

GRAND MARSHAL

REGINA COSTELLO MORINI

Mahopac is my lifelong home. I was born here on December 13, 1935, the fifth of Raymond and Teresa (Flaherty) Costello's seven children. We grew up in the white house at the corner of Mount Hope Road and Kennicut Hill. Just down the way, at the bottom of Kennicut Hill, was Buckshollow Road, where most of the Italian immigrants to Mahopac had settled; others lived on Kennicut Hill where the road then stopped before the development of Teakettle Spout.

Back then, there was only one school in town. It's now known as Lakeview Elementary, but in my day it housed all the local schoolchildren, from kindergarten through high school. There was only one class for each grade level, so everyone knew everyone else. Tourism was a big part of the economy because the grand hotels that surrounded Lake Mahopac attracted throngs of "summer people," but the year-round population was relatively small.

We all went to school together, and we all played together. Because I came from such a big family, a lot of the outdoor fun and games took place at our house; there was always someone around. Many of my playmates were first-generation Italian-Americans who spoke Italian at home and English at school. One of my special friends from my teenage years was a boy from Buckshollow Road named Nano Morini. His parents, Nano, Sr., and Ida, emigrated from Ripa, Italy in 1920. The Morini family, which included Nano's older siblings, Reno and Dena, lived across the street from the Louis Casagrande family; the Casagrandes were Nano's godparents.

(When I say everyone knew everyone else in Mahopac in those days, I mean it.)

Nano and I were childhood sweethearts. After high school, I graduated from Katherine Gibbs Business School and lived and worked in New York City for a few years. With a train station in Mahopac (now the American Legion), it was easy to come home on weekends. Nano graduated from college and then served in the Navy. We were married on November 30, 1957.

Both my father and Nano's were Mahopac businessmen with connections to the Italian American Club. My father, Raymond Costello, was one of the first lawyers to hang out a shingle in Mahopac. He had an office in Carmel and one at home and represented almost everyone who bought land on which to build a home. He also represented the Agor family, and his name is on the deeds that conveyed the land for the Italian American Clubhouse and the adjoining lot.

Nano's father started a construction business, N. Morini & Sons, which is still in operation today. Nano, Sr., was one of the founders of the Italian American Club and helped to build the clubhouse. Another of his projects was digging Mahopac's Dixon Lake and developing the surrounding area. Both his sons joined him in the business and both raised their families in the Dixon Lake neighborhood. Dena

Morini and her husband settled there as well. I still reside in the house my husband and his family built, the last Morini to hold down the fort in Dixon Lake.

Nano and I had three children: Joan, Carol, and Paul. All three are married and I've been blessed with eight grandchildren and even one great-grandchild. Perhaps the greatest sadness of my life is that Nano didn't get to meet our six younger grandchildren. He died suddenly on March 3, 1990; he was 55 years old. His funeral was at St. John the Evangelist Church where both of us had been baptized and where we were married just 32 years earlier.

So, at the age of 54, my life changed dramatically. Virtually overnight, I found myself alone for the first time--without my husband, my partner, my lifelong friend, and the father of my three children who were only in their 20s at the time. We all missed Nano terribly. We still do.

Public service and volunteering had always been a big part of my life, even while I was raising my children. Putnam County Executive David Bruen asked me to join his administration as the first Assistant County Executive, and I served in that capacity for eight years. In 1990, I was elected to the Putnam County Legislative and represented the people of District 9 for 18 years. I also joined the Lake Mahopac Rotary in 1988 (the first year it allowed women as members) and was its first female president.

After Nano died, I started volunteering even more as a way of keeping busy. In my experience, you meet the best people while volunteering; you wind up getting far more out of the experience than you give.

Over the years, I have volunteered at St. John the Evangelist Church and remain a Eucharistic Minister there. I've volunteered in the Mahopac schools, with the Lake Mahopac Garden Club, and the American Cancer Society. I've been a member of the Boards of Trustees of the Putnam Hospital Center, United Way of Westchester/Putnam, the Mid-Hudson Library System, and the Mahopac Public Library (a true community center that thousands of residents patronize throughout the year and of which we can all be very proud).

In the nearly 83 years I've lived in Mahopac, I've seen my community grow and change. All the hotels are gone. The railroad station so close to home no longer exists. And all the "Mom-and-Pop" stores I knew and loved have disappeared as well. But one thing has stayed the same: I realize how fortunate I've been to grow up and raise a family in a town where the people take pride in their ethnic heritage and ancestry and are also grateful for and contribute so much to our American way of life.

And I am grateful to the Italian American Club for bestowing this honor on me. If Ancestry.com is correct, my DNA is 97% Irish. But I am also Italian. Through marriage. And in spirit. *Viva Italia!*