

## ***Jeannette Marie Camino Turton: Family, Faith and Fun***



*I met Jeannette Turton, of Indiana, Pennsylvania, when she was sitting with her husband on the maroon benches in the cafeteria of the M/V Malispina, somewhere between Auke Bay and British Columbia. The quiet hum of the ship's engine, the blue-grey waters of the Inside Passage, and the snow-capped mountain peaks were the scene for*

*this mother of four and grandmother of seven's Elder Hostel Alaska adventure and the backdrop for our Women's Voices interview.*

Jeannette Marie Camino Turton grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, the daughter of Italian immigrants to the United States. A first generation American, all four of her grandparents lived in the village of Ururidy, Italy. She described her early life as not unlike many others of her generation: her father worked for Carlings Brewery in Cleveland until it closed and her grandparents cared for her and her brother while her mother worked as a "Rosie the Riveter" during World War II. She grew up, went to Notre Dame College, a women's school in South Euclid, became a history teacher, got married and started her family right away.

"With the birth of my twins, I managed to have four babies in 27 months. We lived hand to mouth while my husband attended graduate school. He had a grant from the National Institute for Health of \$5,600 a year. Thank God the All Star Dairy made home deliveries! At the end of the month we'd have very little left and they would deliver milk and eggs and cheese. I used to buy 220 jars of baby food a month for the twins!"

"I learned to sew just so I could dress the kids. I made everything they wore. My husband Larry had to wear white shirts at the clinic and when his collars wore out, I would take the shirt material to make tops for the girls that I would decorate with appliqués."

Jeannette said her early years of marriage were spent thousands of miles from family, without any help. "I remember one day the lady next door came to help me fold diapers and I was so thankful. Those were the hardest years. I remember when my husband was

getting his Ph.D., my cousin Joe sent \$50 for Christmas to buy the kids some things. He told us to save \$25 to out to dinner and we did! It was amazing!”

“When my husband finished school we moved to Kansas City and rented a little bungalow with an upstairs. I remember there were no heating vents in the upstairs and I called the City of Kansas City to complain. I was quite perturbed!”

Jeannette said that one hardest times she remembers was when she spent a week in the hospital after the birth of her twins. “The wives of some of my husband’s colleagues took care of the kids. I had just had the twins, came home and the next day I passed out from the pain. I had to go back to the hospital for gallbladder surgery. The doctor wouldn’t let me go home to take care of the babies. My mother took one twin and my mother-in-law took the other. It was a very hard time.”

For Jeannette, her mother and mother-in-law provided inspiration and strength for overcoming life’s difficulties. “My mother was a phenomenal woman and a great inspiration. My mother-in-law had 10 kids. They were both very strong women and I tried to imitate them.”

When she went to college, Jeannette said both of her grandmothers had a fit. “But my father told them that I would be a better mother for it. And I firmly believe that. The nuns used to say, ‘Educate a man and you educate a person. Educate a woman and you educate a family’ My father understood that.”

As for her husband, Jeannete described him as “a hell of a guy.”

“He never shirked his fatherly duty. He took charge of the kids when I needed him and I never had the feeling that I was raising the kids alone. Larry and I are probably each other’s best friends. That’s the most important thing in marriage. We haven’t gotten tired of each other yet! We are founding members of the Indiana Ballroom Dance Club. When my girls got engaged we decided we needed to dance, so we took ballroom dance and we’ve been dancing ever since.”

Jeannette said that along with her family, she drew strength in her life from her church. “I love going to church. I’m a people person, and I really like the people. We have gone to the same church for almost 30 years. We have a core group of friends that we spend a lot of time talking about faith. All of us have the same problems, the same experiences.”

Jeannette’s greatest source of pride is her children. “We got all four kids through college. We have a daughter who is learning disabled and had to work harder as a result of it, but she earned a BA in history, an MA in archival history and a Master’s degree in library sciences. I am so proud of all of my children! It’s because of them

that I decided to go back to school myself and earn my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.”

Yet despite that pride, Jeannette's cites something different as her life's greatest accomplishment. “I hope it's not willingly hurting anyone.”

“I've tried really hard to be a good teacher, mother and grandmother. If I have any advice to give to the next generation, it would be to be patient. Don't be afraid to keep on learning. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes. Don't forget to vote. Pay your bills on time and learn the perils of debt. Love each other. And have fun!”



## *Hope and Unity*

*"I had a real sense of wanting to reassure people that there was hope, that there was a reason for the things that have happened to us, that we could overcome the difficulties we had in common. And part of it was to begin to unite as a family again and gradually to take that to the larger levels where we would unite as tribal people and begin to unite as nations. And of course that is taking us to the level of the world, where the world has to look at the things that divided us. And that we individually have a choice that we can make that can set a whole change in motion."*

*—Lauretta Walton King*