

Mary Alice Cerrito Fettis

1948

PROPERTY MANAGER, FLIGHT ATTENDANT, REALTOR, ENTREPRENEUR

WRITTEN BY NICHOLAS, MARY ALICE & PETER FETTIS, CONNIE SEXTON, WENDY BRICKMAN

Mary Alice Cerrito Fettis was born in 1948 to a well-known Monterey Catholic family as their second child and daughter. Her father, Sal Cerrito, of Sicilian heritage, and her mother, Alice Urquidi Cerrito, of Basque heritage, both spoke their parents' native languages and had to learn English in school. Both quit high school to support their families. Through the challenges of the Depression, they worked hard and long hours to make ends meet, learned the restaurant business and saved their money. They became pioneers in the restaurant industry and, at one time, owned seven restaurants in Monterey and other areas of California. Mary Alice's parents became her greatest mentors in faith, education, business, career choices and love of diverse cultures. Their exceptional work ethic and strong Catholic faith were her inspirations for most of her major decisions during her life.

As a child, and with the encouragement of her parents, Mary Alice played and fished beneath Old Fisherman's Wharf with her friends and rode her horse, Buck, with her friend Susan Waligora around Pebble Beach, Jacks Peak and on the Monterey beaches. The first year Buck tossed her off every day. Sicilian Sal taught Basque Alice how to make traditional Sicilian meals like spaghetti and meatballs for their Sunday family dinners. Sal was proud of his cousin, the great Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso; consequently, Mary Alice grew up listening to 78 rpm records of his original recordings.

At 15 she began working in her parents' restaurants. She remembers working so hard in the Neptune's Table pantry during the Bing Crosby Pro-Am golf tournament

(now the AT&T), that there was no time to spy on the cioppino dinner in the banquet room filled with 300 members of the Paisano Club, her father, Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra.



Gloria and Mary Alice.

Another favorite recollection was attending daily Mass at dawn with her mother. After Mass and before school from the restaurant they watched the sunrise reflecting on Monterey Bay while devouring silver dollar size pancakes. On and off for the next 19 years she worked in most areas of the family restaurant businesses. She graduated from Santa Catalina School where she developed a spirit of independence and intrepidness to meet adventure and adversity. She earned a

BA and a Masters at Teaching (MAT) History from Santa Clara University. SCU equipped her with skills utilized in all of her careers, events, projects, and family life. At both Catholic schools her faith matured, and she forged lifetime friendships.



Brown family holiday.

Mary Alice's older sister, Gloria, and her husband, Roger Brown, (former Pacific Grove Assistant Fire Chief) had eight children--Gloria Jane, Diana, Roger, Chuck, Bill, Dave, Mary Ann and Jim--and many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Holidays were usually spent at Gloria and Roger's energetic home.

Evenings usually found two or three grandchildren on a sleepover in sleeping bags in Mary Alice's parents' bedroom. Mary Alice spent many vacations with the Browns at Disneyland, Fresno's Storyland, Lake Tahoe ski trips and summers at their second home in Big Sur. The robust relationship of Gloria and Roger with their children impressed upon Mary Alice the importance of strong family values.



Mary Alice standing in the engine of a DC-10 in her TIA uniform.

Inspired by her mother's adventurous spirit and love of travel, Mary Alice became an international charter-flight attendant with Trans International Airlines. During this career she traveled to over 45 countries, greatly broadening her view of life. She worked on a wide array of flights which included taking clergy to Rome; U.S. military to Germany, Japan, Philippines and New Zealand; New York gamblers to Las Vegas; sales incentive flights to Brazil, Mexico and Tahiti; shopping excursions to London, New York and Hong Kong; vacationers to Norway, Italy, Greece, Spain, the Caribbean, Venezuela, Peru and Hawaii; Nigerian Muslims on Hadj to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and participation in Vietnam evacuation. During flights she learned

to speak useful words and phrases of many languages. On layovers throughout the world she sampled unusual cuisines, purchased many of the world's finest articles at affordable prices, viewed many of the earth's treasures and experienced extraordinary vacations off the beaten path. Her extensive travel led to her own personal flexibility. Mary Alice internalized that a multitude of paths, procedures and/or protocols could achieve the same task. Through her travel experiences, she learned to appreciate the attributes of many cultures and incorporate them into her personal life. Sal and Alice had been creative dynamos during their working careers. As they slowed down, Mary Alice and her sister, Gloria Brown, took over



Mary Alice with Chef Wendy Brodie at La Chaine des Rotisseurs Christmas Dinner.

the management of family real estate and Cerrito's Neptune's Table Restaurant on Old Fisherman's Wharf.

The spacious restaurant included a dining room and bar, banquet facilities and an entertainment lounge. The sisters worked closely with the chefs to preserve the great traditional seafood recipes and designed and implemented more customary Italian and innovative dishes. After dinner customers could dance at the best entertainment lounge on the Monterey Peninsula overlooking the Monterey Harbor. All of Gloria's eight children worked in every

department of the restaurant--kitchen, bar, dining room, bookkeeping, human resources and management. It was truly a family affair. Roger taught his kids the exciting art of pyrotechnics. They had many family adventures shooting off fireworks from Hong Kong to the LA Olympics to 4th of July in New York City. Following in Roger's footsteps, several sons enjoyed successful careers in pyrotechnics and in Monterey Peninsula fire departments. Mary Alice's nieces had prosperous careers in retail, accounting and education. They all used skills in their careers they initially acquired from the restaurant experience and brought some of the great Sicilian recipes to their home kitchens.

After the sale of Neptune's Table, Mary Alice chose careers that involved creativity, people skills and food service. She worked with well-known local Chef Wendy Brodie at Cambridge Plan International to create healthful experimental menus for 25 or up to 3,000 diners and worked with restaurants and hotels around the country to implement the recipes. With Pan American Investments, an import company, her job was to sell loads of 44,000 pounds of garlic and sesame seeds!

For her next move she chose a career that provided her the flexibility to continue to work with Gloria managing the family properties, where she could work with people, be attentive to their mother in her later years and travel with her. In Pan American Investments she joined a boutique firm for which she sold commercial and residential real estate for over 25 years. She enjoyed the Greek entrepreneurial atmosphere of the Kakis and Rouso families. In real estate she experienced the joy of matching clients' needs and visions to the properties of their dreams.

To this day, she still manages family properties with her sister, Gloria.

Mary Alice's parents were very active community volunteers in many local organizations, including the San Carlos Altar Society, Monterey History & Art Association's La Merienda, SCRAMP, Kiwanis Club of Monterey, Elks Lodge #1285 and more. Her father was a founding member of the Paisano Club.

Mary Alice was inspired to follow in their footsteps and continues to give back to the community in the arenas of business, community service and education. To her surprise and delight, the benefits of volunteerism yielded a wealth of like-minded new friends and business colleagues. Many provided support and sound advice. As a young businesswoman, she relied on a premise she learned at Santa Catalina--that challenges are meant to be overcome. Over the years she took on many volunteer leadership roles and became president of the Monterey Hotel and Restaurant Association (precursor to the Monterey County Hospitality Association), a Pink Lady at CHOMP and co-founder of Women on Wine, an organization to assist in the education of women in oenology. She also became one of the first women to join the Monterey Kiwanis Club. As a member of the Monterey Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, she served on their small business committee and was instrumental in creating the first Small Business Excellence Awards Dinner.

Mary Alice is proudly married to the multi-talented Nicholas Fetti, who is of Greek descent. When they began dating, Nicholas told his mother of Mary Alice's Sicilian heritage, and she responded, "Oh, that's okay!" meaning that was close enough to Greek and which only demonstrates how closely aligned the Sicilians and Greeks



Nicholas at his piano.

their values were so completely aligned on that first date that they wed before Gene and Joy.

Nicholas is a composer, pianist extraordinaire, owner of a successful piano business for over 45 years, property manager and a former volunteer with the Boy Scouts. Nick especially enjoyed the father-son outings with Peter to Camp Pico Blanco in Big Sur, Camp Chawanakee in the Sierras, and the Northern Tier on the border of Canada. When not hiking or riding his bike around the Monterey Peninsula, Nicholas donates his time fundraising for the Greek Orthodox Church and Kids 'n' Cancer by providing magically beautiful piano concerts. He also gives his time generously to the Greek Orthodox Church's Philoptochos Society, which provides resources, shelter and love to all suffering from many challenges.

Peter Fettis, the delightful son of Nicholas and Mary Alice, is an Eagle Scout and York School Faculty Award recipient. He graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he majored in environmental science with an emphasis on marine ecology. He has written an intuitive nutrition book, *How to Eat Well & Love Yourself*. He teaches yoga and surfing to local and underserved

are, both in heritage and family traditions. Mary Alice and Nicholas met at the Edgar Rice Burroughs estate in Los Angeles on a New Year's Eve blind date arranged by Joy Powers of Gallatin's Restaurant fame. The next day Joy, her fiancé Gene D'Ovidio, Nicholas and Mary Alice enjoyed brunch at the Bel Air Hotel. For the benefit of the engaged couple, Joy and Gene, they discussed the purposes of a religious wedding ceremony, cherished list of guests, essentials of a reception, etc. Nicholas and Mary Alice found

students through The Wahine Project. His main focus currently is building websites and an online education platform.

While raising Peter, Mary Alice volunteered for numerous school projects. She was a den mother with Cub Scouts and a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts. With Nicholas she attended almost all of Peter's baseball, football, soccer, basketball, and lacrosse games. She also volunteered in other community organizations using her extensive skill sets in marketing, event planning, hospitality, budgets, leadership, cultural relations and more. All of these skills she learned while working with her parents.



Humboldt Squid at Whalefest Monterey, Hopkins' Marine Station Dynamic and Interactive booth.

Embracing Nick's Greek heritage, Mary Alice became active as a board member of the Hellenic Cultural Institute, supervised their frequent lecture series and served on the Board of Mentors. Because of her love of local history, she became a board member of Monterey History and Art Association; co-chaired the La Merienda committee; officiated as La Duena, the chaperone of the event's La Favorita and her court, and continues as a mentor.



Nicholas and Mary Alice at La Merienda.



**Mr. Squid and Mary Alice at
Whalefest Monterey.**

Mary Alice served as president of the board of directors of the North Fremont Business District and continues on its board, working on the streetscape and specific plans for the District. She was also a founding board member of the “Language Capital of the World” event, which celebrates the numerous languages of the many ethnic groups of the Monterey Peninsula. For over a decade she served as the president and board member of the Fisherman’s Wharf Association and helped to bring more world recognition to the wharf through science, culture and creative arts events. In this capacity she worked with the City of Monterey, State of California, Harbor Master, Monterey Bay National Marine

Sanctuary and 36 merchants on the wharf. In order to focus public awareness on the environmental issues facing the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and to provide the wharf with an economic boost, she restored the annual world-class event, Whalefest Monterey. With the support of the Fisherman’s Wharf Association, her dedicated committee and over 200 volunteers an educational event was “dressed up” to look like fun. It features a two-day symposium with world-renowned experts and dozens of marine-oriented interactive exhibit booths, a variety of local musicians, research and rescue vessels, activities (including abalone races) and The Marine Mammal Center release on Monterey Beach. Whalefest Monterey benefits many local and national marine nonprofits, organizations, agencies and institutions that educate, inspire and empower the public to preserve and protect the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the oceans of the world. The COVID-19 challenge for the 11th Annual Whalefest Monterey 2021 was to take the dynamic interactive event that had drawn up to 20,000 attendees to Monterey’s Fisherman’s

Wharf from all over the state, the country and the globe and transform it into a virtual event. For Mary Alice, as the event's chair, this was the most challenging creative year-round project ever.

Mary Alice has chaired several other creative and cultural events on the wharf, including Art on the Wharf, which celebrated local marine art and launched a marine art photo competition as part of Whalefest Monterey. In addition, she originated the first All Things Italian – Columbus Day Weekend Celebration and the Japanese Heritage Days on the wharf.

Mary Alice is deeply honored to have been recognized by several organizations for her volunteer work. Among the awards are the Italian Heritage Society of the Monterey Peninsula 2014 Honoree AKA the Italian American Cultural Center Foundation Award, The Laura Bride Powers Award from the Monterey History & Art Association, and The Sea Star Award for Education and Outreach from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Monterey Chapter.



She is currently a member of Carmel Mission, Catholic Daughters of America, Italian Catholic Federation, Philoptochos Society, Knights of the Vine, Monterey History and Art Association, the Monterey Museum of Art and the Italian Heritage Society of the Monterey Peninsula.

Mary Alice loves family vacations. In 2015, thanks to the prominence of Whalefest Monterey, Mary Alice was invited to participate in the World Cetacean Alliance Conference in the Azores.

From there Nick, Mary Alice and Peter traveled to Portugal, Spain and France. The Basque cousins drove them to the top of a pass in the Pyrenees on the boarder of Spain and France to a 7,000-year-old sacred ring of stones (older than Stonehenge). It was an electrically charged and powerful moment at the top of the majestic Pyrenees, surrounded by grazing horses with big cowbells and sheep painted with red and turquoise brands. In Mary Alice's "spare" time, world travel is still an ongoing passion. She plans to visit New England, Greece, France and Spain to maintain the existing rich bonds among the relatives. Her bucket list of trips includes visits to the Galapagos and to her father's parents' hometowns of Agrigento and Palermo, Sicily.

Mary Alice loves to read, attend movies, theater and concerts, visit museums, and she enjoys entertaining at her family home in Carmel Valley. She delights in cooking Italian, Basque and Greek dishes for family and friends, embracing the holidays with



Nicholas, Mary Alice, and Peter at McWay Falls.



Peter and girlfriend Ashley in yoga accord.

gusto, gardening, walking and attending daily Mass.

Looking back at this tapestry of her life, she is grateful for her strong roots in her Catholic Sicilian/Basque family heritage. She is aware of and thankful for how they contribute to and influence her spiritual life, her business decisions, her own family traditions and her relationships within the Monterey Peninsula community. She hopes to pass on these gems to future generations.



Nicholas and Mary Alice celebrating an anniversary.

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