



The Martoches: Grace, Salvatore, Mary Dee and Charles

It was a quick trip from respect to friendship to love. It is hard to believe that with all the ethnic, geographic, religious, educational and cultural differences between my mother and my wife, they would grow to be great friends, and to share a true respect and love for one another, but that's exactly what happened.

I will never forget the day I called my mother from North Dakota to tell her that I, her only son, was about to go see Mary Dee's parents to announce my intention to ask for her hand in marriage. Mary Dee is a Norwegian, Bohemian, Irish, and English Protestant girl from the plains of North Dakota. My mother, of course, was an Italian-American Catholic from the industrial Rust Belt City of Buffalo. She was sure at the moment of my phone call that I would never return to Buffalo, convinced that the pressures and ties that would have kept her daughter in Buffalo to remain close to her family would also keep Mary Dee in North Dakota with her family. She, and to a lesser extent, my dad, thought that I was lost to them; that I would never return. They were so family-oriented, so Italian, so committed to their children and hoped-for grandchildren -- this was a real catastrophe to them. My mother actually hung up when I called because she was so upset and so fearful of say-

ing something from which our relationship would never recover. In retrospect, it was probably best.

But to the surprise of my parents, Mary Dee moved to Buffalo right after we graduated and we were married in May 1967. My parents' fears diminished. My mom was smart, tough and hardworking. It didn't take her long to see the same qualities in my new wife, Mary Dee. At first, the fact that Mary Dee was a college graduate and about to start a career as a teacher was somewhat intimidating to my mom, but she soon overcame that. Later, when Mary Dee was dissatisfied with teaching, I encouraged her to go to law school. She started law school with two small children, Amy who was 2½ and Claire who was 3 months old. In fact, we had a third child, Christopher, while she was still in law school. My mother and my sister Terry lovingly cared for the kids often while Mary Dee went to class. The kids enjoyed it very much and so did my mom and my sister.

The arrangement was a God-send for Mary Dee and it made it possible for her to attend classes with a clear mind. My mom taught Mary Dee how to cook and bake, certainly with an emphasis on Italian-American cooking, but she was just plain a terrific cook and soon so was Mary Dee. Mary Dee always said that she thought all salad dressings came out of a bottle until she met my mom and my sister!

As with most Italian-American families of that generation, Sunday dinners were a big deal! My sister and I and our families went to my mom's house for dinner every Sunday for many years; later we moved "all the way" downstairs to the lower flat occupied by my sister and her family and continued the tradition for many more years. I remember one great story about Mary Dee and I going with my parents to see Msgr. Gambino to get a letter of good standing, that I needed to get married in a Catholic church in North Dakota. Mary Dee

was not a Catholic, although to her everlasting credit, she agreed to raise the children as Catholics so that we could all attend services together. As we entered the church rectory, my saintly mother, a faithful Catholic, looked at my soon-to-be wife and said, "When Msgr. Gambino asks you if you are Catholic, just lie and say yes. It will make things much easier." We all laughed, but Mary Dee did and my mother was right. It did make things much easier.

Another decision, which seemed inconsequential at the time, had a profound effect on their relationship. As so many of my parents' generation did, my mother and father went faithfully each year to the various cemeteries to care for and plant flowers at the gravesites of their ancestors. After my father's death in March 1975, an almost immediate concern was how this would continue because, even then, my mother's driving was limited to her neighborhood. Mary Dee offered to take my mother to the cemeteries; my sister and I gratefully agreed this was a sensible way to accomplish this emotional and important responsibility. Thus began a tradition that carried on until my mother's death in 1997 and one that Mary Dee continues to this day. My sister Terry and I also visited the gravesites when we could, but the pressure to do it at a precise time and on a certain date was off, thanks to Mary Dee.

We once hosted a "Big Night" party from the movie of the same name. Everyone made recipes from the wonderful feast served by the movie characters created by actors Stanley Tucci and Tony Shaloub. It was a magical evening and something we will never forget. Although my sister Terry and her husband Dick were there, my mom had already passed on to join my father, but she would have loved it - no doubt about it. However, I am sure she would have tweaked the recipes with a "pinch" of this, and a "smidge" of that and, you



know what, the food would have been better than ever! Mom would have led the compliments and kudos for Mary Dee and me for organizing such an event and throughout the evening she would have had a very self-satisfied smile on her face about how far her star pupil had come as a "cook extraordinaire."

It was a very quick, but special trip that my mom and wife took together.