

Michelina “Lina” Gabriele D’Aquanno

1931 – 2022

Homemaker/Seamstress

By Frank & Tina D’Aquanno

Michelina “Lina” D’Aquanno was born in Trapani, Sicily on March 12, 1931, the daughter of a fisherman, learning the craft of sewing from the nuns at the local covenant. At the age of 19, she married Trapani native Filippo D’Aquanno. After serving in the U.S. Army during WWII, a relative of Filippo’s told him about a lovely fisherman’s daughter in his hometown of Trapani who might be the right woman for him to marry. He began a courtship through letters and cards with Lina. Filippo returned to Trapani with a wedding dress in hand. They were married on May 6, 1950 in Trapani. The newlyweds returned to the Monterey Peninsula to work and raise a family. Lina was proud of her Sicilian traditions and carried them on with her family and friends here in America.



Family wedding portrait 1950.

During the early days in Monterey, Lina worked in the fish canneries. She then became an excellent dressmaker, and her talent was renowned by her many clients throughout the Monterey Peninsula. One of her first jobs was to make 5 dresses for the 1951 Santa Rosalia Festival. The Santa Rosalia Festival benefited from her sewing talents throughout the years.



Santa Rosalia Festival Committee members, dressed in handmade traditional Sicilian clothing made by Lina. Front row: Jackie Cerchi, Filippo and Lina. Back row: Joe Cerchi, Rose and Charlie Della Sala.

On one occasion during the 1960's, Lina's son Anthony recalls returning home from St. Angela's school with his brother Frank and finding many limousines and security personnel surrounding their parents' home. They learned that President John Kennedy and his wife Jackie were in town for

the Bing Crosby Pro-Am. Mrs. Kennedy's dress had torn and she was in need of a seamstress to repair it. Lina was recommended, so Jackie went to Lina's home where she promptly repaired it for the grateful Mrs. Kennedy.

The first organization she belonged to was the Catholic Daughters where she helped at the church and sewed the priest's garments. Later, she became involved with the Fiesta de Los Padres to raise funds for the San Carlos School and also helped raise \$3,000 to build the Parish Hall.

In 1970, Filippo and Lina became members of the Sons of Italy. Since the organization was low on funds, she led the club in raising hundreds of dollars through the KSBW Supermarket Program and appeared on the sponsored TV commercial. She helped the Italian community in different ways, assisting with the Monterey Bi-Centennial that was celebrated with a parade and coordinated the 1200 people who attended the Sons of Italy Convention in Monterey. She also became a member of the Parade of Nations.



Nina Asaro (Leavenworth) crowned as queen of the 1979 Santa Rosalia Festival.

After the resignation of Peter Coniglio from the Santa Rosalia Committee, the late Jerome Lucido wanted to expand the celebration and build a statue of Santa Rosalia for the fishermen. During a committee meeting, Lina came up with the inspiration that the nominated queens of the festival sell tickets, and the young lady who sold the most tickets would become queen. The committee put her in charge of this fundraiser, which earned money for the club and the purchase of the beautiful statue of Santa Rosalia that today looks out to the bay overseeing our fishermen. While Lina was the chairperson of the Queen Coronation fundraiser, her committee team helped raise over 100 thousand dollars.



Fishermen's patron saint, Santa Rosalia, looking over the fishing fleet in Monterey Bay.

Lina was also in charge of the Santa Rosalia parades. With the help of her husband Filippo and son Frank, they built 5 floats that were displayed in various parades representing the Italian community. She sewed beautiful custom-made satin Sicilian costumes for the men, women and children, as well as the Carabinieri (police) who guarded the statue of Santa Rosalia during parades. Some of these costumes had been displayed at the Monterey Airport Culture Expo and at the Monterey Maritime Museum. They also stored and cared for the Sicilian horse carriage for the festival. She was asked by the Washington D.C. Library of Congress American Folklife Center to borrow their 10-foot-long metal replica of the ship “Santa Maria” to be displayed across the United States during the celebration of Christopher Columbus’ 500-year Quincentennial in their exhibit titled, “Old Ties, New Attachments: Italian-American Folklife in the West.”



Decorated parade car with banner and Lina’s floral arrangement.



Sons of Italy parade float with seahorses, swans and Columbus' boat fleet titled *Coming to America*.

In 1971 her husband Filippo was elected Venerable of the Monterey Lodge Sons of Italy and Lina assisted him. They only had 43 members. The lodge grew to over 200 members in a short time as a result of all the activities that they planned. Lina enjoyed taking charge of the Columbus Day Dinner at the San Carlos parish hall with the I.C.F., Knights of Columbus and the Sons of Italy groups—a fundraiser for San Carlos School. Lina coordinated bus trips to various casinos providing hot meals of Italian food to help raise funds for the lodge. During the time Filippo was an Assistant Grand Officer, they would travel up and down the state to initiate new Sons of Italy lodges. Lina handmade satin sequenced banners for some of the new lodges, designed and sewed a large banner for the California Supreme Grand Lodge Sons of Italy, and enjoyed making beautiful floral head table center pieces for lodge functions. Lina served as deputy of the Salinas lodge for 7 years.

She proudly was President of the United Lodge – Central Coast Sons of Italy for 12 years.



Santa Rosalia statue being escorted through the Monterey Custom House Plaza, surrounded by *Carabinieri* (Italian police), Knights of Columbus, Festival Princesses and fellow Italians wearing celebration dresses and costumes. (Most of them were made or altered by Lina.)



Lina's handmade banner carried by Festival Princesses during the Santa Rosalia parade, wearing authentic Sicilian costumes.

In 2007, she was recognized by the Italian American Cultural Center Foundation with an award for her contributions to the Italian community in Monterey, along with Mike Marotta, Sr., Josephine Favazza and Emilio Rossi.



Lina accompanied by fellow honorees during the 2007 Italian Heritage Society AKA American Cultural Center Foundation award ceremony at the top of the Monterey Marriott Hotel. Left to right: Mike Marotta Sr., Lina, Emilio Rossi, Josephine Favazza and Monterey Mayor Chuck Della Sala.

Aside from all the organization activities, Lina was a housewife and mother. She raised two boys, Anthony and Frank, as well as fostered four nephews and one niece from Sicily. Lina and Filippo also sponsored other family members to immigrate and become citizens of the United States.

After Filippo retired from the City of Monterey Public Works Department, they built their dream home on the hills near Laguna Seca overlooking the Monterey mountains next to close friends.

Lina passed away at the age of 90 on January 10, 2022. Her devotion and commitment to Italian traditions and her community will be missed.

