

***Marie and Joe Gucci:  
Growing Up As Part Of America's Greatest Generation***

All of us are products of the generation that claims our birth. Those born in the same generation share traits and attitudes that are not common to those born earlier or later. Many were born in time frames that had relatively little impact on their lives; for others, the impact of their generation was major.

Joe and Marie Gucci are children of a generation that left its imprint much deeper than any other in American history because they are products of The Depression - born in the 1920s but touched deeply as older children and early teens by the 1930s. The biggest imprint was an ability to cope with change -- born in the Roaring 20s, raised in the Depression, maturing into adults during World War II, and raising their families during the Korean War, Red Scare, and Cold War. And beyond these many changes, Joe and Marie were both children of immigrant parents who arrived on Ellis Island with high hopes, struggled through the Depression, and then achieved great success as first generation Americans.

Being children of first-generation Italian-Americans and children of the Depression, Joe and Marie Gucci were molded by great and wonderful forces that drew them together in marriage and in time. Each is different, of course, but both alike in oh so many ways. During the war, for instance, Joe as a soldier went overseas in combat while Marie assumed the all-important role of Rosy the Riveter -- helping crank out production for the war effort and when peace arrived returning to the full-time task of raising a family. Listen to them and you will hear from a generation of Americans who lived through our country's roughest and most difficult hours and emerged strong people with a great faith in the future.

So we will not be surprised when Joe and Marie express very similar thoughts about some of the important matters of life. Neither will their differences shock us, because they also are as different as man and woman with roles defined by their era and culture.

For instance, when asked what accomplishment in their life were they both most proud of, both Joe and Marie gave identical answers.

- "My kids are my pride," answered Marie. "I stayed home and raised them and they are what I am most proud of. I did the best I could for all three and am very proud of each one of them. And I have three great daughters. The girls are all pretty close. I keep trying to get them to move closer to one another. There's still plenty of time left that if they moved closer they could catch up on so much that they've missed because they were apart geographically."
- "Raising my kids," answered Joe. "My kids are all good kids and I am lucky to have them. I'm proud to be their father, watching them grow up, and never having to worry about them. They were always good kids."

Marie and Joe Gucci now tell their stories - to their daughters, to their grandchildren, to other relatives and friends, and to future generations who will wonder what it was like to live during America's greatest era of change. Listen closely, the answer lies in their life stories. First Marie, and then Joe. But when hearing Joe tell his story if it sounds familiar, like déjà vu . . . it was!

### **Marie Gucci: The Beginnings**

*For Marie the early times are not as vivid as for husband Joe. She remembers the days well growing up in South Philadelphia but not as much about her family coming over from Italy.*

"Our family didn't discuss things about life in Italy and coming over to America with us kids. I probably have a lot of relatives still living in Italy on my father's side. I once thought they got married over here in America but the Ellis Island immigration papers about my parents' arrival here mention children so they must have been married in Italy. My Father's name was Stephen Lacquila and my Mother's name was Clothilda Sturbano

"My parents both came over here from Italy through Ellis Island. My mother was young and my dad was much older than she was. My Father had a brother who stayed in Italy and many of his family members are still in Italy. They had a certain way of naming their children. My father's first son was named after his dad and the first

daughter was named after his mother. That's how they were named. My Grandmother and Grandfather, of course, also lived in Italy but I don't know what part of Italy they came from. I know their dialect but not the exact part of Italy where they lived.

My parents came over to America to get a better life and a good job like most immigrants did. My dad went to work right away, even though he barely spoke any English. He spoke broken English at best, but he ran the whole RCA building in Cambridge New Jersey, without any education. When new people came in to the business they got rid of the old and put in the new. And my dad didn't get the money these young kids got because they had an education. That always bothered me because they had to learn the business from him.

"My father worked in every area of the RCA Building and trained other guys to do different jobs. He could barely sign his name and spoke broken English, but he was terrific with money. He helped his bosses with financing because he had a terrific mind for math. He worked there at least 25 years. I know that because he got a 25-year watch. When he got his first heart attack he retired. My mother was always a housewife all those years. She wasn't educated but mom was very smart in her own ways. She helped the kindergarten teacher sometimes, and worked with her dad in the tailor shop for a year.

"As I said earlier, my dad was a few years older than my mother and he never wanted mother to work. He was extremely jealous of her because she was very pretty. And he was old-fashioned about not having his wife work.

"My family had five kids. Most of my family is gone now. I was just a little girl when the Depression hit but certain things stick in your mind. Later in life, when I started buying clothes, if they looked tan I wouldn't get them. We all had to wear those little tan dresses, which we called Depression Dresses. And those thick tan stockings! I hated to go to school in those things. Some of the young kids today wear tan dresses and stockings and I think, 'Oh, my God, those kids are wearing welfare stockings.'

"My family grew up in South Philly. During the Depression, my dad lost his home in the city but always worked hard to provide what he could. After the Depression was over my father got back on his feet again but it was a hard, hard time.

### **The Early Years**

"Growing up I was raised on Italian food -- every day of the week. You know as kids we walked everywhere; that's why we were all so extra thin. And when you walked down the long blocks of row houses, you could smell what everyone was cooking. There were Irish and Italian families and you could smell supper cooking by just walking by. Each day of the week the Italian families cooked the same thing. Monday was soup night and if you were lucky you had meat in your soup. If not, it was pepper and eggs. Tuesday you had spaghetti and meat balls. Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays were spaghetti days. Wednesdays you had some kind of greens. Saturday was Hoagie day. Everyone in the neighborhood had the same thing to eat each night.

"This was a great time to be kids. We didn't have much but it was a great life, and we were happy with what we had. Our playground was the city street and we were not allowed out of the neighborhood. I was in my teens when I was first allowed out of the neighborhood and that was to go to work. We walked to work and back home again, in all kinds of weather. When we started dating the boy had to be somebody from the neighborhood.

"As kids we'd be out in the streets all the time -- playing marbles, hop scotch, jump rope. We'd have to be called in for dinner; otherwise we'd stay out and play all night. I never rode a bike for years because most of us didn't have a bike. Some kid up the block whose family had a little money would have a bike and we'd take turns riding that bike. It was the same with Maries; nobody had Maries. We had to borrow Maries when we went skating. I never knew what a swimming pool was.

"I went to high school but had to quit so I never graduated. I had to go to work when I was 16. All my brothers did, too. I got a job as a waitress, at the B&O Railroad where the army and navy guys stopped in for a cup of coffee. I'd get a 10-cent tip for each cup of coffee and made a lot of tips. That was a lot of money then.

"One thing I remember my dad saying often was, "Rich people may have lots of money and be millionaires but they don't have common sense and they don't have any manners." He had come across a lot of big shots at RCA and that's the opinion he formed of them all.

"I was raised and married in South Philly. Annette and Tina were born in South Philly, too. My baby, Joanne, was the only one born in Las Vegas. I was 32-years-old when we moved to Las Vegas and have lived here now longer than I lived in S. Philly.

"I used to like to dance when I was young and would go to the dances a lot. I went to the dance halls at different times when my husband Joe also was there, but I didn't know it at the time. A lot of the churches, like St. Johns, had dances all the time. And there was a ballroom we'd go to, and a little club called Marty's. You had to be 21 to dance at Marty's, and I did meet Joe there once.

## **Reflections**

"I never drank but I did smoke - that was my downfall. When I was brought up, we had wine on the table all the time. My father used to make homemade wine and he always insisted a little glass of wine was good for you, and now the doctors say it is. But I could never drink wine or any other alcohol. It went to my head right away, and I didn't like that. My first alcoholic drink, other than wine, was when I went out with my husband. He suggested I try a sweet drink to see if I liked it. So I tried a rum and Coke, and an Alexander, but never really liked either. So I never drank.

But, unfortunately, I did smoke for many years. I didn't start until I met Joe's sister in the tailor shop. All the girls were smoking and so I got started and did for many years until age 60 when I had my heart attack and surgery and then I was too sick to smoke. The doctors never said anything to me about not smoking, and never said anything about it when I carried the girls. All three girls wanted me to quit smoking, though. They used to hide my cigarettes and, of course, I'd have a fit.

"One thing I am happy about is that none of my daughters ever smoked. When I had my heart attack I was too sick to even think of a cigarette. I had tried to quit before that but it was too hard and just

didn't work. I think it's harder to quit smoking than it is for people who have problems with liquor

### **Meeting Joe**

"After working as a waitress I worked in the tailor's shop -- that's where I met my husband Joe's sister, Mickey. I became very friendly with her and we became good friends. She introduced me to Joe so when things aren't so good, I blame her. Around New Year's she told me her brother was getting together with the guys in a club he belonged to. They were going to have a dance at the club and my friend wanted me to go with her brother to the dance. I said, no, I don't go on blind dates. She showed me a picture of him, and I said I didn't care about pictures but would have to meet him first. Italian families were always very strict. She was Italian also. She insisted that we talk and then meet.

"That week I got a call from Joe and he invites me to the New Year's Dance and I said OK. I never saw or met him before. So he comes up to the door to pick me up and I see right away that with my high heels on I am taller than him. So I had to get some other shoes to wear so I wouldn't be taller than Joe. And off we went. There was a blizzard that day; the worst storm of the year. When we got out of the dance we were almost snowed in but took the trolley car home. We took the trolley cars everywhere we went, because no one had a car. None of my brothers had cars. So that's how Joe and I met -- on New Year's Eve in 1948. And two years later we married.

### **The War Years**

"My dad was working at RCA when World War II started and the whole operation was turned over for the war -- making parts for planes and ships. So it became a war production plant. I got a job down there because a lot of the men who were working there had been drafted. So I helped on the assembly line. This was before I met Joe when I was working at the defense plant

"I can remember so well when the war ended. People flooded out into the streets in South Philly from everywhere. People came out screaming and yelling all over the place. And all the young people got together and went down to the Navy Yard, looking to see who would be coming home. It was a happy time. A lot of people remember

when President Kennedy died or when Pearl Harbor happened. I remember so clearly when World War II ended. It was very exciting. What a celebration!"

## **The Vegas Years**

*One of the great memories Marie and Joe share together is meeting Elvis Presley when he was in his prime as an entertainer in Vegas. Marie remembers it well.*

"My two brothers-in-law, Jackie and Tony, were part of a group of musicians and they ended up playing at the Strip Hotels for lots of years. They played opposite Louis Prima who was the main attraction then. While Freddie was entertaining there, Elvis would stop at the Sahara and Elvis became good friends with Jackie.

My husband was working at the time as a slot foreman at the Sands. So my two sisters-in-law and myself would often go to the Sands at night and take our husbands a bite to eat. Joe worked at different hotels but was at the Sands then. He was working all kinds of shifts and often Jackie and Tony and Joe would just eat at the hotel. Other times, the three brides would take them something to eat. The kids were in their teens then and were old enough to stay at home and baby sit my youngest.

"One day Elvis happened to be at the Sahara and we three brides were taking lunches to our husbands. We'd stick around to watch the first acts and then we'd all leave together. Well on this one particular night Jackie tells us Elvis is back stage and asked if we'd like to meet him. So, of course, we all agreed we'd love to meet him. Elvis had a whole lot of bodyguards with him. But he came right over to our table. He was the most handsome, sweetest guy in person -- much more so than how you saw him on the screen or on TV.

"Elvis was actually very shy but he kissed each one of us ladies. Then he sat in the booth with us and asked what everybody's name was. Jackie was talking about how Elvis knew karate and was asking Elvis if he would show what he knew. So he stayed around for a while and then went back stage with Jackie and Tony and some of the

other guys and showed his karate stuff. If Elvis had gotten into a fight he didn't want to use his hands because he considered them weapons. So he never wanted to use karate in a fight. That's why he had all those bodyguards follow him around all the time.

"Elvis played in Vegas a lot and I saw him in other shows. I took my daughter, Annette, to see him in a show in 1972 when she turned 18. And that was the last show he did in Vegas. Elvis came over and autographed a napkin for Tina. She was so crazy about him. She had that napkin for all these years and just sold it recently. He wrote on the napkin, "To Annette from Elvis" That was the last time I saw him. It might have been in 1970 when I first met Elvis, I'm not real sure now.

### **Mom's Spaghetti**

*One thing Marie is well known for, especially with family members, are her great spaghetti and meatballs. She's humble about it but her daughters know better and wish they shared her secrets.*

"I don't know what's so special about the spaghetti sauce and meatballs except that's what the girls were raised on. Whenever we'd go out to eat in a restaurant, Joe and the girls would talk about how the spaghetti sauce and meatballs weren't very good - because they weren't as good as mine. The sauce and meatballs in restaurants taste like plain hamburger meat.

"When I was up to New York recently I taught Annette how to make the meatballs because Michael loved them so much. I taught her to make up a batch, and then cook two or three and see what changes needed to be made - like a little more salt, maybe. And then you make those changes for the whole batch. She's making meatballs pretty close to mine now. I can never tell how they will turn out each time. There's something special in how you measure, and you have to put a lot of your feeling into it.

"And you just have to judge what to do. You have to judge the texture of the meat and when to put in the crumbs and milk. Sometimes the meat comes out harder, sometimes softer - it depends on the meat. I don't like when the meat's softer. If you use a ground sirloin or another of the best meat grades, it doesn't come out so good for some reason. I usually try to buy chuck. When I was living at home,

we'd use beef, pork and veal. But 100 percent sirloin does not come out right. And, like I said earlier, after it's all mixed together you fix a couple first and taste then to decide if you like them or not. And then add more salt or cheese and adjust the other ingredients until you are satisfied."

*When asked who was her hero - whom did she most admire and why, Marie thought for a bit and then answered:*

"There's quite a few people I admire a lot. I admire my parents, first of all, because coming to new a new country was so hard in those days, and they provided very well for us. I also admired Pope John very much. I liked a number of Presidents. Mostly my family was Democrat and we admired FDR the most. FDR was all we heard about growing up and we thought he was the greatest president of all."

*Marie then talked about what she was most proud of in life and what she would do differently if given the chance.*

My kids are my pride. I stayed home and raised them and they are what I am most proud of. I did the best I could for all of them and am proud of each one of them. And I have three great daughters. The girls are all pretty close.

"If I had to do it all over again, and if I wasn't married, I would pick a career for myself. We didn't have the chances like the kids do today. If I had any talent, I'd prefer doing something in the music or entertainment field. I'd be a singer and make people happy. I admire good singers and dancers. If wish I had some of their talent when I was young. I would have put it to good use.

*Marie leaves this advice for her children and grandchildren.*

Just be yourself. Don't be a bully, but you do have to protect yourself. Be honest, healthy and happy, and be nice to others.

### **Joe Gucci: The Beginnings**

Both of my parents were born in Italy -- my mother in a small town called Abruzzi, my father in Campo Basso, a town near Naples and

Rome. Both came over to the U.S. through Ellis Island with their parents.

Both came here in the early 1900s and married at a young age. They got married in the U.S. in their teen years. They came here, like everyone else, because the U.S. was paved with streets of gold. Where my mother lived in Italy they used to go up to the mountain to get drinking water and bring it back to the house. And there were no bath facilities. My father was a little better off in Italy.

My mother came with her father, Joseph DeAngelo (whom I was named after), and her brother, Costantino DeAngelo. My mother lived with her brother, with whom she was very close, until she married my father. My dad came with both parents, two brothers and a sister. My dad arrived earlier than my mother did but both came in the 1900s.

My father was a jack of all trades and picked up a number of new jobs over here. He drove the PRT trolley cars for awhile and then went into street paving which was probably his biggest job. He made and sold socks at one time, and had a farm in New Jersey.

My mother and father were living in Philadelphia when they married. In those days the man was the supreme commander. My dad was living with his mother at the time so they moved into his mother's house. He would get his paycheck and turn his pay over to his mother. That's what they did in Italy and it's what they continued to do over here.

My mother faced a lot of tragedies as a young woman raising her family. My mother's son was scalded to death as a young boy. He was the third born and his name was Carmen. He was younger than 5 years old when he was scalded. Mom was boiling water at the time, moved back away from the stove, and tripped over him. He got scalded all over and died of shock in the hospital. She never got over it but she survived and continued with her life.

My mom was pregnant at about the same time Carmen died and she lost the child she was carrying, through a miscarriage I suppose. She still had milk in her breast and there was a nunnery in our neighborhood which had an orphaned baby girl who needed to be breast-fed. So they came and asked my mother to take the baby and feed it. She named the baby girl and took her into our home.

"Every month she would take the baby back to the nunnery to be checked out. One time they took the baby from my mother into another room to check the baby and never came back with her. Mom was really broken-hearted. They had deceived her! When she had another boy she named him Carmen, after her son that was scalded to death. Altogether she had 10 kids, including the boy who died.

### **The Early Years**

Growing up, we ate nothing fancy, like steak. We were poor but not wretched poor. My mother made pasta, beans and greens -- stuff like that -- the usual Italian food. She made her own bread and cakes. Every Easter she made a special Easter Cake. It was a doll made out of dough and on its stomach she would place two hard-boiled eggs. My father made his own wine -- for the family at our meals. Pop never drank excessively. We'd drink water and wine but never had soda. We used to drink seltzer. We'd get a pitcher for two cents in the 1920s. We'd just go up to the fountain and they would pour the seltzer into your own container. At that time there was no Coke or Pepsi; the soda drinks were colored soda, like orange and crème.

I was born in Jersey on a small farm and from there moved to Philadelphia and spent most of my time in Philly. That's where I met my wife who was born there. My family worked on the farm in Jersey from 1936-38 and we kids loved it there. I worked on the farms with all my brothers and sisters.

"When we lived on the farm, the school was quite a ways and we'd have to walk to school. My older brother, Victor was crippled then and my brother right under him, Steve, would carry Victor on his back all the way to school. One day coming home from school, it was very cold and Steve was having a hard time carrying Victor. So, finally, he says, 'the hell with you!', and dropped Victor off his back and kept on walking home.

"The farm was way out in the wilderness at the time. We grew strawberries as our main crop. One year there was too much rain and we lost the entire crop and ended up losing the farm. That was when we moved to Philly.

"When I was a boy in the late 1920s and early '30s we had these machines that you might call a recorder today. In those days they were called token machines. My family used to go out at night and my older sister would take charge of us kids who stayed home. My older sister and brother would watch Freddie, Mickey and myself.

"We had this pot-bellied stove for heat, and it would get red hot and create lots of steam. I would get a piece of newspaper, put it up to the red hot stove, and then touch the burning paper to one of the fringes of the token machine. I'd light the fringe and then just sit and watch until it burned out. My brother and sister were in the kitchen washing and drying the dishes. They couldn't see me but I could watch them and keep an eye on them.

"So I'd light these fringes and then put them out. But one started to burn and it got away from me and I couldn't put it out. I was 4 or 5 at the time. I walked out to the hallway but didn't say anything to them. But they came into the room where Freddie and Mickey were sleeping and saw the smoke and put out the fire. It ruined the paint on the recorder. But I didn't get a beating for doing that.

"The nuns in the Catholic schools in those days were pretty tough. They would beat you with a stick and they had this board-type thing called a chi chi. It was a tough board and they would make students kneel down on it for a long time and it would put a dent in your knees and really hurt. My oldest brother Victor got the chi chi treatment often.

"My older brothers went to Catholic school but I didn't. One of the nuns beat my brother one day and my mother took both my brothers out of the Catholic schools and put them in the public schools. And so I went to the public schools.

"We used to play games in the streets as kids. We'd take a bunch of string or rags and wrap them with tape for a ball. And we'd use a broomstick for a bat. We had a rule that if you hit the ball hard enough that it went up on a roof the batter would have to go get it. So when you 'roofed a ball' you'd go climb up on top of the roof to retrieve the ball so the game could continue.

"I attended Benson Junior High and from there went to South Philly High. I spent a couple years in high school but never graduated. I had

to go to work at age 16. Everybody in the family had to do their share to keep things going. My first job that meant something was at a leather factory making handbags for \$19 a week. The one before that I was a huckster, selling fruits and vegetables.

"Hucksters would go through the city with a horse and buggy or an old truck and would carry whatever we were selling in a basket. We'd walk down the street and yell out whatever we were selling, "Tomatoes, Five Cents a basket! Potatoes, Ten Cents a basket! We'd go through all the bad neighborhoods but it didn't make any difference. They were tough guys but we were tough, too. Most of time kids had to be tough growing up in South Philly.

I met my wife through my sister. Marie worked with my sister and when we were first introduced I think she hated me. But I called her again and again and we dated for about a year and half before we took the plunge. That was 52 years ago. Our first date was a New Year's Eve Dance when my buddies and I had a party and invited girls to the party.

### **The Artist**

"I do oil painting and enjoy working on it now and then. Right now I'm doing something for my daughter, Tina.

"I should have started painting 15 to 20 years ago. I had belonged to a sketch club in Philly before I went into the military service but I never followed up on it after I got out. As a kid I always liked to draw and lots of time had a pencil in my hand. I'd sit at the kitchen table and draw, and then erase what I drew. My dad would draw also; he'd draw birds mostly.

"The best artist in the family was my oldest brother, Victor, who did commercial art at one time. I like to paint to pass the time. I really enjoy it and the kids keep urging me on to keep at it. My daughters all have artistic talent also but, like me, they don't follow up on it either. Yvonne has very good hands and could be a very good painter.

"I mostly do paintings of scenery. I'll take two or three pictures of a water scene or other scenery and then take parts from two or three pictures and paint it on the canvass. Sometimes I just picture the scene in my mind and paint.

## The War Years

World War II, of course, started in December 1941 and I enlisted in March 1942. My mother was against me joining the Army. I was working at the time. My parents had to sign for me because I was 19 years old and still a minor. At first they wouldn't sign. I became a miserable person. I wouldn't eat or talk to anyone so they finally decided they might as well go ahead and sign for me.

"I took basic training at Camp Lee, Va. and from there went to Camp Wallace in Texas. Then I was sent to the state of Washington and lived in a big park there. I took the test for a radio operator and did well with the Morse code so I became a radio operator. Then I was sent to Seattle and from there to Puget Sound.

"When I went overseas, I was put on a boat called the SS McHale, which was an old German mule boat that took war mules to Germany. By July 1942 I was overseas. I first landed in Dutch Harbor and at that time the Japanese were attacking Midway and the Aleutian Islands. I was on one of the Aleutian Islands and boy that was no vacation. There were no trees, just tundra or wild grass, and it was damp and foggy all the time. I was assigned to headquarters battery of an anti-aircraft outfit.

"I had never been anywhere in my life and so there were lots of things to see and places to go. That's why I never minded the Army; it was like an education to me, I was on this one island four or five months and then was shipped to Adak, another island on the Aleutian chain. There were no people on Adak when we arrived. Whoever was living there (they called the natives the "Aleuts") were evacuated when the war broke out.

"Dutch Harbor had been attacked and bombed before we got there. It was bombed pretty good; they sunk a couple ships still in the harbor. The Marines were there at the time we arrived. Because of the Aurora (or Northern Lights) it didn't get dark until 10 or 11 at night.

"After serving in the Aleutians, I was sent back to the states for almost a year. I wound up in Boston, then went to Europe at the time when the Germans broke the line and things didn't look real good for us at the time. I landed in Glasgow, Scotland, and then went across

the channel to Marcie, France. The camps were named after cigarettes and we landed in Camp Lucky Strike. I was always freezing, no matter how many clothes I had on. Then we went to Holland and then into Germany.

"Before I was sent to Germany I was in a replacement outfit, called the Repo Depot. I was a radio operator and they were going to put me in the infantry as a forward observer. I asked what a forward observer was and they told me that job put you between the U.S. and the Germans and that I'd be directing the bombing traffic. Fortunately, they needed a radio operator so I went into Central Germany as a radio operator and spent the rest of my time there. The group that went into the area they were going to send me as a forward observer was a bunch of guys from California. Those poor guys could never get used to the weather and they were given the wrong kind of clothing to wear. They ended up getting massacred. I would have been part of that fight if they didn't need me elsewhere.

### **The Working Years**

As I said earlier, my first job was as a huckster selling fruit from the wagon. Then I worked for a tailor for a while because my mother wanted me to be a tailor, but I hated that work.

"Then I worked for New York Ship in Jersey, which involved a lot of hard labor. We'd get down in the hole of the bulkheads of a ship and scrape the paint off the sides. That was very tough work. I then worked at Cunio Press, a magazine printing business. I did a lot of work on farms. Farming was the best time of my life. It was hard work but lots of fun and we loved it.

"My older brother Carmen and I went out together for awhile. He'd go out to work and I'd stay home and cooked and cleaned where we were living. I didn't know much about cooking, mostly what I picked up from watching my mother. I decided one day to make him some hard beans for supper. So I boiled up a pot of water and tossed in a cup of beans, and then another cup. I took a look and thought, "that's not going to make much to eat." So I poured in a lot more beans and pretty soon they started to swell and we had enough beans to eat for a week. But Carmen didn't mind and never complained. He was a real gentleman.

"Some days, when it rained and Carmen didn't have to work, I would go out and catch turtles, dozens of large turtles, and bring them home and keep them as pets. Carmen never cared but mom came for a visit once and saw all those turtles and made me get rid of them.

"I worked for the Ford Company in Pennsylvania. I did body work and worked on the assembly line. I ran this heavy sander and one day it ripped my pants so I quit and never came back. I worked a little in a handbag factory, running a press. I'd make the inside parts for leather handbags.

"After that I went to school on the GI Bill in Philly to learn neon glass work. I got pretty good at it and the owner of the school had me teaching. So I taught for awhile and was working at the same time. I worked for Ajax Neon which did all kinds of neon signs. I did the glass blowing for the tubes - blew the tubes and put the electricity in them. It was an interesting job because I could create something and I enjoyed that. I worked quite a while for a few neon sign companies, some in Jersey and some in Vegas. I did neon glass work for about 15-20 years.

### **The Vegas Years**

My brothers coaxed me into coming to Vegas and working for Young's Neon, the biggest neon place out there. There was quite a demand for neon signs in Vegas, as you can imagine, making signs for all the casinos. The casinos didn't own the signs but would rent them from the companies that made them, like Young's.

"Then I went to work in the casinos, mostly working with the slot machines. I was slot manager at many places and would be in charge of all the slot machines. Slots are the biggest moneymakers in Vegas or at any casino. Slots are what keep the casinos open. Casinos make all their profits off the slots. One machine might lose money for the casino but 10 will make money. Part of my job was to make sure there were no cheats. A lot of characters would come in at that time who had several ways to cheat the machines, using slugs, and other ways.

"Two of my brothers were part of a musical-comedy group that played in the Sahara in Vegas. There were four in the group, including my brothers Jackie and Tony. Jackie was the leader and played guitar

and Tony sang and did comedy. The group was pretty big in Vegas at that time and were later inducted in the Hall of Fame. The most famous person I met was Elvis but I also knew Louis Prima. Louis had his own golf course and I used to play on his course. My brother had a lot of entertainers come out to his home, like Sammy Davis and many others.

"It was very nice to work in Vegas when the mob was in control. Things were more friendly then and there was no crime. If someone got caught cheating, he'd be taken out to the Back Eighties and beaten, and then blackballed. That took care of the cheating. The mob was in charge from 1954 to about 1970 when Howard Hughes took over. Then it was not nice anymore but became all business. Before, when you worked you knew each other and it was a friendlier atmosphere. Afterwards, it was all business.

I worked at about 15 different places in Vegas. At that time, you'd work for someone and when your boss left you'd often follow him because the new boss would fire the existing help and bring in his own people. That's the way it worked. I worked the Sahara first as a shift boss, then the Thunderbird as a manager and the Atlantis as a shift boss for 3-4 years.

"Then I got a call from Jack Prentice, general manager of the Silver Slipper, and he offered me the manager's job at the Silver Slipper. When he left, Bill Johnson came in and then Prentice got the job as general manager at the Hacienda, the last hotel on the strip. So I moved to the Hacienda and worked there for quite a while. Then this guy by the name of Ligenford came in and fired everyone to bring in his own people.

"From there I went to the Castaways with a friend and worked awhile but was let go when a new manager came in. Then I went to the Hacienda as coin counter. Next I was offered a job downtown at the Golden Goose, small place. Then a friend was driving by one day and asked if I wanted to go to Atlantic City. I got a job there as a manger at a very big club. I worked in Atlantic City for awhile and then came back to Vegas. I worked for the Flamingo as an engineer in the parts department, and on weekends as a dispatcher, and I stayed there until I retired at age 59 in 1989.

## Meeting Elvis

When I got off work, I would go right to the lounge and watch the entertainers perform. When the musicians got off, we'd get together and I'd go out with them. At times, Elvis would come along with us. Elvis was a very nice gentleman, a hell of a swell guy, and a very, very friendly man.

"This was sometime in the 1970s. I would have been 50-something and Elvis was much younger. He was 42 when he died so he would have been in his 30s at that time. Elvis took up karate and was very good at it. After the boys got off work, Elvis would go down in the basement to entertain us with his karate. He'd find this big guy and urge him to come after him. The big guy would come at him, and Elvis would knock him flat on his back. He was pretty good at karate.

*Joe was asked who is his hero - whom he most admired and why. His answer says as much about Joe as about his hero.*

My favorite hero was Rocky Marciano, partly for him being an Italian but also for being a great champion. He was very good at what he did and he had a lot of heart.

Some people talk about Ali who made claims to be the greatest champ of all times, and some would just follow along with what he said without thinking about it. But Rocky was the best as far as I'm concerned. He was never beaten. He was small in stature - the heavyweights were smaller in those days, most were 5-10, 5-11 or 6 feet. Rocky, I think, was 5-11. But he had a big heart.

My other favorite was Buck Jones, a cowboy. In my early teens I really liked the cowboys and knew them all, like Buck Jones, Tom Mix who was in the silent movies, Hoot Gibson, and Ken Maynard who was a real cowboy!

*When asked what one thing in life he would change if given the chance, Joe quickly answered.*

I wish I had gotten a better education but I never had the chance. When I was growing up, when you got to be age 17 or 18, you had to quit school to get a job to help the family. But I would have liked to have gotten an education. I hated school then but now the main thing

is to have an education. I wished I had an education myself, but mine was all street learning.

*And the advice Joe leaves for his children and grandchildren sounds a lot like the Marie's wishes for the family.*

"The main thing is to be honest with yourself. The second thing is to treat everyone the way you want to be treated."