

## Jill Jacobs (Giacoppo) Biden

By Sal Martoche (father of Supreme Court Justice Amy C. Martoche)



The elevation of Jill Jacobs Biden to First Lady of the United States has caused a considerable stir in the small town of Gesso, not far from Messina, Sicily. You see, Jill's paternal grandfather was born Domenico Giacoppo, and Jill Biden is now the first First Lady of Italian heritage in United States history.

As has been reported, one can almost hear the excitement in the voice of Jill Biden's far-off 8th cousin, Caterina Giacoppo, 64, who still resides in the hometown of Jill's paternal grandparents. In Italian, I can hear her saying, "Jill, caro, come home. We're waiting for you. The sauce is made, the meatballs are ready. Mangia! You like cannolis? I made some special with fresh ricotta this morning. Mangia!"

Oh, we know Jill's maternal grandparents were Scots and English, so we will probably have to share bragging rights. But, for now, Jill is one of us! This mother, grandmother and lifelong educator has already made us proud by being the first Italian-American Second Lady as the wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

This gal from Hammonton, N. J., who grew up in Willow Grove, Penn., was the oldest of five girls. Every weekend of her childhood included time with her Italian grandparents, and she and her sisters loved the nation's oldest Italian-American festival, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Italian Festival in Hammonton.

She loved the traditional Italian Sunday dinners her grandmother prepared, often including spaghetti



Jill Biden

and meatballs. During a speech in Westmoreland, Penn., this past October, she said, "Like so many immigrants, Italian-Americans have contributed so much to this nation. Our culture, our values and our lives have made this nation richer and stronger and a more beautiful country."

When she married Senator Joe Biden in 1977, she became an instant mother to his two sons, Beau and Hunter. Together the Bidens have a daughter, Ashley, who was born in 1981, to round out their family. Joe Biden has said Jill was a tremendous help to him and his sons in recovering from the almost unbearable tragedy of losing his first wife and daughter in a terrible auto accident a few years before he and Jill met.

She has been a teacher and professor for most of her adult life and was the first Second Lady of the United States to hold a job while her husband served as vice president. She plans to do the same as First Lady. I believe teaching is in her blood.

This elegant, accomplished and graceful woman is the daughter of Bonny Jean Boardman and Donald Carl Jacobs, whose father changed his name to Domenic Jacobs in an era when he thought it was necessary to avoid prejudice against Italians. After serving in the Navy, he took advantage of the GI Bill and attended business school; he ultimately became the head of a savings and loan institution in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Mrs. Biden, who had been previously married and divorced, was a model in the Philadelphia area knew Joe Biden's brother, Frank, from college days. Biden

had seen her photograph in a local advertisement and he “may” have asked his brother, Frank, about her when Frank said he knew her.

Frank set up a blind date for the two. Jill Jacobs was nervous; he was nine years older than she. But she was impressed by his impeccable style and easy manner. She could see he was smart and well-mannered and not pushy. They shook hands at the end of the night, and she was smitten from that point on.

They were married in a Catholic ceremony on June 17, 1977, at the chapel of the United Nations in New York City, 4 1/2 years after the death of Biden’s first wife, Nelia, who had been his high school sweetheart, and their infant daughter. Jill had to be pursued because she was very leery of the spotlight of public life and wanted her own career and identity, which she knew would be difficult married to a United States senator. But Joe Biden and the boys made that reluctance dissipate by their enthusiastic acceptance of her and the love and hope she offered the family.

Joe Biden has said numerous times that, after the tragic death of Beau from brain cancer in 2015, he doesn’t think he would have survived on top of his previous tragedy if it were not for Jill’s strength and constant support. Ironically, it was Beau, on his death bed, who urged his father to seek the presi-



President-Elect, Joe Biden and First Lady

dency. I’m sure that young man is looking down now and beaming. And his pride is not only for his president-elect dad, but for his stepmom, the new First Lady of the United States of America.

Cousin Caterina isn’t the only resident of Gesso waiting with open arms and bountiful Italian hospitality to welcome their Italian-American daughter home. The town is yours, Jill, whenever you’re ready!



The tiny village of Gesso in Sicily is celebrating the victory of the next U.S. president, Joe Biden, and the historic rise to the White House of a First Lady with Italian roots, whose ancestors hailed from here.