

Nancy Milani: A Little Flower in God's Hands **by Gianluca Milani**

It was a warm day in June. Nancy and her little sister Dorothy were running around the apricot sapling in the middle of the garden. Their baby brother Albert was sleeping in the bassinet in the shade of a tree. Nancy stopped to look at some flowers, glance at her brother, and then continued her game of tag. Nancy Barbara Torrese was born on January 17, 1936, in South Philadelphia to Albert and Anna Torrese. Albert Torrese was born in the province of Chieti, Italy, near the Adriatic Sea. He came to America when he was thirteen years old and after graduating from high school, tinkered with electrical projects and worked with his father and brother in their family's paper hanging business. Anna Angelini was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She attended Southern High School and, in 1934 when she was seventeen, met Albert Torrese and married him that same year. Nancy was born the next year. A few years later, a little sister named Dorothy was born to Albert and Anna and the family lived with Anna's parents until Nancy was almost five years old. Then the Torreses bought a house of their own on Kerper Street in North East Philadelphia. Since Nancy's father was handy and could fix anything that was broken, friends called him "Mr. Fix."

While working at the family business, Albert took night classes at the Drexel Institute of Technology. Nancy remembers attending her father's graduation when she was three years old. Her father then worked as an electrical engineer for Philco developing the television. Because he had this job, he had a television of his own and on some nights the family and neighbors would go down into the basement and watch movies.

A son, Albert was born to Albert and Anna in 1942. When Nancy was old enough to go to school, she entered first grade at Presentation Grade School which was a tiny, four room building; a fifteen minute walk from her home. Her favorite subject was spelling. Throughout her childhood, Nancy had many pets: bunnies, ducks, chicks, and a dachshund named Otto. Every night Nancy would wash the dishes with Dorothy.

In 1943, the United States of America joined the Allied Forces against the Axis Powers. Some of Nancy's uncles joined the Army. One joined the Navy. Every night after dinner, the Torreses would walk to their victory garden, a small plot of land among many lots in some nearby woods, and pick fruits and vegetables. Nancy loved to work in the garden. Sometimes when the Torreses didn't have enough fruits and vegetables of their own, they would buy some from a huckster, who sold produce in a horse-pulled wagon. On May 7, 1945, when Nancy was in fifth grade, Germany surrendered and the war was over.

In 1946, Nancy's father and her uncle Aldo Lattanzio, who was married to Nancy's aunt, began to build a house one block from the ocean in Wildwood Crest, New Jersey. It was one of the first houses to be built and was surrounded by sand and dune grasses with the crashing waves close by. After the house was built, the Torrese and Lattanzio families would spend their summers down the shore. The mothers and children would stay in Wildwood Crest while the fathers would leave work early on Friday afternoons and stay by the sea with their families until Monday morning.

Nancy was able to attend Melrose Academy, a private high school, after receiving a scholarship for writing an essay on her dachshund, Otto. Her favorite subjects at Melrose were French and mathematics. She sang in the church choir

and sometimes played the organ. After graduating, she studied chemistry at Seton Hall College, but after two years her mother needed her at home so she transferred to Chestnut Hill College. In the summer of 1956, when Nancy was twenty years old, her friend Andrea who lived with the Torrese family, asked Nancy to go to Ocean City with her. At a little restaurant called the Chatterbox, they met one of Andrea's friends and his friend, Albert Milani. Nancy said hello and not much more. During the next school year, when she was a junior at Chestnut Hill College, she met Albert again at a dance there. She was "dazzled by his dancing" and fortunately he liked to attend all of the dances. Four years later, in 1960, Nancy and Albert were married on a cold January 23 at Presentation Church in Cheltenham, PA.

For the first year and a half after they were married, the newlyweds lived with Ulderico and Anna Milani, Albert's parents, in Overbrook, PA. Shortly before their first child, a daughter named Anita, was born in June, 1961, they bought a twin house on Sherwood Road in Overbrook. They had three more children there: Albert, Chris, and Laura. The twin house was soon too small for the growing family and, in 1973, they moved up the street to a large brick house with enough yard for the children and for her gardens. Nancy loved the new house, "The house was like a mansion to me; it was so beautiful with a sun porch on one side and an incredible leaded glass window on the landing." There was even a butler bell in the kitchen. God used that butler bell to save Nancy's life. When she was pregnant with a baby who did not live, she was bleeding internally and after her husband had gone downstairs to leave for work, she felt faint and couldn't call to him. She fell on the floor and pressed the butler bell button and it rang in the kitchen. Albert heard the bell and got help.

Over the next few years, two more sons Daniel and Paul were born to their family. When the boys were a little older, Nancy started leading a contemporary music group, playing the guitar and singing in the church music ministry. Albert began working with the parish youth group and, at the same time, Nancy started making pizza on Friday nights. Soon, the house was crowded with hungry teenagers every Friday night.

The family continued to go to the shore every summer, but the house was getting crowded so, in 1984, Albert and Nancy bought a house in Wildwood Crest up the street from Nancy's parents. The children enjoyed the beach, pizza on Friday nights when their father would arrive from work in Philadelphia, and weaving their way around all the flowers that were growing in the sandy soil surrounding the house. Soon the children were old enough to get married and in December 1990, a baby boy named Christopher was born to Nancy and Albert's oldest child, Anita.

After years of planting gardens wherever she went, Nancy wanted to learn more about the plants she worked with so she took a horticulture course at the Arboretum School at the Barnes Foundation. Soon she was planting gardens at her children's houses.

A month before her oldest son Albert was married, Nancy was in the garden down the shore with Albert's fiancée Jean when Nancy began to feel faint. Thinking it was only the heat, she went inside to lie down. A few hours later, the family realized something more serious was wrong and brought her to the hospital. She had had a very bad stroke. The family was very worried especially because Nancy's father had a stroke and was paralyzed on the left side of his body. After weeks of everyone praying for her while she went from hospital to hospital

to home, she began to recover and was even able to dance with her husband at Albert and Jean's wedding! Jean wrote a song for her while Nancy was still in the hospital:

In your hands there are always flowers
By your hand so much beauty has been sown
Planted and hoped for
Nourished and born

In God's hands there are always flowers
By His hand so much beauty has been sown
Planted and hoped for
Nourished and born

A little flower you are
A little flower in God's hands
You are a little flower in God's hands

In the year 2000, after five of their six children were married, Nancy and Albert moved to a one story house in the woods on Apple Tree Lane in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. Though it was smaller than their Overbrook "mansion" house, the house was large enough to hold the ever-growing family and the yard was big enough for the ever-growing gardens. Every Friday night, the Milani children, their spouses, and her nine grandchildren would come to the house on Apple Tree Lane for Grandmom's home-made pizza. Many, many happy years were spent in that house, but then in December 2009, Nancy's husband Albert suddenly and unexpectedly passed away after contracting an infection at the hospital. Nothing was ever the same without him. Although Nancy was heartbroken without Albert, she didn't shut herself out from the world and continued to be a good mother and grandmother. He was so sorely missed that Nancy decided to sell the house and move into her daughter's house.

On moving day in July 2011, after the movers had come and taken everything away and her children had left, there were a few things still in the house that Nancy wanted to take care of. She got in the car to go to her daughter Laura's house. She saw a little stone statue of a frog that she wanted to take with her and not realizing that the car was in drive, removed her foot from the brake and stepped out of the car. The car started moving forward. She was disoriented by the unexpected movement of the car and she fell over onto the grass. Then the car rolled over her leg. She then drove half an hour to her daughter's house, walked inside, and called to her daughter in a weak voice. Laura asked, "Mom, are you all right?" She answered, "No, but just get me some ice for my leg and I'll be fine." Laura and her husband drove her to the emergency room right away. The x-ray showed that there were no broken bones. Nancy said, "Thanks be to God." It took many months for her to fully recover, but she was out and about by November.

Today, at age 82, Nancy Milani, my grandmother, still makes pizza every Friday night, but with so many busy schedules it's not often that all of her children and nineteen grandchildren can join her. The house that her father built near the ocean is still standing and her sister Dorothy lives there with her family. Nancy still gardens in Pennsylvania at all of her children's houses and at her shore house in Wildwood Crest. She enjoys reading, practicing and performing jazz piano, singing in her church choir, and attending her grandchildren's concerts. Every summer she stays down the shore where her children and grandchildren spend happy times with her in the house that she and her husband, my father Albert's dad, my grandpop, built for us.

In February, 2018 Nancy's oldest grandchild, Christopher and his wife, Gina, had their first child, a boy. They named him Milo Zachary Tanzola. Now Nancy is not only a really good grandmother, she is truly a great grandmother.