



**HAVE  
TRAVELED**

**DONNA  
CASTELLONE  
SPARADEO**



# I HAVE TRAVELED

DONNA CASTELLONE SPARADEO



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*Dedicated to my immediate and extended family who tried daily for normalcy. Friends that softened the blows. Foster parents that cared. Group homes that listened and restructured the broken pieces. Surrogate parents that provided hope peace, warmth and calmness.*



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# INTRODUCTION

I began blogging a few years ago and decided to share my life story with an old friend. After much encouragement, I began to feel more confident and decided to open more of my writings to some other folks to whom I've not been connected in my life until recently. This provided me with objective feedback. The votes are in, and they are all the same: "Compelling!"

My story will show a family that was destined to fall apart. Not having the maturity to understand the depth of what happened, I continued to wonder, *Why me?* I decided to dig deeper as I willingly began to aid and repair my relationship with my mother. My story shows a lasting bond among three very poor, abused, and at times neglected siblings, along with a want and need to have a well mother. There is sexual abuse, some physical abuse, and mental illness. There are also hope and forgiveness, and the will to want more out of life.

A personal holocaust disrupts the mind. To be able to pull away from such sadness and persevere in good human spirit has been my driving force. I truly believe in angels, love, forgiveness, and paying it forward.



# CHAPTER 1

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*May 28, 1967*

I wish I could recall this day; it'd make me amazing. But, like all of us, it's not possible. I do remember many toddler moments. Mom would always say, "Donna, you have the memory of an elephant." In addition to that, she'd say, "Donna Marie, bite your tongue." She also told me how very cute and hairy I was. Some of that has changed. I've grown into my looks as well as my nose. Ah, genetic joys. I am Armenian and Italian with decent, bountiful amounts of facial and body hair. I'm told I had a full infant beard. In addition to that issue, my Roman nose did not fail me. It was truly adult size, and at a very young age. Seriously, that's one thing I remember as a toddler. I'd spend lots of time with my eyes crossed. I'd glare at my nose, and wonder, *Why? Why this nose?* I would have fun conversations with my siblings. They'd notice my crossed eyes and wonder what I was up to. I recall a great conversation I shared with my brother Joe.

"What 'cha looking at, Monkey?" he said.

I'd uncross my eyes, place my hands on my hips, and announce, "My nose is really big, and I think I have a hairy face."

Joe named me Monkey because I was a hairy little hyperactive being. He'd always help me and make me feel better by saying things like: "You don't have a hairy face. You have a lot of baby fuzzy hair. But Mommy said it's gonna fall off." We would giggle and play other games, and then I would start back up with the nose worry.

I'd slide down the banister at a very young age. I'd climb trees and act like a complete silly monkey. I was playful and coercive. I just couldn't keep still. I kept myself and everyone busy with all of my curious ideas.

I'd run up to Joe, get super close to his face, and stare at his nose. I'd approach Joan and do the same. We'd have circular conversations about my issue with my nose. We'd tease each other endlessly about who had big feet or a crooked toe. There was always something to tease or talk about.

Mom described my hair as soft and somewhat spiked, yet soft. It grew to become wavy. I remember mom singing to me, "There was a little girl who had a little curl right in the middle of her forehead, and when she was good, she was very very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid."

I remember Mom wetting her fingertips and pulling down a curl. I'd look at her fingertips as she'd moisten her right index finger and thumb with saliva. I always thought Mom had great teeth, and very nice lips. Her nose was big too. She was aware.

She'd eloquently explain, "You've really got to get rid of this thought and stop worrying about your nose. This is a beautiful Italian-Armenian nose." She'd avoid the words "big" or "enormous" when discussing my nose. My brother and sister... that was their

job. My siblings, Joe and Joan, would help me along my journey of self discovery, mocking and increasing the worry in the appropriate way siblings do for each other, whether we were figuring out why my nose was so enormous, or why I had unwanted toddler facial hair. We'd spend hours discussing many things like this, along with scabs, bruises, boogers, laughing, tattling, and creating as much happy time as possible. I have a lot of memories. Most fun thoughts occurred with my brother and sister, or in my little coconut. I was an imaginative child, hyperactive and verbal. I'd make up songs and pretend to be a ballerina or a famous ice skater. I'd jump into poses with self-taught dramatics. I think I derived this type of behavior from both parents. My father was a singer and songwriter, a very passionate man. Sadly, he was unable to gain any real traction. He did perform at a couple of amusement parks. His passion was '50s and '60s doo-wop and country music.

Mom liked singing and dancing. She'd show us dances she'd learned as a child and further explain how she was a majorette in the school marching band. She'd jump into twirl position and pretend she was holding the baton, with her hands, her feet, and the positioning. She could bring you to where she was in her mind. I'd listen attentively as she'd revisit her past. Mom would sing and hum while she washed dishes. She would sing to the highest notes, so hopeful. You could see the passion in her face. She'd stop in the middle of singing and remind herself aloud to sing from her diaphragm. She'd start right back again. Mom actually had a great sense of humor. She'd realize she had more cleaning to do, and she'd create a witty tune about her return to cleaning. She'd always leave you thinking about the next thing. She still does.

We did laugh a lot with Mom. We cried a lot, too. Sadly, Mom too was a product of a somewhat physically abusive parent. This type of confusion, along with poverty and the impossible situation of having four children, would set the stage for mental illness, depression, overeating and a fractured family unit. Looking back in retrospect, my mother is probably the smartest, most beautiful woman I think I'll ever meet. Mom is a well-spoken woman. She didn't swear unless she was super angry. We were not allowed to swear. If we violated this rule we were sentenced to soap in the mouth. My mother spent lots of time articulating her words, sometimes to an annoying level. She had constant rants and verbal how-to guides that she'd violate continuously. I can't blame her completely. She was raised by such a heavy, indoctrinated, hypocritical style of parenting. It's no wonder she'd repeat and trip. The combined struggles of fighting off what she didn't like having been taught in her home as a child, raising her own family, and changing times proved much too overwhelming for a mother of three. Abuse and weak family support kept her from ever progressing to an appropriate level of a normal living experience, such as furthering her education and having a nurse case manager available to guide her. I can't imagine what it was like for her as a child. I'm told her father died when she was nine. Mom would always follow that story with the same ending.

"I was nine years old when my father was taken with rheumatic fever. I lost my mother and my father that day." She'd further explain how she had to live with family for some time. Prior to my grandfather's death, my grandparents made the decision to move to Miami, Florida. This was back in the early '50s. They were hopeful

the warmer temperature would ward off my grandfather Benny's disease. Sadly, this idea wouldn't save my grandfather. I don't think that Mom every truly recovered from that loss or many of the other unfortunate losses she experienced. Mom was "daddy's little girl." I recall Mom explaining her great loss and how her entire family died. Admittedly, she'd take on the voice of a child. Sad, when emotions aren't resolved properly for a child.

Mom would further explain, as she'd cover her face with her hands, and scream, "No one was listening. I want my daddy. I want my daddy." For the simple fact that she was my mother, I'd cry as I'd listen to her sad story. I'd suggest solutions to her problem. A clever little three year old...

"Mommy, let's pray to Jesus. He has to help us. He broff us ice creams from the neighbor the ubber day. He can bring back your daddy. I will tell Jesus you want your daddy wiff you."

Mom would cry harder and hug me. She truly struggled. She had too much to let go of. And she wasn't supplied with the proper tools to make it through painlessly, with proper healing. She was truly a depressed mom. I wanted to fix her. I would sing with her and try to get her to play more, but there was never any time. Mom wasn't always crying. She was a very clean mom. She was always cleaning.

Mom would always say things like, "A dirty home is a lack of self respect." She'd shout out phrases like, "I'm poor but rich in God's graces. I can clean and have clean children. I don't have money, but I have prayer and the word of God to get me through." Or she would say, "Keep your nose clean," "Keep a clean house, clean nose, mind your business" type stuff. She had few girlfriends. I do recall her crying lots on the phone with the few she had. She'd hang up



and feel terrible that she hogged the entire conversation with her sad stories of our poverty. All of her girlfriends had proper weddings, and baby showers, and proper divorces. They had parents to carry them financially. Not Mom. She was sentenced to a life of “figure it out.” After all, having a child out of wedlock in the early ‘60s was a sin before God. I’m told she was excommunicated from her church. There was no shower. There was no wedding. Mom was far too fearful to explain how she lost her virginity. She had already been raised in enough shame, judgment, and condemnation to see the outcome. Mom decided to elope. She seriously went from Grandma’s apron strings, catechism, parochial school, Sunday school, and rosary beads to an impoverished lifestyle with minimal or no support. I’ve been taught recently that many women in the ‘60s, bright young women who lost their virginites before proper marriages, were sent to the IMH (a mental hospital) and had their newborns taken from them. Things would turn from bad to worse. Mom did marry through a justice of the peace. She remained loyal to her marriage and bore four children: Joseph, Laura, Joan, and I. Unfortunately, my father also had emotional struggles, perhaps with his sexual identity, attention seeking, or addictive behavior. Whatever the case was, the marriage was unsustainable. My father cheated with multiple partners, male and female. Mom would not shame him to us. We were so very young. Mom had no one to tell.

Mom was torn in her life. Life mostly felt as if she was trying to be hopeful in a nearly hopeless situation. Mom had very large, deep set eyes. I remember when she would sing. She would pretend to be a famous singer and jump into comedic wit, proclaiming how she had “bedroom eyes.” We’d laugh. Sadly, these moments were

few and far between. Mom worked two jobs to support her four children. I remember many wonderful moments, however.

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