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Eulogy: Theresa Mariani Spinelli

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Eulogy
October 2, 1989

We mourn a woman of virtue and valor. We mourn a woman beloved of all whose lives she touched. We mourn a woman whose entire life was marked by goodness and concern for others.

Theresa Mariani was born on April 12, 1916 in Mt. Vernon, N.Y. and attended Hamilton Grade School there. The teachers at Hamilton are said to have loved her because she was such an excellent and well-behaved student. Her scholastic achievement continued through her studies at A.B. Davis High School, from which she graduated in 1934 with high honors. She acted in school plays and took dancing lessons and was considered a talented actress and dancer. She shared many happy childhood experiences with her sister Esther and with her brothers Ralph and Maurice and enjoyed wonderful memories of those experiences.

After graduating from high school, Tess went to work for the Wuestenhofer Insurance Agency. She was a liberated woman long before it was fashionable, and she was a perfectionist in every task she ever undertook. She eventually returned to work in the family business, known to us as "Nonno's Store," where she ran things with her customary efficiency. She was one tough cookie, and almost everyone here is familiar with the incident in which she chased a would-be robber from the store with a broom.

A major turning point in Theresa Mariani's life came in 1936, when a handsome fellow who lived down the street entered the store to buy a pack of gum. That fellow's name was Vito

Spinelli. Vito always says that he had a good "physic" in those days. (I think he means "physique.") At any rate, Vito's hand lingered on Theresa's when he paid for the gum, and the rest is history. Tess reported to her sister Esther that she had met a "gorgeous" man and was in love. On August 27, 1940, four years after they met, Vito Spinelli and his "honey," as he always called her, were joined in matrimony. It was truly a marriage made in heaven, and the 49th anniversary of that marriage was celebrated just over a month ago.

Four years after they married, Vito and Theresa had their first child, Ann. Dottie came along a year later. Eugene appeared in 1956 and Mary in 1957. Theresa loved each one with all her heart. The family permanently moved to the Catskill farm in 1969, and Vito soon found employment in this area. The Spinelli children all grew up in a loving, nurturing atmosphere, reflecting the deep love their parents felt for them and for each other. Tess was proud of the successes of all her children. She considered that she had another son when Dottie married Don and another daughter when Eugene married Marisa. She lavished great love upon her grandchildren, Alissa and Donald, and she fought very hard to survive for the birth of the grandchild Marisa is due to deliver at any time.

Theresa was an especially kind and compassionate person. In all the time that I knew her, I never heard her speak an unkind word of anyone. Not that she lacked some very strong opinions about various things and expressed those opinions clearly and, in

certain cases, with considerable salt. That petite and beautiful lady could be tough when the occasion demanded it. She took great pleasure in those weekly poker games, and she was known to wager on the speed of a horse from time to time. Theresa was the most tolerant person I have ever known. She was very forgiving of the foibles and foolishness of her fellow men and women. Always known as a peacemaker, she maintained lifelong relationships with a wide circle of loyal friends. I knew her for more than 20 years and loved her very much. To know her was to love her. She was charitable to all, devout in her religion, and honest and direct in all her relationships. Dr. Sasodia, who attended her in her final illness, told me that she was the most courageous patient he ever had.

Theresa always was willing and anxious to help, whether it was her own children and grandchildren, her brothers and sister, her nieces and nephews or her friends. She helped to care for many of the young people in the family, and they always looked to her for guidance and wise advice. She always put the welfare of others above her own. Even in her final agony, she told her children to take care of Vito and each other, and she apologized for being too much trouble. She died as she had lived, loving, caring, and without concern for self. But she is not gone. A couple of days ago, when I was at the farm, I said to Vito: "She is still here." He agreed.

For Theresa Spinelli lives on in her children and in her grandchildren. She lives wherever there is laughter, selfless

devotion, integrity and honesty, compassion and wisdom. She lives in the thoughts and hearts of her brothers and sister. She endures wherever there is tolerance, kindness, commitment, love, forgiveness and courage. She can be seen in the eyes of Ann and Dottie and Eugene and Mary. A poet has written:

They are not dead who live in lives
they leave behind;
In those they have blessed, they live
a life again -

Yes, Theresa lives in her children and her grandchildren, including the grandchildren yet unborn. She leaves a wonderful heritage, a magnificent legacy. For what greater thing is known to mankind than the love and respect of children for parents and of parents for children? The proudest part of Theresa's life was to give and receive that love and respect.

It is written in the Book of Proverbs:

A woman of valor who can find?
Her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband trusteth in her,
And he shall have no lack of gain.
Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she laugheth at the time to come.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor,
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom,
And the law of lovingkindness is on her tongue.
Her children rise up and call her blessed,
Her husband also, and he praiseth her:
'Many daughters have done worthily,
But thou excellest them all.'

Thou excellest them all, Aunt Theresa. Pax Vobiscum.

Shalom. Peace -- to a Woman of Valor.