myself that people would approach for information about any decisions that had to be made in the family. We were the ones more or less that people would come to. For whatever reason that is I don’t know why. Maybe it’s because I’ve always been a take charge person or maybe because I’ve been there for a lot of the care giving. My nickname as the baby was always “Ro Ro.” Even when I was in my forties they’d say “You remember the baby, RoRo”?

“I’m in Holtsville now and my husband is with me. We’ve been married for thirty-six years.” I met him at a barbeque. A good friend of his and a good friend of mine were married when they had this barbeque for all the friends of the neighborhood. He thought I was the wife of somebody there and we mutually knew all these different people but for some reason we had never met. I was going out with someone else, you know, whatever, we were continuing our lives. And it was July fourth, in 1972, and half the day went by and we’re all sitting and hanging out with our friends and somehow he finally found out that I was Rosemary and I wasn’t married to anybody. We started talking and that was it. We were in Uniondale where my friends lived at the time. I have three sons today. Two are married and one was going to be married in July but they just broke up. David is my oldest. He’s thirty-four and a Production Assistant for a Production

Company called Rhythm and Youth in Los Angeles. He's a digital coordinator for their video whatever type of thing. And he's a musician. He's been in California for five years. He went to pursue his music career and ended up with this job. He still has a band. They're putting out an album and they also went to a company for the licensing of their songs in different programs and so on. That's David. Then we have Bobby, he is thirty-three. And he is a teacher at Mt. Sinai. He teaches Sixth and Seventh Grade Band. He's married for the second time. He has an eight year old son from his first marriage and he has two little ones from his second marriage. They're precious. I baby sit for them during the week. I love my children but my Grandchildren are just amazing. My youngest son Michael is a high school teacher in Deer Park. They just had their first child in July. That's Michael and he's five and I babysit for him also. As I'm saying this I'm remembering at the time when they were looking for jobs after college

I wanted them to come to Brentwood but both of them were getting married at the time and the only positions open were subbing and permanent sub and they weren't sure of a job. It kind of broke my heart because they couldn't work in Brentwood. Brentwood was such a unique place, you know? They were fortunate to get jobs in other districts right away so that's where they went.

Even though they're still very young, I see that they all love music. David is a terrific kid and he reads well and me being a reading teacher that's very exciting. He's in Third Grade. And they're all great kids. Their personalities are good, I guess it's because I'm a grandmother that I can see their personalities there; the happiness to see a person, you know, there's just that nice sense of warmth, that familiar sense of family. We're all people persons is another way of saying it. We see each other often. I babysit for three of them every week.

My husband and I have often said some day we'd love to visit Ireland and Italy and see those two countries. I believe my mother in law came from County Cork. She went back to visit several times. I have a beautiful tea set that she gave me after one of her visits; and I have a belique butter dish with a thatched cottage on the cover. She loved it there.

Rosemary believed that her grandparents were very likely to have been manual laborers while they were in Italy. She wasn't really sure what they did before immigrating to America. Yet, she spoke with self assurance when she said,

“My mother was a very unique person, she really was. She was 8th Grade educated. But she was the smartest woman, really and truly. Her mathematical ability was incredible. She read well. She was always up on the news. She loved politics. Her greatest love of course, was her family. She was always most interested in what was new. She could never just sit in the house and not “do”. She was always involved doing something. She also did knitting and sewing types of things”.

“I loved my mother but my father was an incredible man. What an easy going man he was. Really and truly, he was not your typical Italian European macho-man, you know your job is here and mine is there, He was there. He helped with the children at such an early age, you know, it was so incredible to me and he always made time for us because there were so many of us he always worked two jobs and sometimes had a job on the weekend. Yet there were times when we sat, we had dinner with him, my mother would have something special for him and there was never a time when he would say, - “I’m tired, leave me alone.” He was there with the hugs. My father was a window trimmer for Whelan Drug Stores, for forty-two years. He loved doing it. He would decorate windows all over the country. He drove once and then because he backed down a big hill he stopped driving my father would walk from Ozone Park to Brooklyn. He took trains out to Montauk because there was a Whelan’s Drug Store out there. He had regular customers in New Jersey, and Pennsylvania and he could tell you how to get there. That was the most amazing thing about it. He was just incredible. And he loved what he did. He loved it and then he worked for a gentleman in Harlem; in a drug store, as a helper. I can think of his name. He was a wonderful man. His name was Mr. Fatado. Had I known I was going to be asked all these questions I would have come more prepared. He loved my father. He was a Black man. He loved my father. My father loved him and that was just the way it was. My father was never intolerant. He was not like that”.

“Tell me one of the most important lessons family has taught you.” I learned acceptance and tolerance; I’ve learned never to turn my back on anyone. There was one Aunt in my life that was dynamite in terms of the impact of her influence on my life when I was growing up. My Aunt Camille was an amazing human being. She was someone who was like that for me. She was always

accepting and never complained; a wonderful cook and an incredible seamstress. She was my mother's sister."

"My choice of a career started when I was in school. I attended only parochial schools and as I was growing up and went to high school I started in grammar school and then continued when I got to high school to make a decision that kind of got me to where I was eventually. I joined the convent. I became a "Dominican Sister of Amityville. You know, I went through school and so on. So I was a nun for five years and I always loved Children. I always wanted to teach so that's what I did. When I left the convent it was because I felt so restricted. The reason I went in was because I loved God and I wanted to bring God to people and help people. One of the places where I was a nun, there was a child there whose parents had gone through a divorce. And the mother would talk to me. You know, and I didn't have experience in the world by this time I was about twenty, and it helped her to talk and I felt good about that. So I had gone back to the convent one day and I was told, "Sister you can't do that. You can't get involved in people's lives". And I thought to myself, Oh, Oh, I don't think so. I really had very strong doubt at that point. And I transferred to another school. After one year you could do that. So I did it - and in this parish; the first one was Notre Dame in New Hyde Park to this one, Cure' of Oz in Merrick, I loved my class. They were precious, precious kids, - third grade at this point - first one I was in was second grade. Anyway, I had this little boy Steven Conroy, I'll never forget his name and this was years ago, his mother came to see me one day, pregnant with her ninth child and she said Sister, I don't know what to do - I'm having this child of course, - but Father yelled at me because I want to use birth control. And this was way back and I firmly believe in this - it's just my personal belief - only God knows and only God can judge you. Do what you feel is right. If you need to do something like that, you're raising nine children. Nine gifts you have here and if you can't have any more then you have to use your own conscience and don't worry about that. And I was so upset by that. I said to myself, it's wrong to do that to people and make them live in fear. Anyway, so I left the convent in 1968. Then I came home and by that time my parents had left Ozone Park and moved to Brentwood, and at the time, my brother already lived in Brentwood. They moved in 1965 and I came to live with them in 1968. I finished up some schooling that I needed by 1970 and then I started teaching in January of 1970 and took over for Florence Perkin at Oak Park.

“She went on a Sabbatical. I was with John (Jack) Hoffman and loved it. I had little Kindergarteners. That was my first step into Brentwood. That year in September I started in Loretta Park. I was there for my first seven years until I got excessed and had to go to Twin Pines for one year. At that time I was on my third child – I should say this was years later because I got married in 1973. “

“Sister Joan McDonald was one of my teachers in Brentwood that I’ve stayed in touch with. Her name was Timothy Ann at the time but I still see her every once in a while. She was my teacher in Elementary School.” --- When Rosemary told us about leaving the Convent I was reading her body language and she was telling me that leaving provided you with a great sense of relief once your decision was made. It was a big decision, but you seemed relieved once it was made. Like it took a weight off your heart. It had to have been a difficult decision to make.

“I had talked to a priest about it; prayed and all that stuff. It was a hard decision to make but when I made the decision I felt I could still do Gods will outside of the convent. I loved my years there. They were wonderful years. There are many people in Brentwood that we have met while working here that we have learned were former members of religious orders; both nuns priests and brothers. I think you’ll agree teaching is a spiritual calling like few other occupations.”

“Next we asked about her first paying job when she was in high school and fourteen years old when she worked at Embassy Laundry in Jamaica. She went to Dominican Commercial High School after school.”

“I actually did billing and office work kind of thing there, after school and on Saturdays. In the summers I worked there all the time. English was my favorite subject and Math was my least favorite. Was there somewhere or someplace that you enjoyed going after school? We had a Park right down the street from us and in those days you could go down to the park and hang out with your friends and play ball go on the swings, it was an amazing childhood, now I wouldn’t let my own kids out to go that far.”

“I guess summer was my favorite season because I love nature when everything has matured and you see everything grown. I attended St. Elizabeth’s Elementary School and after that I went to Dominican Commercial High School.

Then I went to Molloy College for my undergraduate work to obtain my BA in English and to Hofstra University to complete my Masters in Reading.”

“My second choice of career if I was forced to choose would have been Nursing. When I was in High School I was a member of what they called the Antoinette’s. They were girls who used to help out the Sisters of the Sick Poor and we’d go around with them to the houses especially on weekends. The only thing that stopped me was we were going to hospice people. Who knew that later on in life I was going to be using that myself in my family. Part of my thing is that I’ve been a caregiver for so many people in my family that my family sometimes refers to my car as my “ambulette”. That was my whole nursing thing, and people kid me about my car, because I’m always taking someone to the doctor, but, yes, nursing, I’ve always admired nursing, and that I would love to have done as well.”

“When I first came home I worked at that time in the summers with the Special Education Program at South Middle and with Special Ed kids in conjunction with the Town of Islip and Howard Brodski. Part of what I got used to doing in my family was caregiving. So that was my whole nursing thing. I always admired nurses and that I would love to have done too.”

“It was January of 1970 when I first got into the District. You came to Brentwood because you had roots in this community. Your brother was living here and you had family here. When you first came home you worked with the Special Ed Program in the summers as we’ve said. Brentwood had already earned a national reputation for its exemplary Special education programs. I loved being in Brentwood and I was subbing too. The first person I met was Adrienne Eastman and when I took my first look around I thought I was in heaven.”

“Honestly. I’m not just saying that. The first minute I walked into the first building in Brentwood, I loved it. The people, even in the old administration building, it was incredible to me. Everybody was on your side. No one was trying to do a ‘gottcha.’ You know what I’m saying? Everyone was there and supportive. That’s what I noticed most of all. It was wonderful and I just wanted to help kids learn and love learning. And you saw examples of your success with individual students? Oh, I did. Part of my teaching was always the values too. You can’t do one without the other. I never felt that way. That was important, to teach the sharing, the give and take and the tolerance. And I loved that with my kids.”

I told Rosemary something I remembered her brother Anthony had once said to me a long time ago that I won't forget. We were in the middle of his interview when I reminded him that he had once said he saw Brentwood as a microcosm of America. He stopped me cold and said, "Oh, no John, not the entire country, the whole world." Brentwood by then had changed. What he said had once been true no longer was. We had something like fifty-five language groups in the District by then with more diversity than ever. We had become a microcosm of the whole world. It was my own perspective that was instantly and intrinsically changed that day.

Rosemary had seen it herself over the thirty years she'd been in Brentwood. There is a big difference in the community today and in the background of kids, in the degree of need, the level of education coming in. A lot of our kids that come here from other countries didn't start coming to school until they were eight.

She felt that there are times when her students needed to learn 'life' not math, for example. State exams mean well but decade after decade they consistently missed their mark. Teachers have been begging for years to be allowed to teach. If only everyone would just get out of the way and allow teachers to do what they know how to do – to teach. Young teachers who are still in the classroom now and are Master Teachers, love what they do, and are so upset with what they are required to do with students and they know what's wrong. Worrying about test scores is so very wrong.

Rosemary began by teaching Kindergarten and then she taught First Grade, and second Grade for two years and then Third Grade for one year. She taught in the classroom for a total of fifteen years and then became a Reading Consultant for the next fifteen. She loved working with all grade levels. They were wonderful she said. She taught for two years in Catholic school and fifteen years in Brentwood. She loved first grade most of all the grades. Truthfully, she loved them all. She loved the kids and she did everything she possibly could to help them change their lives for the better; to help them move on. Since she is still living on Long Island occasionally she runs into people who remember her from years ago. In fact there was one of her third graders who is now a father of grown kids who --- and she shifted gears to talk of another former student ---- and another girl with whom she corresponds and she sends pictures of her kids, at Christmas time

and so on and every once in a while you'll meet somebody at the bank and you'll say "OMG Mrs. Mendez, How are you? One daughter Andrea Mendez became a lawyer. Oh how wonderful; so many different things, you know. It's wonderful to remember."

She was an active member of the Brentwood Teachers Association and for the first couple of years she was a Delegate. Once she started to have children she really didn't do much of that except to make phone calls to get out the vote or canvass members when they needed help on the phones either for a vote that was coming up or appeals to the Board or politically whatever was coming up. When you were teaching what kinds of things would get under your skin? In other words, what made you angry? Dare I say sometimes Administrators have irked me for one reason or another ----- the fairness or lack thereof to certain kids, or a person who was extraordinarily helpful to you in your career? When I first came here Ruth Cummings was a sweetheart. One person I have to mention is Mary Criscione, she was the sweetest person. she was so good to me on the phone in all those years of subbing,.... dynamite! That was very much part of what we referred to as the fabric of the Brentwood family. Oh my goodness. You see people in other school districts, including my own children's districts and so on, when I would tell them stories about Brentwood and they would hear it from other people and this is including my own children's districts. They would say, Mom, that's unbelievable.

"And I mean that from all levels. I'm talking about the kids, the teachers, the parents, the Board. This doesn't exist anywhere else. My son in Deer Park High School, he is a Delegate there and very involved. And he can't believe the spirit and how supportive the Board was during those years when I was still here. It doesn't exist anywhere else. It truly doesn't and that's why Brentwood is so unique. It's something I would never regret being here all those years that my sons could not experience that. You know? But I have a couple of nieces that are here in the district and I'm happy for that."

How did you come to a point then when you began to feel; I have to do something else. It's time for me to move on. " You know, it wasn't the kids. It wasn't the kids I wanted to leave. It was the nonsense, some of the nonsense; like the state testing requirements, for example. I loved mentoring the teachers. Then it was my responsibility. I felt like I already was a mentor to all my teachers. The young teachers would come to me. It was great. They used to call me the

'Queen Mother', we used to kid around about that. I'm still in touch with them – the young ones. That was the best part of what I did but it was never my job. It was never my kids. It was all the other rigmarole that was going on. I didn't and couldn't agree with some things. And I thought, you know - - It's time. I'm getting older. My kids are having kids. Maybe I'll babysit. Bob and I want to travel a little bit. That type of thing. And he was older and already retired from the Police Department in NYC and he had been commuting for years to and from his work. His schedule was from four to twelve and he'd already worked for Federal Express for ten years. It was time. I said to myself, *'think maybe I'll do it.'* For his last six years he worked at Queens Central Booking. Bob had clocked twenty-one years altogether that he retired and he was still young. Twin Pines was Rosemary's last Building Assignment where she worked with Alex Werner and Bob McCarthy as Principal and Assistant Principal. At the beginning her annual salary was \$9,000. The date of her official retirement was July 1, 2001

If I could grant you three wishes with a magic wand to make whatever changes to public education you know are desperately needed, what would you like to do for the system of public education in our country that would transform outcomes of teacher effort for the better?

That's easy for me to answer. I would wish first, for (1) smaller classes, twenty students or less, (2) and to eliminate all or as much testing by grade as humanly possible (3) to make it standard practice for a minimum of one master educator from each district to become a sitting member on each and every local Board of Education.

I would describe Brentwood's teachers as well rounded and gifted. I've consistently seen its' students as metaphoric sponges; willing and able to work as hard as they can making do with what they receive to enable their success -----as they had done in the past with neither expectation nor complaint.

My advice with respect to new teacher recruits would be to see them first for the degree of humanness they have cultivated. Self awareness is a first requirement of all learners. Seek humanness in yourself before you look to other people.

In answer to my final question Rosemary made the following statement: "I'd like to be remembered as someone who shared her life and gave kindness; someone who was concerned about each of the people with whom she came in contact and was able to make a difference for them. I hope that I've left each and every child with something corresponding to a little piece of me."