



Italian American Heritage Club Of Hunterdon County

KEEPING OUR *Pride*, CELEBRATING OUR *Culture*, REMEMBERING OUR *Past*

Program Notes for April 2012: Barbara-Jo Cruczek



Barbara-Jo Cruczek is and has always been proud to be 100% Italian. Both sets of her grandparents were born and raised in Italy. The Lucchini-Petti clans hailed from the mountain village of Casalciprano in the Campobasso Region of Italy. Felice Lucchini and Marianne Petti married in the town's one-thousand year old church and had several children before venturing to America. Although at least twelve children were born to the couple, only eight survived infancy. Barbara-Jo's dad Felice Philip, was born in 1917 and was the last and the youngest Lucchini.

Although from the same small town of Acri in the Calabria Region of Italy, Angelo Curto and Santa Groccia did not meet each other until well after each arrived separately in America. Theirs was also a large family of at least eight children with five surviving infancy. Barbara-Jo's mom, Bambina Mary, was born in 1919 and was the third child and oldest Curto daughter.

Born and raised in Mount Vernon, New York, Barbara-Jo was surrounded by music and musicians for her entire childhood. Her dad, a professional musician, was her lifelong mentor as she followed in the steps of the musical Lucchini clan. Barbara-Jo played her first note on the trumpet at the ripe old age of two and has been an active trumpeter ever since, playing in a variety of venues - as a member of an ensemble group and in solo performances for senior groups and veterans' assemblies. No matter the venue or purpose, each performance is dedicated to her beloved parents who remain her impetus and inspiration to continue their dream and to continue to honor their memory in the

best way she knows how - to play the horn and to make beautiful music.

Barbara-Jo was mandated by her mom to be the very first in either family to attend college. Though financially strapped, nothing would stop her mother from giving this only child the chance at a better life. And so, with her other's fierce determination and some financial help from her high school, Barbara-Jo was headed in the right direction. She attended SUNY Oswego and Rutgers University where she earned BS and MS degrees in the Geological Sciences and subsequently enjoyed a thirty-six year career as a science educator.

Certainly Barbara-Jo attributes all success that she has had to her loving parents, and has completed her first book as yet another tribute to their memory. **Play Me A Song**, is a historical retrospective of the unusual circumstances of the lives of her parents. Both struggled with poverty, physical ailments and limitations, and the lack of education. From his miracle birth in 1917, the snippets chronicle her father's journey as a traveling musician, composer, and arranger with insight into the workings of his musical creations and his genius. Tormented by adversities throughout his career, his shoulder was his mother whose stabilizing foundation kept him afloat and the family together with her perseverance, determination and love. For the three of them, it is a story of survival.

Presently retired and residing in Flemington, with her husband Gene, Barbara-Jo relishes the freedom to travel, to write, to play the trumpet, and to volunteer in community service projects. Barbara-Jo is a member of the Flemington Woman's Club, the Polio Network of New Jersey, and the Rutgers Geology Alumni. She is committed to the support of our Native American Children and has been involved with their betterment for the past forty years. Barbara-Jo is also the music librarian and principal player in the Grand Staff Ensemble whose mission is to award scholarships to musically talented high school seniors pursuing music in college.

Music will forever be Barbara-Jo's passion an connection to her past as she is still playing her trumpet sixty-four years after blowing her first note!