

Living Legends: The Martinazzi Sisters

An occasional feature on persons and families with deep Tualatin roots whose impact continues today.

BY LARRY MCCLURE

Martinazzi Avenue is a familiar name in our city but few may realize there are several strong women with that family heritage still making their mark today.

The most widely-known Martinazzi (rhymes with “snazzy”) is Loyce whose articles on Tualatin area history are widely followed in these pages. She lives in nearby Lake Oswego. Big sister Jo has relocated from Oregon to Arizona. Sister Toni settled in Kentucky. Only Rochelle still lives in Tualatin on part of the original 50-acre home place

In 1937 their parents Art Martinazzi and wife Ann Chapman (from nearby Stafford) purchased the land which had been farmed by the Jurgens family (their relatives) since 1869. Today’s Apache Bluff subdivision once grew Martinazzi berries and hay in addition to a Grade A dairy. Rochelle’s driveway entrance still displays Art’s coveted Century Farm sign awarded to any Oregon farm continually operating for at least 100 years. His mother Nettie Jurgens was born in a house still standing on Shasta Trail.

The sisters, who share similar memories of their growing-up years in Tualatin, single out dad as their hero. He set high work standards for his daughters insisting they “always do a little more” and earn their pay. Toni remembers trouble if school report cards didn’t show the top mark for “Makes Good Use of Time.”

Fence lines were always straight on the Martinazzi farm. Rows of crops also had to be precise despite using real horsepower to pull the plow and till the fields. Weeds were anathema. Jo remembers milking cows starting about age 8 and the other sisters followed the

twice-a-day routine as they grew older until dad finally bought a milking machine. Picking strawberries was hard on the knees. To earn money for school clothes, they worked in other farmers’ fields as well. Jo, Loyce and Toni weeded onions on farms in the Cipole lowlands.

The family struggled through the post-Depression era and the post-World War II period, but “we didn’t know we were poor,” says Jo. During the war years, Ann and Art joined hundreds of workers in the Portland shipyards to support the family. Ann later wrote for the Sherwood newspaper which served our corner of Washington County and, with Art’s help, wrote a series on the history of Tualatin to help celebrate the centennial of Oregon statehood in 1959.

There was little time for leisure, though the girls do remember picnics, swimming in the river and a horse named Billy bought for \$10. If a winter brought deep freezes, the flooded lowlands would become ice rinks capped off by warm fires. Rochelle remembers colored marshmallow treats from the Tualatin Country Club. Summertime sometimes meant pulling a mattress out in the yard on a warm night. Mom would check to see how many heads were poking out from the blanket in the morning. One day she counted six. A childhood friend named Steve Hansen (age 6) had joined them. Still alive today, he enjoyed telling reunions “I’m the only guy who slept with all the Martinazzi girls.”

On Sundays the sisters walked by themselves to the Methodist church in town. They were first to get on and the last to get off the bus to Tualatin Elementary School which was new in 1939 and now site of Marquis Senior Living and Rehab Center. As a first grader, Jo remembers a terrifying trip to school

via rowboat during one of Tualatin’s big floods which blocked roads downtown. There was no missing school in the Martinazzi rule book.

Loyce and Toni were active at Winona Grange which was the center of teen activities, often singing in talent shows and preparing community dinners. Today Loyce carries on the Grange tradition and still offers her music talents at the new Methodist church as well as sharing garden produce, homemade jams and lemon meringue pies. Each spring will find Martinazzi sisters helping clean up Winona Cemetery for Memorial Day where the family plot is located.

George “Corky” Andrews in Tualatin remembers going to school with the older Martinazzi sisters and lamenting with his buddies “the prettiest girls around were my cousins.” He didn’t appreciate cheerleader Loyce calling him to the pep rally stage and making him say something “because neither I nor the football team were very good.” Corky did validate how hard his cousins worked each summer. “We were all glad when school started.”

All the sisters were more than eager to leave home after high school graduation and almost immediately wed their sweethearts. Only Jo’s marriage lasted until today. She supported her husband in operating a service station in Sherwood before retirement. Loyce married Larry Lee and their farm business grew into Lee Farms, carried on today by son Craig Lee and his family after Loyce remarried. The popular enterprise is still based on agriculture but has added entertainment as a major focus. Loyce inherited her mom’s history interest and writing skills to co-found Tualatin Historical Society (THS) and co-author several books on Tualatin history.

After marriage and four kids, Toni set out on a college path that led to a public school library career in Portland. In the 1970s she helped create Tualatin Public Library by organizing volunteers to operate a makeshift version at the city park and later in a mobile van parked in front of K-Mart (now Nyberg Rivers Shopping Center). Toni had wanderlust that culminated in a one-year walk across the U.S. to promote national trails sponsored by the American Hiking Society. This feat was followed by other journeys around the world while running 5Ks and half-marathons. Toni found time to research family history and compiled two books: one on her father’s lineage “From Pavia to Portland 1845-1892, The Enrico Martinazzi Story” and the other her mother’s story: “Albert Rice Chapman 1866-1948 and His Descendants.” Both are available to check out at both the Tualatin Library and Tualatin Heritage Center. Loyce’s books on Tualatin history are available for sale at the Center.

The Martinazzi sisters raised 15 children among them. Over the years came 26 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren, not including step-children and step-grandchildren.

On the original Century Farm, Rochelle and her son and business partner Tim Foster work year-round maintaining the Christmas tree operation. After retiring from 22 years of delivering mail and then remodeling/renting houses with her husband, she and Loyce got the idea of growing trees. Lee Farms and Century Farm now both provide u-cut and pre-cut varieties for the Christmas season. Following the Martinazzi work habit, Rochelle’s daughter Tammy returns from Florida each December to help in the field and make wreaths. Pappy Art would be proud to see some of his family still working part of his old farm.



Tualatin’s only Century Farm started with the Jurgens family whose descendants keep it going today. The Farm is currently managed by Rochelle.



Loyce Martinazzi playing and singing at the Farmer’s Market.



(Left to right) Jo, Toni, Loyce, Art, Ann, Rochelle and Vicci.



Toni Martinazzi having just completed 5K race, finishing in 1st place in the 80+ age group.



(Left to right) Toni, Rochelle, Joanne, Vicci, and Loyce (top right).



Larry and his wife Ellie have lived in Tualatin for 44 years where they raised 3 children and follow 7 grandchildren on Facebook.



Jo crabbing down at Warrenton.