



Angetina Isernio

102 years old. Passed Feb. 15, 2009 with loved ones by her side. Born Concetta Recchia to Liberato & Mariannina (Recchia) on October 28, 1906 in San Marco La Catola, Foggia, Italy. Angie arrived at Ellis Island with her mother, brother & sister and joined her father who had prepared for their arrival in Seattle, Washington. The family settled on Beacon Hill, where three more sisters were born, including one brother, who died at 18 months from pneumonia.

Angie married Frank Isernio in 1932 and raised her son Frank and daughter Gloria within a few miles of her parents' home on Beacon Hill. Frank Sr. preceded her in death in 1990. Angie lived in her home for 70 years.

She was a devoted daughter, sister, mother and friend. She touched all who came in contact with her. She warmed us all with her smile, generosity and humor, but most of all, for the love she gave us.

Angie was an excellent cook and took much pride & pleasure in cooking delicious meals for her family and friends. Her cooking and family dinners will long be remembered. She was a very creative and resourceful person. No one loved the soil more than Angie. She grew beautiful flower & herb gardens, then tended the vegetable garden after her husband's passing. She insisted that every guest and visitor leave her home with gifts of vegetables, flower bouquets or something she made herself, such as pizzelle & biscotti cookies. She was an accomplished seamstress and made clothing for all family members. She was a very artistic and creative crafts person, who had the ability to create beautiful gifts for everyone she knew. Angie's legacy of love, generosity, encouragement and incredible sense of purpose will warmly guide us forever. The family was touched deeply by the loving care of the Faerland Terrace Hospice staff. Angie is survived by son Frank (Margaret) Isernio, daughter Gloria Sullivan, four grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Angetina Isernio
102 Years Old 1906-2009
Eulogy By Son
Frank Isernio
February 21st, 2009

Good Morning. For those very few of you that don't know me, I'm Frank Isernio, Angie's son. First, I want to thank you all for being here with us this morning. We are very grateful and touched by the many gestures of concern, kindness and sympathy offered to us during the past weeks. I also would like to give our heartfelt thanks to the Hospice staff at Faerland Terrace. They formed a loving bond with Mom and expressed it in many ways, making sure her last days were as comfortable as possible. Thank you all again today and forever.

The tears I've shed over the last few weeks are not coming from grief as much as they are from recalling a lifetime of the incredible love and guidance that my Mother has given me. It's impossible to tell you all that she means to me in this brief time so I'm going to try to touch on examples of her character and values.

Before I do that, I want to pay respect to my father who in his quiet and serious way also gave me many important lessons and values. His primary mission in life was to provide for his family. He believed all labor no matter how menial was proud, and that you better spend your waking hours working doing whatever necessary or you are less than a man. He also had strong convictions about responsibility and self discipline all tempered by the unwavering value of respect for family and respect for all who were respectable. He said little but he always emphasized that you don't get respect unless you give respect, and live a respectable life. In no certain terms, he believed that the worst thing you could possibly do is bring shame to the family. As far as I can remember, he didn't miss a day of work in his life because of illness. He was a cautious matter of fact man, a realist, never, never a pie in the sky optimist.

The reason I bring this up is because we all have two parents and get different life lessons from each. I'm thankful for the lessons learned from my father, now I want to express what I feel are the gifts that my Mother gave me.

Excuse me if I digress, but I want to start by recalling a story you may not know. You probably wonder why someone born Concetta is called Angetina or “Angie”. When she arrived in this country as a young girl, her new American kid friends wanted to help her by suggesting that Concetta was too difficult to pronounce. So they said why not go by “**Connie**”, which they explained was much easier to pronounce. She was very upset by that and told them “I’m not a dog, don’t call me a dog! No way I’m not a dog!” Many here know that CANE with an A is the Italian word for Dog. A very upset young Concetta goes home to her parents and tells them she doesn’t want to be called Concetta and will absolutely never be called Connie. She went on to say that she really liked her older sister Angelina’s name and asked if she could be called by that name also. Her parents patiently explained that it wouldn’t be a good idea to have two daughters with the same name, so they said how about Angetina (little Angelina) she readily approved of the new name and she never looked back. This gives us a glimpse of the determination she continued to display throughout her 102 years of life.

On to the life of Angetina:

Total commitment to family: Every waking hour of her married life was dedicated to the well being of her family. She was a housewife doing all the household chores that housewives did in the past. While cooking wonderful meals, and washing clothes without modern appliances, she also tended the garden which was always colored with beautiful flowers and many herbs. In addition, she insisted on doing all the interior painting as well. Our family never ever missed a meal. I can honestly say that I didn’t ever see her lying down in the daytime hours until late in life, she worked constantly. She believed caring for her family was her duty and her pleasure and never made an excuse no matter how she felt. Ironically, I can’t remember her ever being sick except for the occasional cold.

Loved People: Mom seemed to make friends with whomever she met. She met every new person with an almost child-like innocence. She would warmly accept any one. She would accept human flaws in people as long as they were polite and respectful. I’ve been amazed at the number of people she has befriended over the years. I’d stop by to see her and find people from all walks of life visiting: bus drivers, store clerks and people she met while riding the bus who would introduce themselves to me and say that they wanted to bring their wives, husbands and children to meet this lady that touched their lives. I’d see pretty gift boxes with Pizzelle and Biscotti cookies wrapped with a bow on her table. When asked who they were for, it was

always “for the nice bus driver” or “the nice person she met on the bus”. She would generously give to all and she was always so appreciative of their friendship in return.

She made one very significant friend in her last years. A young black cat, barely bigger than a kitten appeared at her front porch window sill. The cat meowed and meowed, obviously hungry and in distress. She felt if she fed it, it probably wouldn't go away and she would be responsible for it. The cat probably smelling the great cooking odors from her kitchen was on a mission. He stayed perched on the sill looking in the window for two or three days crying out to her. She felt she must feed the poor cat but no way was she going to let it in the house and give affection to encourage the stray to stay. You can probably guess that this didn't last too long. The cat really hit the lottery with Mom. She not only fed the Kitty, but fed it a diet of Albacore Tuna, much too expensive for her but the Kitty needed nourishment and she rationalized that this creature gave her so much in return, he was worth it. They became best buddies. The cat grew to be over 15 pounds with a beautiful glossy black coat and wouldn't leave her side unlike most cats. Indoors or in the yard, the cat was always at her feet. He had been a stray once and didn't want to take the chance of losing Mom. He would even try to follow her to the bus stop and she would have to shoo him home. When she napped, Kitty napped at her feet. She never got around giving him an official name, just called him Kitty Kitty. She finally had to part with her dear friend when we moved her to Faerland Terrace 4 years ago. Thankfully, the new owner of her house agreed to care for Kitty Kitty. Mom often asked often if we knew how Kitty Kitty was doing. We always told her he was fine and that made her happy.

Teacher: My earliest memories come to me with visions of her showing or teaching me. She taught me how to turn over soil with a shovel and to care for plants and vegetables in the garden. I remember she even taught me how to pound a nail in a board and use a saw to cut wood.

Encouragement: I always think of one example that said so much about her. My dad being the cautious man he was would say “stay away from the water, you might drown.” Mom replied, “Learn to swim, take some lessons, let's go to the beach”. In the summer, her and my Aunt Margaret would pack lots of tasty picnic food and take my cousin Joe and I transferring buses 3 times to get to Seward Park to swim and take public swimming lessons. She always encouraged reading and learning. She would say “the library is your friend, you can learn just about anything if you enjoy reading.”

Mom was my first business partner. I was nine or ten and wanted to earn extra money besides my paper route income. Mom said “how about if we pull your red wagon up the hill to the woods close by and fill it with the Ivy plants growing there. We can also load some of that rich black soil and I will put the Ivy in clay flower pots and you can go door to door and sell them.” I was all for this idea, we went ahead and thrived on it. Before I was twelve, I’d sold Ivy, Christmas cards, Wall Plaques made by Mom as well as extra eggs from her chickens door to door. Looking back it was her wise guidance, encouragement and initiative that instilled confidence in me. She opened me up to the fact that if you are willing to provide a product or service that people need, consistently, there is a good chance you will succeed, but only if you are willing to take the initiative. When I mentioned starting my present business almost 30 years ago, my dad said “it’s a big risk, you never know what will happen.” Mom said, “do it, you can always go back to what you were doing before” and, “how can I help? Can I wash casings or something?” She was over seventy at the time!

Strength and Determination: Mom was very productive well into the first half of her nineties. Still insisting on cooking Sunday dinner. Taking the bus daily and carrying one or even two shopping bags if necessary. She was a very resourceful woman. She would say “it isn’t what you have; it’s what you do with what you have.” She had compassion, but no use for people that rendered themselves helpless to life’s challenges. She said “talking is fine, but doing the real work is what some people won’t do.” She didn’t broadcast her faith, but prayed quietly with her rosary. She would say many people pray, wish and hope and complain about life, but don’t take it upon themselves to do anything about it. Wishing and hoping isn’t enough.

Guidance: On Mom’s ninetieth birthday, my sister Gloria recalled how our mother always told us, “Associate with people you can learn from. Associate with people who lift you up, not bring you down.” Words of wisdom.

Courage: No adversity could break her determination. When something was troubling, she would say “it will be ok, tomorrow is the start of another day.” She didn’t verbalize it but she mastered the art of understanding that life challenges us constantly, but we always have the choice of how we react to it. She constantly adapted but never never strayed from her core values.

Determination: Here is another example of Mom’s determination and “can-do” attitude. I was told the following story by a friend of the family. Mom

was in her early nineties and carried and set a 12 foot ladder next to the garage, then climbed the ladder to the roof with a broom in one hand and proceeded to sweep twigs and leaves. She made her friend swear to silence about all this “because if Frankie finds out about this he will be really mad!!!” Around the same time, we found out that she saw an ad in the paper that Chubby and Tubby on Rainier Avenue had 50 pound bags of fertilizer on sale and it was the last day of the sale. Pulling her little wire shopping cart, she took the bus, transferring 3 times going to the store, and then three times returning not just once, but twice in the same day; two trips and one hundred pounds of fertilizer. This was in her early nineties. When I found out, I said “Ma, I could’ve I done this for you in a half hour, why didn’t you call me?” she said “Why bother you? It was a nice day and it was good exercise for me!”

Hospitality and Giving: She loved to express her love for friends and family by cooking for them. By the way, she never had to call me twice for dinner. I never could understand why some kids had to be “forced to eat their dinner!”

She always insisted on bringing a gift when visiting someone as well as making sure that the guests and visitors that left her house had a gift in their hands as a taken of her appreciation. An example of how her generosity and how her values were never compromised to the very end is the following story: For the last four years, Margaret and I would visit her regularly at her Faerland Terrace home. All of a sudden, apples and then bananas started appearing on her table; two on one visit four the next and many more as time went on. She would insist that we take the fruit. At first we would refuse, telling her to eat them herself and that we had plenty of fruit at home. But she would insist we take them. We discussed it with the staff and they told us she go to the fruit bowl in the lobby using her walker and take a piece of fruit after meals 2 or 3 times a day. They didn’t have the heart to question her, after all if she was eating them, good for her. As the stash of bananas and apples grew we finally realized her absolute need to give something to each visitor was so great that we would gratefully accept them, then return them to the front desk on the way out after each visit with her. She had to give something to everyone.

Humor! The wonderful aides at Faerland Terrace formed quite a bond with Mom. Over the last few weeks, we’ve heard so many warm stories about their attachment to Angetina. Most would break out in huge smiles telling us great stories; some told us that she would sing to them as they put her to bed. Another said she would smile, sway her body and perform a little dance step

while hanging onto her walker. On and on, they were all amazed and touched by her.

Thankful: She was always thankful and content for what she had. She would always say, “why would I want to go on a vacation, I have everything right here.”

In her last years, people constantly asked her how old she planned to live to and what she looked forward to. Her answer was always the same, “I just want to see my family well.”

Mom and Margaret: I think consciously or subconsciously, we all look for our parent’s approval as was the case years ago when I brought Margaret, my future wife to meet Mom. Margaret, always being her no drama, comfortable self, quietly pitched in with Mom in the kitchen and helped clean afterwards. Obviously, Mom could have said that Margaret was very pretty and very nice, but later said what I felt was Mom’s ultimate approval; “she’s very capable.” Margaret and Mom are both doers, light on talk, Their mutual respect and love grew and was very heartwarming to me. Through the last decade of Mom’s life, Margaret did so much to give our Mother the comfort and joy and piece of mind that we all wanted for her. Mom told her often how much she loved her and we are very grateful for Margaret.

I would like to continue reminiscing but I know we can all do that together in the days and years ahead. I believe the best we can do for Angetina, is to immortalize her in our minds and apply the examples she’s demonstrated for us.

Mom, thank you for the many gifts you’ve given me. Forever your loving son, Frank.