

La Famiglia Del Piero

FARMERS, DOCTORS, LAWYERS

WRITTEN BY MARC DEL PIERO

The history of the Del Piero family in the United States started in Nimes, Udine (Friuli), Italy, during the second decade of the last century. Timoleone (Timo) Del Piero (1892-1982) served in the Italian Army both in North Africa (now Libya) during the Italo-Turkish War (1911-14) and in several theaters during the Great War (World War I). Timo saw combat service with the infantry (ground forces) in the dry, deadly and treeless Sahara Desert and then with mountaineer forces in Europe during the World War. His selfless service to the country of his birth was recognized with numerous military awards and commendations and an annual stipend for the balance of his life. He was a remarkable rifleman, and loved hunting well into his 80's. But, like many soldiers, he grew to hate the conflicts that took the lives of so many of his friends and comrades-in-arms.

At the end of that conflict in 1918 much of Italy was in ruins and the economy was ravaged. After years of combat, Timo decided to return to his hometown of Nimes with a plan to start a new life outside of the military. When he got there, he discovered that the war had caused great injury to his community and significantly diminished most opportunities for young Italians of his generation. Nonetheless, the young soldier did catch the eye of Caterina Comelli (1894-1985). They married, but as was the case with many of their brethren, they decided to emigrate to the United States, a land of promise and potential success away from the troubles of the "old country." Like most young immigrants of that period, they believed that they could shape their own future and success with their Catholic faith, a desire for educational opportunities and hard work.

Interestingly, they did not "leap blindly" from the shores of Europe to the New World. Timo and Caterina had a plan that was only temporarily interrupted by the

arrival in 1921 of their first daughter, Rita. Timo emigrated from Italy in 1921 and found work at the then-booming Davenport Cement Plant on the northern coast of Santa Cruz County in California. At the time, that northern area of Monterey Bay had become a magnet for Friulianis (northeastern Italians) who were coming to the United States after the Great War. Many of the descendants of those early families remain residents of the Monterey Bay area. Timo worked hard and saved his money to bring his family to California the following year. In later years, he used to say to his family that it was not very difficult to save his monthly paycheck because, besides working at the cement plant, there was nothing to do in Davenport.

Caterina followed in 1922 and entered the United States through Ellis Island with Rita. As a young mother who spoke no English, she demonstrated great courage by traveling across her new country to join her husband. Mother and child crossed the country by train and joined Timo in their new home in Central California. In short order, two more children were born--another daughter, Aurora, and their only son, Richard. In 1924 the Del Pieros leased farmland from the Giberson family in Moss Landing and the Springfield Terrace in Monterey County. Timo began growing artichokes, sugar beets and lettuce. Not long after, the family settled in Castroville, which was then the Central Coast's epicenter of Italian-American farmers and their activities. This was the beginning of the family's nearly 100-year residency in Monterey County.

The three children all attended the one-room Moss Landing School, which remains to this day at its location on a northern hilltop overlooking the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Monterey Bay. Their teacher at the school was a very young Mrs. Mary Lou Giberson, who subsequently was the third-grade teacher for Richard's three sons--Marc, Eric and Kris--in the 1960s at the Pajaro Elementary School just to the north of Moss Landing.

None of Timo and Caterina's children spoke English at the time that they began their schooling, only Italian, so they experienced the challenges of learning a new and necessary language while keeping current with all of the rest of their lessons. It

was in that one-room schoolhouse that all three children developed a lifelong desire for and commitment to education, which was the key to their family's success in America.



1932 photo of my grandparents and their three children.

Left to right: Rita Del Piero Stringari (my aunt), Timoleone (Timo) Del Piero (my grandfather), Aurora Del Piero Mitchell (my aunt), Caterina Comelli Del Piero (my grandmother) and Richard Del Piero (my dad).

Rita, Aurora and Richard all attended Monterey High School. All of them loved that school, and they made lifelong friendships with the children of Monterey's Italian-American families during those years before World War II. At that time it was a simpler, more idyllic California, before modern urban sprawl and traffic jams. They commuted daily from Castroville to Monterey on sparsely traveled roads, through

massive fields of row crops and coastal sand dunes and for decades thereafter shared stories about growing up among scenes in their everyday lives from John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* and *East of Eden* on the Monterey Peninsula and the Salinas Valley.

In 1940 Rita, after attending Hartnell College (it would be years before the Monterey Peninsula College was built), began studies for her degree in elementary education at San Jose State University. She roomed with her lifelong friend, Ann Soldo, who subsequently became the first woman to be elected mayor of the City of Watsonville. Rita graduated in 1942 with her elementary teaching credential, married Lawrence Stringari and had two children, Lorita and Tim. For the rest of her professional life (1942-2008), she devoted herself continuously to teaching and to the elementary education of children of the Monterey Bay area. In 1976 Rita co-founded the Asilomar Regional Reading Conference (ARRC) in Pacific Grove and served on that board until 2009. The library at T. S. MacQuiddy Elementary School in Watsonville is named after her in recognition of her lifelong commitment to elementary education. She passed away in 2011.

Aurora also graduated from Monterey High School. World War II was raging, and she, like many other young women from Monterey, met an affable and kind naval officer, Clyde Mitchell, who was assigned to duty in Monterey County. They married and had two children, Kathy and Michael. They ultimately lived an exciting life all over the country, because Clyde's naval career was followed by employment as an executive with Bechtel Corporation. Aurora ultimately resided in Burlingame near her daughter, her grandsons and her great-granddaughters until she passed away in late 2021.

Perhaps the most exciting life was led by Timo and Caterina's son, Richard, who went on to be a war hero after he left Monterey High School. During World War II, he volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps at the age of 18, despite being eligible for a full deferment as the only son of a farming family.

Initially trained as a pilot, he was assigned to become a “top turret gunner” behind a .50-caliber Browning machine gun on a B-17 bomber. He and his crew flew bombing raids over Germany from their bases in England. The “gunner” who manned the “top-turret” position did not need a parachute once the B-17 was airborne because his seat could not be exited until the plane landed. Under fire from aircraft and ground forces, Richard and the nine-man crew completed 25 combat raids over Nazi Germany, one with an unexploded German anti-aircraft shell lodged in their plane’s left wing. Richard and his fellow crewmembers bombed Geiselwind on his 21st birthday. Less than 30 per cent of all of the B-17 crews ever completed all of their missions without being shot down, so before every mission Richard went to Mass. His crew believed that Richard’s faith protected them all during their unbelievably dangerous combat missions.

After the war, Richard came back to California. Although he qualified for a position with the Federal Bureau of Investigation with his educational background (a college major in accounting) and his war record, he was denied a position because his mother was still not a U.S. citizen. Catarina did become a citizen several years later, but the FBI’s rejection caused Richard’s life to take another turn that resulted in three more generations of the Del Piero family’s living in Monterey County.

In 1947 Richard started farming with Timo in the Pajaro Valley near Watsonville. Just back from the war, he attended a high school baseball game and met the love of his life, Patricia Borcovich, a senior who was, according to Richard, the prettiest girl at Watsonville High School. They married that same year, and Richard bought a farm where they lived for the rest of their lives. They had three sons--Marc and Eric, twins born in 1953, and Kris, who arrived in 1956. The boys were all raised on the family farm in North Monterey County, and theirs is the story of California during the last half of the 20th century.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Del Piero boys were exceptional students and committed athletes during their elementary and high school years. It was a time of unprecedented growth in California and the belief that “anything is possible” if you

worked hard enough in the Golden State. Exceptional academic achievement was expected in the Del Piero household, and the three sons lived up to those expectations. Additionally, all three were known to faithfully show up for swimming practice daily (except Sundays) from the time that they were about eight years old until they graduated from high school. They studied diligently, and they worked hard, loading lettuce trucks and railroad cars during their summer vacations to help to pay for their college educations. Through their constant mutual commitment to important goals Marc, Eric and Kris grew to be very close, and they remain so today.

The oldest Del Piero son (by one hour and ten minutes) Marc, is an attorney, licensed to practice law in the State of California since 1980. Having lived on the Monterey Peninsula his whole life, he believes that it is the best place on earth to raise a family.

Marc received his Bachelor of Arts degree in history, with emphasis on California history, from Santa Clara University in 1975. He was also commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Santa Clara University Army ROTC program and later spent 13 years in the California Army National Guard, attaining the rank of captain. He served as a platoon leader and a tank company commander, as well as in a variety of other roles during his service to our country.

Marc was always interested in both politics and the law. He subsequently received his Juris Doctorate degree from Santa Clara University School of Law in 1978. Fourteen years after he graduated, in 1992 Marc was asked by his alma mater to serve as an adjunct professor at the law school, which he did from 1992 to 2011, teaching California water law.

Throughout his life, Marc has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to improving the lives of Monterey County's residents. Even before he graduated from law school, Marc began contributing to community betterment: In 1978, at the age of 24, he was appointed by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors to serve on the

county Planning Commission and served as vice-chairman. And the next year, in 1979, Marc married the love of his life, Tina Tomlinson, whose pioneer family (the Honore Escolle family) has lived on the Monterey Peninsula since 1852. Tina and Marc met while they were both attending Santa Clara University. Tina spent her long and impressive career working for non-profit organizations and raising millions of dollars for charitable programs on the Monterey Peninsula. She retired after spending nearly two decades working as the Director of Development for the Monterey County Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice. She now serves on numerous boards of directors for local non-profit groups that provide invaluable services to some of Monterey County's most needy residents.

In 1981 Marc became the first descendent of Italian immigrants to be elected to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors. At 26 (he turned 27 three days later) he was sworn in on January 3 as the youngest elected supervisor in modern times, serving from 1981 to 1992. During his tenure, Marc personally wrote and implemented many of the county's general plans, local coastal plans, and ordinances and policies mandating the protection and preservation of surface water and groundwater resources, productive farmlands and ranch lands, coastal wetlands and our vast environmental resources. Many of those policies have remained in force for over 40 years.

As a result of his broad knowledge of environmental laws and federal and state natural resources regulations, Marc was appointed by then-Congressman Leon Panetta to the committee to put together the draft policies for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which became the largest marine sanctuary in the country. He also co-founded and continues to serve on the board of directors of the Ag Land Trust, a non-profit organization which has permanently preserved over 46,000 acres of Monterey County farmlands and open space.

In 1992 Marc was appointed by then-Governor Pete Wilson and confirmed twice by the California State Senate to serve as the attorney member and vice-chair on the



Our family photo taken at the family apple orchard in Pajaro Valley in 1985 after my Grandmother Caterina's funeral.

Front row: Patricia Borcovich Del Piero (my mom), Aurora Del Piero Mitchell (my aunt), Richard Del Piero (my dad), Rita Del Piero Stringari (my aunt) and Teresa Aldisert Del Piero (Eric Del Piero's wife).

Back row: Paul Del Piero (infant, held by me, Marc Del Piero), Marc Del Piero, Tina Tomlinson Del Piero (Marc's wife), Clyde Mitchell (Aurora's husband), Lorita Stringari (Rita's daughter), Tim Stringari (Rita's son), Kay Stringari (Tim's wife), Kris Del Piero (my brother) and Dr. Eric Del Piero (my twin brother).

California State Water Resources Control Board, which governs all of California's water resources. The board is headquartered in Sacramento and for eight years Marc commuted from Monterey County to the state capital twice a week. During his time

on the board, he acted as the hearing officer for every major water-rights case and decision rendered by the board, including the historic decision to compel the City of Los Angeles to return water and restore the eco-systems of Mono Lake in the eastern Sierras.

When his time on the water resources board ended, Marc entered private practice, representing public agencies, farming interests and resource conservation organizations in Central California. He is recognized as an expert by the State Water Resources Control Board on California water-rights law and has testified many times before the board and state courts in that capacity. He also served the U.S. Department of Justice as a federal bankruptcy trustee from 2008 until 2019.

Marc serves on the Board of the Italian Heritage Society of the Monterey Peninsula. He voluntarily serves on the boards of three other non-profit charities in Monterey County, including the Dan and Lillian King Foundation for Constitutional Studies. In 2019-20, under Marc's creative leadership, the foundation's board members created a unique educational curriculum for eighth graders on the constitutional history of the founding of our country. They subsequently spent \$2,000,000.00 and sent every eighth-grade student in Monterey County, regardless of financial means, to see the musical *Hamilton* at the Orpheum Theater in San Francisco as part of their history program.

Marc is currently the executive director of the Ag Land Trust of Monterey County. Unlike many people who retire and leave the arena of public service, Marc's charitable and public service contributions have continued unabated. In 2021, Marc Del Piero was honored by the Italian Heritage Society for his outstanding community service.

Marc and Tina have two sons, Paul and John, who graduated from Santa Catalina Lower School and the Stevenson School in Pebble Beach and spent summers on the farm with their *nonno* Richard.

Paul received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Pomona College and his Master of Business Administration and his Juris Doctorate degrees from the University of Southern California. Paul is an attorney and a director for the Continuum College of The University of Washington. His wife, Larissa, a PhD in Rehabilitation Neuropsychology from the University of Southern California, is the director of the Polytrauma System of Care for U.S. Veterans Administration (Puget Sound – Washington, Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon) and the VISN 20 Clinical Program Manager. She is also an assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine. They have two daughters, Daphne Rita and Phoebe Hope Del Piero, and they regularly return to the Monterey Peninsula to visit *Nonno* Marc and *Nonni* Tina.

John received dual Bachelor of Science degrees in economics and engineering management from Vanderbilt University. John is a vice president of international solutions for Lighthouse, Inc., a large multi-national technology company. He is also a shareholder in an investment company, Alpha Investments of Nashville, Tennessee. His wife, Dr. Juliet Hartford Del Piero, is also a native of the Monterey Peninsula. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in enology and viticulture from the University of California, Davis, and her Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree from the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. She completed her residency in ophthalmology at Baylor University College of Medicine. Juliet and John reside in Carmel Highlands.

Eric Jonathan Del Piero became a physician and eye surgeon who has practiced medicine on the Monterey Peninsula and in Monterey County since 1985. One of his fondest memories is of hunting for rabbits and quail that his Italian grandmother would prepare with polenta at the family's midday meal. He always told his grandparents that he wanted to be a doctor.



My son John's Wedding in 2021.

Left to right: Dr. Eric Del Piero (husband of Teresa), Paul Del Piero (attorney, Larissa's husband, and the Director for Professional Education Programs for the University of Washington), Dr. Juliet Hartford Del Piero (John's wife), John Del Piero (my youngest son), me (Marc) Del Piero and Kris Del Piero (Marc and Eric's younger brother).

Eric attended local public schools and spent his summers working on a field crew, loading lettuce in the Pajaro and Salinas Valleys for both the J.J. Crosetti Company and the Bud Antle Company. The world opened up for him when he became the recipient of an American Field Service (AFS) scholarship to spend his high-school senior year as a foreign student in Aarau, Switzerland. That year abroad exposed Eric to unprecedented educational opportunities and cultural resources throughout Europe that changed his view of the world, and he found that the delicious Northern

Italian cuisine was the same Mediterranean diet his *nonna* had made for him years earlier.

Upon his return to the United States, Eric attended The Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University and the George Washington University School of Medicine. A residency in ophthalmology at the University of California, Irvine preceded his appointment to a vitreoretinal surgical fellowship. Specializing in microsurgical procedures and laser treatments, Eric's practice provides cutting-edge therapies for some of the most challenging ophthalmic pathologies. He has saved the sight of literally thousands of Monterey County residents during his impressive career.

While in practice, Eric was twice been elected to be president of the Monterey County Medical Society. He was honored to have served on the board of trustees of the California Medical Association and was named Monterey County's Physician of the Year in 2007. With his wife of over 40 years, Teresa, Eric has enjoyed the cultural opportunities unique to the Monterey Peninsula. They support the Monterey Peninsula Theatre Trust and the Monterey Museum of Art, where Eric was a trustee for almost a decade.

Teresa Del Piero's paternal grandfather came to America from the Calabria region of Italy in 1904 at the age of 16 to "rescue" his younger sister who (at the age of 14) had immigrated a year earlier to work as a "domestic" with another Italian family. She was unhappy and her brother, a trained tailor, changed both of their fortunes when he arrived. They made a life for themselves in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, and bought a commercial building (which still exists) for their tailor shop.

Teresa's paternal grandmother was born in Ohio to Italian immigrants, the third of 14 children. Teresa's father, Caesar Aldisert, grew up in Carnegie and, after serving in the Navy as a physician in World War II, eventually opened his obstetrics and gynecology practice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He encouraged Teresa to pursue a degree in theatre, and she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting from Boston

University. She met Eric on a blind date in Washington, D.C., when he was in medical school at George Washington University and she was an undergraduate in Boston. They eventually settled in Monterey. Eric's *nonna* was so happy that he found a nice Italian girl!

Teresa has managed Eric's ophthalmology practice since 1985, while following her own career and performing in numerous local theater productions. She was a founding board member of the Monterey County Film Commission, and she also served on the boards of the Monterey County Theatre Alliance and the Carmel Art and Film Festival. Teresa and Eric both serve on the Monterey Peninsula Theatre Trust Board. They were the recipients of a "Champions for the Arts" award from the Monterey County Arts Council in 2012 for their philanthropy in the arts in our local communities.

Kris Del Piero has lived in North Monterey County for his entire life. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California, Kris went on to achieve his Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Santa Clara University. After completing his advanced university degrees, he founded a farming company with his father, Richard, and for many years grew produce in both the Pajaro and Salinas Valleys. He has also been involved in numerous business and real estate ventures during the course of his career. In 2012 Kris bought the family farm from his parents and continues to keep the family's agricultural traditions alive. He is also active in a number of non-profit volunteer organizations.

There you have it—four generations of the Del Piero family who proudly call the Monterey Peninsula "home" and show their respect and esteem for it by devoting their time, treasure, and efforts for the betterment of the community.



Del Piero Ladies just got out of the swimming pool at the Pebble Beach Beach and Tennis Club, February 2022.

Left to right: Teresa Del Piero (Eric's wife), Phoebe Del Piero (Paul's youngest in her mom's arms, age 20 months), Dr. Larissa Del Piero (Paul's wife), Daphne Del Piero (age four years, Paul and Larissa's oldest) and my (Marc's) wife Tina Del Piero (mother of Paul and John Del Piero).

MARC DEL PIERO

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