

From left to right: Tracey  
(née Kitley) Antonucci, Jane  
Antonucci and Sharon Kitley.





Sharon in the classroom,  
circa 1990s.

# Three Generations, One Calling

**For these three amazing women, education is more than a passion. It's a legacy.**

BY MOLLY MECHLER

## TEACHING AND MOTHERHOOD

Both mothers and teachers share a common thread: Both require patience, dedication and endless amounts of love. Just as mothers shape the hearts and minds of their children, teachers guide and inspire their students, often becoming second mothers along the way. The Kitley-Antonucci family is a shining example of how the roles of educator and caregiver often intertwine, ultimately molding

both students and communities.

Sharon Kitley, Tracey (née Kitley) Antonucci and Jane Antonucci have dedicated a combined 52 years to shaping young minds, carrying on a legacy of education that spans three generations. For these three women, teaching isn't just a profession. It's a calling. Despite working in different classrooms and districts, they share the same unwavering commitment to their students.





Tracey and students.

## A SHARED CALLING

When Sharon Kitley's husband Bill was drafted into military service, Sharon and their young daughter, Tracey, moved in with her parents. Seeing this change as an opportunity for growth, Sharon enrolled in classes at Kean University. She was initially set on pursuing a business degree but soon realized that her true calling was in education. She began her teaching career in the late 1970s and early 1980s and became especially passionate about special education.

"I grew up at the end of the polio epidemic, and some of my classmates had polio. It's what drew me towards special education and making sure everyone can learn," says Sharon. Witnessing the challenges faced by her peers inspired Sharon to ensure that every child, regardless of ability, has access to a supportive and inclusive education. Sharon retired in 2000, after 20 years in Middletown Township, where she left a lasting and profound

impact on her students and the community.

While growing up at the Jersey Shore, Tracey Antonucci worked as both a lifeguard and a swimming instructor. But she was inspired by her mother to pursue elementary education at The Catholic University of America.

"I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I loved kids and babysat a lot. But honestly, I also loved summer and wanted to be able to go to the beach," says Tracey with a laugh.

After college, Tracey spent three years teaching in Maryland. She returned to New Jersey in 1995, where she accepted a job in Middletown Township. This found Tracey and Sharon working in the same district but at different schools. "Middletown is a big district," says Tracey. "Even though we were in the same system for five years, we never worked in the same building"

At Thompson Middle School, Tracey's first teaching placement, she met a physical education teacher

named Steve Antonucci. Steve and Tracey fell quickly in love, married in 1998, and eventually settled in Manasquan to raise their family.

For over 27 years, Tracey and Steve have been happily married and working in the same field—although they insist on commuting separately during their daily drive along the Garden State Parkway. "Steve is at the high school, and I teach third grade. We have different schedules. I'm always rushing, and he would never want to carpool with me."

Steve plans to retire this year and Tracey prepares to follow in the near future. Meanwhile, their daughter Jane is stepping into the family tradition and beginning her own teaching career.

Jane Antonucci studied elementary education at James Madison University. Like her grandmother, she initially pursued a degree in business before realizing teaching was her true calling. "After taking six business classes, it was obvious it wasn't for me," says Jane. "I

## GETTING CANDID

**A rapid-fire Q&A with the three amazing women who participated in this story.**

*What or who inspires you?*

**Sharon:** "My husband, Bill. He's always so positive. His glass isn't just half full, it's overflowing. I'm a worrier, and he keeps me grounded."

**Tracey:** "My family. Steve and our five children. Each one of them inspires me in different ways every day."

**Jane:** "The women in my life: My grandmother, mom and aunts. I look up to all of them."

*What would your students be surprised to learn about you?*

**Sharon:** "I was a competitive swimmer and swam backstroke on swim teams."

**Tracey:** "I used to give swimming lessons and work as a lifeguard."

**Jane:** "That I'm left-handed, and that I don't actually live at school."

*What is one of your hidden talents?*

**Sharon:** "I can talk to anyone. I have the gift of gab and feel comfortable in most crowds. Plus, I like to think I have a decent sense of humor!"

**Tracey:** "I have a (semi) green thumb."

**Jane:** "Singing karaoke."

*If you won the lottery and gave up teaching, what would you do instead?*

**Sharon:** "I'd be a photographer. I love taking pictures."

**Tracey:** "I'd work at an animal shelter."

**Jane:** "I'd own a women's clothing store with casual, everyday clothes. I love to shop!"

*If your classroom had a mascot, what would it be?*

**Sharon:** "A bear, specifically a polar bear, to go along with my favorite unit in winter."

**Tracey:** "A butterfly. I've hatched them before, and I love calling my students my little butterflies."

**Jane:** "Party Peeps, with a disco ball hanging from the ceiling in my classroom."

*If you were a superhero, what would your teaching power be?*

**Sharon:** "I'd be the Kindness Fairy. No bullying, just kindness and acceptance. Everyone would treat each other with respect."

**Tracey:** "Teleportation so I'm never late and don't have to sit in traffic!"

**Jane:** "The ability to make my students laugh and always knowing how to cheer them up...or maybe mind reading!"

loved kids, and I knew I was meant to be a teacher, so I switched my major."

Although she continues her family's teaching legacy, Jane does not work in Middletown. Instead, she is forging her own path in the Upper Freehold Regional School District, where she teaches fourth grade. "I would've loved to work with my mom and dad in Middletown, but I was offered this position, and I couldn't be happier here."

Whether at home or in the classroom, motherhood and teaching require love, encouragement and an unwavering belief in the next generation. This month, in honor of all of the local graduation ceremonies, we celebrate the powerful impact that parents and teachers have in shaping the future—one hug, one lesson and one word of encouragement at a time.

*Molly Mechler is a dedicated mother, seasoned educator, avid reader, recreational runner, thrifty shopper and local beach lover.*

