

## **Sophie Vincelli**

*(family rock, loyal friend, homemaker extraordinaire, lover of life)*

Born on September 13, 1916 in Sortino, Italy; died on April 19, 2015 from respiratory failure, aged 98.

During her long and accomplished life, Sophie travelled the world, started her own business and was active in the community, meeting prime ministers, presidents, princes and ambassadors – not bad for a fatherless, little girl born in a tiny Sicilian village. Yet perhaps it was this challenging and humble beginning that led Sophie to cherish most of all - her family, friends, and the simple joys of life, such as home cooking and a round of golf.

Sophie (nee Sofia Briganti) never knew her father who died in the Great War. When she was 10, Sophia's mother immigrated to Montreal, Canada and married her deceased husband's brother. Although in an unfamiliar country, Sophie quickly became trilingual and helped care for her three new half-sisters despite a strained relationship with her stepfather.

It was while working at the Kraft factory, wrapping and packaging candy, that she met Frank Vincelli, who at the time was a pattern maker's assistant but who would soon become her best friend, husband and love of her life. "I looked out through the open doors of the factory one day, and there he was, just walking along the sidewalk," she later recalled. "I knew right then that he was the one".

She and Frank married in 1939 and a grand romantic adventure unfolded that would last decades. They travelled extensively, golfed regularly and became pillars of Montreal's Italian community, notably through their decades-long involvement with the Canadian Italian Business and Professional Association. In addition, Sophie started and managed a highly successful interior decorating business for over 40 years. The couple adopted a son Stanley and a daughter Christina, and settled in the Town of Mount Royal, where their home soon became the epicentre for many happy family gatherings. Among the many meals I remember my aunt making were favorites such as lasagna, breaded chicken cutlets, and pasta e fagioli.

As my godmother, Sophie took a keen interest in my life and always looked out for me. When I was in my early twenties and still single, she nonchalantly asked if I would deliver a Christmas gift to one of her friends. When I delivered the package, I was hastily ushered into the dining room, introduced to the parent's daughter and told to stay for dinner. My dear aunt had skillfully and unexpectedly, masterminded a blind date! When I returned later that night and good-naturedly chastised her for the premeditated ambush, my aunt just smiled, winked and said "Can't blame me for trying!"

Sad and difficult circumstances, such as her husband's death in 1995, never altered

her positive attitude. Her unwavering spirit is best exemplified at a family dinner when she was 96, and her 85 year-old sister – my mother - expressed apprehension about moving to a new retirement residence. Sophie listened to my mom's concerns, then smiled and calmly said, "Kay, you're never too old to try something new." Like Sophie, the advice was exquisite.

When times gets tough, as they sometimes do, any lingering thoughts tinged with self-pity are quickly dismissed when I think about what Sophie overcame, and how she left an inspiring, beautiful legacy - choosing to live a life filled with wonder, determination and the mischievous wink of an eye.

*Michael Leclair is Sophie's nephew.*