

## Angela Joanne Polizzi Gergel

2/1/30 - 12/24/03

The stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing years of both financial and emotional depression were one of the greatest challenges ever to face America. In 1930, the planet Pluto was discovered. Herbert Clark Hoover was President. The National Census in 1930 figured our Population as 123,188,000 in our then 48 states. In September 1931, a bank panic spread across the country. Over 800 banks were shut down in September and October. By 1932, unemployment reached 13,000,000. Euclid Beach Park was a local hotspot and provided a great escape for those in the Cleveland area who needed a break from reality. Ironically, not unlike today, those were times of turmoil, testing the faith of the nation.

And it was that on February 1, 1930, a new life, Angela Joanne was brought into the world by Angelo Jasper and Carmela Polizzi. Jasper, born in Sicily and Carmela (Kay) (Valenti), born to Sicilian immigrants. Our Grandmother Kay is alive today at 97. The family's earliest roots in Cleveland are located in the Little Italy neighborhood around Mayfield and Murray Hill Roads. For those of you who share those roots, I invite you to visit this wonderful area, linger a while, visit the Holy Rosary Church where Grandma Kay was confirmed.

Both Angela's parents were quite enterprising, Jasper operating A. M. P. Meat Market / Restaurant and Hotel Supplies on Union Ave., near their family home on 116th St. as was Kay's Beauty Salon, also close by on Union Ave. Those were certainly tough enough times to be operating two businesses while raising a large family; add the heartbreak of the tragic deaths of two young daughters, Jenny, who only grew to 3 years, dying of pneumonia in her brother's arms and Joanne, who died at one year. As we speak here today, we understand the family's great anguish and are in awe of their unwavering faith and determination, which is the foundation for our strong and proud family.

Angela was born at the family home and was to grow up the only daughter, surrounded in age by four brothers, Raymond, Charles, Joseph, being closest in age to Alfred, the youngest. Angela would recall those childhood years as bittersweet, the constant servings of Italian style soup, stew and pasta. She would later weep over the memory of their hardship, and tell of how her and my father vowed to make a better life for their new family.

Angela was a 1949 graduate of Cleveland Heights High School, then majored in home economics the three years she attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She married William Gergel on Thanksgiving Day Nov. 27, 1952, supported him in pursuit of his Masters degree in Chemical Engineering. She soon became a devoted young mother in June of 1954 with the arrival of Stephen. Each two years apart were Kathleen, in April of 1956 and Timothy in August of 1958. Bill and Angie lived for a short time in an apartment in

Euclid, then moved in to the second floor of Jasper and Kay's house on Rydalmount in Cleveland Heights. Around 1957, close to the time of Jasper's passing, we moved to a house in Newbury, where my sister and I have memories of early childhood. Then in 1961, mom & dad bought our house on Belrose, in Mayfield Hts. This was our true childhood home. In November of 1971, we all moved together again, to the wonderous old century home on Milann Drive, in Willoughby Hills.

As children, Kathy, Tim and I were too young to realize the lack of Italian style cooking, thereby mom's effort to forget the pain of those difficult years. It was much later, after my parents returned from a trip to Italy when she regained the desire to immerse herself in the traditional culinary arts. Angela, however, could be a fantastic cook. Of course, her home ec. training had her preparing properly balanced meals with a yellow vegetable, a green vegetable, a starch etc. She certainly had an extensive cookbook collection and we all had our favorites such as pork chops and scalloped potatoes, stuffed artichokes, Hungarian pastry, hoska bread at Easter (not too mention Lamb-shaped Cakes!) pork, dumplings & sauerkraut at New Years, ham with raisin gravy, batter dipped fried chicken.

Mom was incredibly good with her hands. She made my sister Kathy many sweaters. She crocheted afghans and holiday snowflake ornaments. She crocheted an incredible tablecloth, which truly displays her artistry. In college she even learned how to tailor. When Kathy went off to college mom made her a grey wool blazer, which is of such fine quality and classic design that Kathy still wears it today.

Angela's handiness also applied to home repairs. She'd watch a plumber or handyman eagle eyed and then rarely had to make the same repair call twice because the next time she'd fix it herself!

Kathy and I both agree that for us, mom's greatest gift was one of music. She could sit down at the piano and read music or she could sit and just play without. She could pick an alto line out of the air and harmonize. She loved to play "There is a Tavern in the Town", something she could play without music. She also was determined to play Chopin's Polonaise on the piano and did succeed quite well. In addition to singing in the Cleveland Hts. High choir and various church choirs (including the choir at St. Robert's for a brief time) she played the violin, (in the Heights High Orchestra), mandolin and the ukulele. Angela also had a deep appreciation for the opera. She loved Tchaikovsky, especially 'Capriccio Italien'. She loved the music of the church. Palestrina's Adoramus Te was her favorite. It is a song that she sang many times in four-part harmony with her brothers. It was also a song that she taught the three of us children to sing.

Mom constantly tried to break the routine of the work-a-day world for my

father and organize activities that we did together as a family. She would have the charcoals ready for dad when he got home for a backyard picnic.

Both she and dad loved the outdoors; in the 60's, they took us on many Metropark walks and picnics. When we were a bit older, our family embarked on many camping trips throughout the great lakes area and New England. We acquired a 17 ft. canoe, which we all learned to operate. Angie loved fishing, especially when one of the boys (or her brother) was there to handle the bait and remove the fish from the hook. She was indeed the adventuring spirit, the heart and soul of our family.

It is plain to see that Angela's entire life was devoted to her family. She was indeed successful in making for it, a better life. We were everything to her and we will always remember those good times and love her for everything she did for us.

As her children reached the teenage years and adulthood, many changes occurred in Angela's life. Some people handle change better than others. Indeed, there were earlier signs of trouble that we, as children were not able to recognize. The years following, including the mid 70's and the 80's were particularly unhappy and difficult for Angie, and finally culminated in a diagnosis of terminal cancer.

My family and friends, this is not how we want to remember Angela. And such is her extraordinary story for evidently God had for her, other plans. How this came to pass is not easily understood and perhaps not meant for us to understand but you must realize that she was a living miracle. In 1989, Her full-blown diseased condition gave her doctors little hope and she was eventually sent home to die. There, at Kathy's house, she rested, Kathy's small children around her, Nicole, only four years old, was often her companion. No one really knows for sure, but somewhere in Angela's struggle she arrived at the crossroads of life. Face with the prospect of death, after years of isolation and depression, God presented her a choice. When her doctor later came to visit he was shocked to discover Angela had inexplicably begun the process of remission, acknowledging her recovery was not due to his efforts, and that her recovery was the "work of God".

Of course, we all know Angela lived almost 15 years since going into complete remission. During this time, she moved into her own apartment at Gateway Manor and became an inspiration for many. She had a new vigor for life and once again found purpose and happiness for some time.

For those of you younger grandchildren, who remember Grandma as an angry, troubled or distant person, please remember that in life, timing is not always fair. That behavior was not really her, but an illness that clouded her personality. She did love all of us. Angela did indeed leave something for you to carry and to pass on to others as you live. It is the wisdom

derived from her legacy. It is: "Your relationship with God and your family are most important. We are here because of love."

We are not islands. We have each other. True friends will put their own feelings aside allowing them to step into another's shoes and re-walk that last mile so that they might understand. I know when I've been given that opportunity and actually did that, very often it changed my own feelings. A good friend (that once underwent anger management therapy) told me he learned that the reason people get angry is most often due to their own internal frustration. They are probably more upset with themselves than with you. But try as we may, we may never fully understand exactly what forces trouble the ones we care for.

We need to promise each other that no matter what happens in our earthly lives, and there is certainly much that will go wrong, that we can always count on our love for each other. The past does matter, because it is where our bond together was created.

I believe we can never understand God, we are not meant to; but where it is our fortune to be able to comprehend in total, both the joy and pain of something worth knowing, face it, take time to understand it and ignore the negativity of it, we are meant to come away with the wisest knowledge this world has to offer. If all we come away with is compassion, then we have still learned much.

To cherish the good times of the past is our blessing. Today, it is in our hands. Remember that through Angela, God has shown us a real miracle.