

Joseph “Joe” Raymond LoManto

1932

CERTIFIED ITALIAN INSURANCE TYCOON

WRITTEN BY JOE RAYMOND LOMANTO

Hi, I am Joseph Raymond LoManto. When I thought about writing a story about myself, I wondered why me? Then I started thinking back to some of the old days, and I could feel a smile on my face. I have many fond memories to share. So where do we start, at the beginning and go forward or at the end and work backward? Let's start from the beginning, where you might say I got a jumpstart in life.

It was April 19, 1932. Mary LoManto, seven months pregnant, was sitting on the couch and visiting with relatives, when suddenly her cousin's young daughter jumped on her lap. Well, I was never one to miss a good party, so I came out fighting at one pound and three-quarters, born in our family home at 329 Van Buren Street in Monterey. I was put in a shoe box with cotton on the oven door--one heck of an incubator.



My dad, John, & me. I lived in that house with my dad, John, mother, Mary, and the queen of our family, my grandmother Angela Aiello Ferrante. Ours was a typical Italian family for those days. My grandfather, Erasmo Ferrante, emigrated to the United States from Isola delle Femmine, Sicily, and went to Pittsburg, California, to fish. Then he moved to Monterey to fish for sardines. I am an only child, but I came from a good-sized extended family. On the Ferrante side was my grandfather, Erasmo; grandmother, Angela; uncles Peter and Bruce, who were twins; my mother, Mary, and my aunts Minnie, Angie and Kate. All were born in Pittsburg except my aunt Kate Dillenback, who was born in the house on Van Buren Street.

My dad's family came from the town of Saint Joseph in Sicily and settled in San Jose as farmers. All of my aunts and uncles got into the farming business except my uncle Sam LoManto, who was one of the best marine mechanics around. When I was growing up, there was never a time that we did not have fresh fruit in the house—plums from San Jose, apricots from Hollister and peaches from Modesto. My mouth is watering just thinking about that luscious produce from the orchards.



Here I am at age five.

My grandfather Erasmo fished and had his own boat. He also had a grocery store on Pacific Street and Jackson (near where the old Troia's store was). On the property at Van Buren Street the family built a facility to tan fishing nets. I can still smell that hot mangrove tree bark water covering the nets. You know, I really never thought about the family involvement in the fishing industry until I started writing it down, but the whole family had a role in it. My uncle Peter was an attorney and represented many fishermen; my uncle Bruce was the business agent for the fisherman's union, and my mother and aunts were all cannery workers. By the way, the family converted my dad to fishing, too. He had a boat and later had a fish market in Salinas. The fish market floundered when the pope said you could eat meat on Friday.

Our family also made wine. An often-told family story goes that when I was about five years old, they found Agnus Nola (she was much older--a couple of years) and me in the cellar with the spigot on the wine barrel open and both of us saturated in good old Italian homemade red. I couldn't drink wine again until I was 14.

It was great growing up on Van Buren Street. So many friends all around to play games--baseball on the vacant lot, football on the street, kick the can, king of the mountain, and of course hide-and-go-seek. I remember when Jimmy Pappalardo,

Nino Sorci, Joe Panetta and I would be playing in my backyard and Leon Panetta, Joe's younger brother, would come over. We'd send him home crying. My mother would console him with a hug and an Italian cookie. When Leon got elected to



A typical gathering of my friends. We had played football in the street and were in back of the old house on Van Buren Street where my mother and grandmother would make hot chocolate and Italian cookies for the guys. From the bottom left: Me (Joe LoManto), Peter Riso, Peter Bruno, Vince Crivello, Jack Aranico, Gus Aiello, George Logan, Horace Battaglia, Paul Aliotti, Jimmy Pappalardo and Sal Cardinale.

Congress, I told Joe that now Leon can tell *us* where to go. What memories. I am smiling again. So many friends are gone and missed.

My mother, father and grandmother were just great people. My mother was a seamstress, and one of best. She always wished that she could have gone to a clothing-design school. She would have been even greater. They all loved me, but what choice did they have, since I was the only kid in the household? I lived my whole life on the Monterey Peninsula, except for a few years away for college and military service. I thank God my parents made such a great choice in places to live.

My life centered around school when I attended San Carlos School, Monterey High School, Monterey Peninsula College and San Jose State. After graduation from college I joined the U.S. Navy and spent my service time in Japan and San Diego. After being discharged from the service in San Diego, I lived there three years and worked for Metropolitan Life Insurance. In 1960 I moved back to our beautiful Monterey Peninsula to be partners with my uncle Ray and my aunt Kate Dillenback in the Dillenback Insurance Agency.



My Boy Scout uniform.



Joe, Mary, & John LoManto.

My friends back in 1950 all dressed up on Easter Sunday. Check out those suits. A coat and tie was my outfit for 50 years in the insurance business. From L-R: Vince Lombardo, George Brucato, Vince Riso, John Coniglio, John Bruno, Joe LoManto and Paul Verga.

We incorporated in 1980 to Dillenback & LoManto Insurance Agency Inc., and I had over 50 years in the insurance business with them. I personally never did any commercial fishing and had gone out a few times with my dad, but I could say I kept my hand in the industry by helping many fishermen with their insurance needs.

Shortly after I moved back to Monterey, a friend by the name of Dick Rotter got me to join the 20-30 Club (young men's service club). In those days we called it the Plenty-Thirsty Club. This was my introduction to volunteering. We built the dugouts at the Del Rey Oaks ball field and the road wall where the service clubs hung their signs. When I was president of the 20-30, we were asked to build a chain link fence around the Gateway Center in Seaside. We got the telephone company to come and drill holes for the metal pipes. They did a great job, but their holes were for telephone poles. That's when I met Joe Real and John Wecker, who were members of the Gateway Center board. We had to fill in the holes with something. You cannot believe how many beer cans it took to fill one hole.

John Wecker asked me to be on the Gateway Center board and that lasted over 30

years. At that same time the 20-30 Club was involved with the Bing Crosby Pro-am Golf Tournament. My first year in 1962, when I was selling and checking tickets at the Monterey Peninsula County Club Golf Course, the tournament was called off because of snow. Snow! In Monterey! I became admissions chairman and was on the operations committee when the Crosby became the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. That lasted 51 years.

I am blessed to have married my lovely wife, Sharon, in 1977. I knew her because her ex-husband was in the 20-30 Club. Our Lions Club was meeting at the Casa Munras Hotel, and this one Friday was a two-martini lunch. As I was leaving the bar to go to the meeting, this gorgeous lady who was there with a group from her office, said, "Hi, Joe." My response was "Who in the hell are you?" I found out where she worked and called to apologize. From there on I chased her until she caught me. Not only did I marry her, but we did it twice--once at the Moose Lodge and then again at San Carlos Cathedral. George and Estelle Brucato were our best man and matron of honor both times. We had four children—John (deceased), Shelly Ballesteri (deceased) and son-in-law Peter Ballesteri, Joleen Green and Joseph R. LoManto, Jr. (JR) and daughter-in-law Crystal LoManto--and six grandkids--Alisa, Kristian and Peter Ballesteri; Dezi and Bella Green, and JoJo LoManto (Joseph R. LoManto III). Sharon, John and Shelly all worked with me in the insurance office. A family affair. I was Cub Master when my son, John, was in the Boy Scouts. I helped start the Girls Softball League when my daughter Shelly was playing and was active again when my daughter Joleen played. Then I got involved in boys' baseball when my son JR played. I was asked to be admissions chairman when the Bronco World Series came to Monterey. That was in 1993. Those were good years for Sharon and me, watching and being with our kids.

I spent 20 years with the National Draft Board, and one year on the Grand Jury. That Grand Jury service was an experience because it was during the time when they had the shootings at Soledad prison. I was past president of the Monterey Peninsula Host Lions Club (member for 48 years) and Independent Agents Association of Monterey

County, and I chaired our California state convention when it was in Monterey. These past few years I have been on the board of the Italian Catholic Federation and am now president. Our Branch 36 is the largest ICF branch in the nation. I am proud to be working with such a dedicated board and membership. Our normal sit-down Lenten dinners had to be modified during the pandemic of 2020/2021, so we



changed to drive-by take-out meals. Everything went smoothly--we were able to adjust to the new routine and served our members and friends in the community over 3700 fish dinners during the seven Friday nights in Lent. You talk about volunteers--they are there to help. I have always said that most volunteers would not work that hard for money.

My wife Sharon and Chef P.J. Curatolo getting ready to peel carrots for a Lenten dinner. Now that's a carrot!



Thinking back on all the memories from my life puts a smile on my face and even makes me laugh. God bless us all.



Joe's mother Mary, February 1, 1989. She lived 28 days short of turning 102.

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