



Elaine Valentine

I was born in Hollister, California, and raised in the middle of an apple/ pear orchard in San Juan Valley. My father, Clarence Freitas, and his parents were born on the Azore Island of Pico. My mother, Lucy Caporicci Tomaso, and her parents, were born in Provvidenti in the Province of Campobasso in the region of Molise, Italy.

As a child, I was surrounded with Portuguese families. Five apple tree rows away, lived my father's identical twin brother Lawrence and family. They were orchardist for sixty years and had a packing house on the property. I came from a hardworking family. All five girls on the ranch helped in the fields and packing house during harvest time. My father and five siblings all married Portuguese spouses except my father who married an Italian girl (Lucy) from Watsonville. I thank my mom for teaching me and my sister about our Italian Heritage which was passed down from my grandparents who had emigrated from Italy.

My cousins and I all attended a two-room schoolhouse. I graduated from an 8th grade class of three students. I graduated from Hollister High school in 1970 and earned an AA degree from Gavilan College in 1972. I worked for San Benito County Social Services as a San Benito County Employees Association Board of Director.

On August 5, 1978, I married the love of my life, Richard Valentine, at the Old San Juan Bautista Mission. That was also a special day, as Richard received his first Holy Communion on our wedding day. We moved to the Monterey Peninsula, where my husband worked at CHOMP, and I worked at the Monterey County Health Department as a Secretary to the Public Health Nurses.

We raised three boys, Stephen, Ryan, and Andrew. Those were very busy years in my life. All my boys played sports, were involved with Boy Scouts, and other activities. My oldest son, Stephen earned his Eagle Scout Medal of Honor.

I was always involved with fundraising with schools, Saint Francis Xavier Church, Boy Scouts of America, Young Ladies Institute, American Heart Association, and other community services. I always found fundraising rewarding to me.

In 1985 I became a charter member of Young Ladies Institute, Our Lady of Bethlehem # 240. I have been an officer for almost 40 years. I held the office as President for two years, and I am currently the Recording Secretary. I was Institute Deputy of El Gabilan #172 Hollister, CA for two years. I am very involved with fundraising for our Grand President's Program, Golden Jubilee Seminarists, IHELP and other community organizations. I was a sponsor for the RCIA program two different times. I was very honored to witness these ladies that became Catholic and receive their sacraments.

I joined a Bunco group over 24 years ago with the following Italian ladies: Annie Ferrante, Bettye Sollecito, Sharon LoManto, Cathy Cardinale, Kim Pinheiro, Mary

Dario, Mary Russo, Carmela Spadaro, Nina Aliotti and many others. I found myself bounding with these beautiful ladies and enjoyed their stories of their Italian Heritage. These ladies encouraged me to join the Italian Catholic Federation Branch 36 in Monterey. I am still playing Bunco with this group made up of mostly ICF members.

Richard and I joined the ICF Branch 36 in 2004. I must say for the first few dinners we sat alone in a corner not knowing very many members. As time went on, we began to know more and more members, which was the beginning of many friendships.

In 2005 I started working for the Monterey Peninsula School District at Seaside Middle School in the office as the Attendance/ Truancy clerk for 20 years (2005-2015). I was involved with PTA fundraising and was a Representative for the Monterey Peninsula Unified Employees Association. When I retired in 2015, Annie Ferrante asked me to be on the ICF Branch 36 Board. I must say the first few meetings, I was lost and wondering why they asked this country girl to be on the board. Josephine Favazza became my mentor and I started to understand the true meaning of ICF and all they have accomplished over the years. I started as a Trustee, then Financial Secretary, and each year board members would come and go.

I found myself as 1st Vice President; Joe LoManto was the President. He was a great President and a no-nonsense type of guy. He started the meeting as fast as he ended it. Three years ago in 2022, I became the President of Branch 36. I felt very honored to hold this position, as a leader of the biggest Branch in our Federation. I value our mission statement for honoring our Catholic Faith, our charitable works and promoting our Italian Heritage. I am proud of being part of our Lenten dinners, fundraising for our church, schools, scholarships, and our community. I love being involved with our monthly dinner raffles. I sort of go crazy finding that prefect

raffle prize for each event. Our Raffle fundraisers help our Branch with scholarships and expenses.

I value our Federation and appreciate all our Board of Directors who make Branch 36 the biggest and the best branch. The most questions I am asked are “Who are you? Who are your grandparents and relatives in Monterey?” I must say, I do not have one relative in Monterey, but after living here for the last 47 years, I consider all Monterey Italians as my family.

For the last 8 years I have been on the ICF Central Coast District Board of Directors, currently I am the Recording Secretary.

During all my years of being involved with ICF, I feel I found my golden link reconnecting me to my Italian Heritage. I have met so many wonderful people and made lasting friendships. I feel very connected to the Monterey Italian community and their history and all their accomplishments. I do have a soft spot for our older ICF members and personally call them to tell them about our events or just call to check up on them.

I am very proud of all the donations Branch 36 has given to our church, schools, scholarships, national charities, seminarians and many other community organizations over 93 years.

I am very honored and thrilled that I was selected to receive the Grand President Award that will be given at our 2024 ICF National Convention in San Francisco, on September 1, 2024. This award is given each year to an individual that has been dedicated to ICF and their charitable works. I am also a member of the Italian Heritage Society of the Monterey Peninsula, Festa Italia, Monterey Moose Lodge, YLI #240, FDES, ICF Central Coast Board of Directors, and ICF Santa Rosalia Branch 36/ Monterey and currently I am serving as ICF President.

Today, I am a proud grandmother of six grandchildren: Abigail (11), Madison (9), Leslie (8), Justin (6), Skylar (2), and Kelsey (1). They are all members of ICF Branch 36. We together are teaching them about their Italian Heritage.

I want to thank the Italian Heritage Society for selecting me as a 2024 Honoree. I am honored and grateful to be recognized for all my accomplishments during my life, especially for our Italian community.

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