

## *Biography – Carmela Sansone, Ph.D.*

Being the daughter of Mary and Zachary Sansone, concern for others is part of Carmela's DNA. Her parents taught her it was more important to give to others rather than receive and their lives exemplified this credo. The Sansone Foundation previously the Congress of Italian American Organizations (CIAO) was founded by her parents in the early 1970's and from its inception has benefited the city of New York with social service programs, senior and daycare centers, counselling programs, and demographic research on the needs of the poor. Mary and Zach also created the first multi-ethnic coalition to address the interracial crisis plaguing the city under Mayor Lindsey. It was their inspiration, which has guided Carmela through her life.

Carmela's career began as a special education teacher at PS 160 in Brooklyn. Her interest in troubled children led her to enter New York University's Counseling Psychology Program in 1977 and she received her doctorate five years later. Her dissertation was on The Effects of Ethnic Identification on the Self-esteem of Third Generation Italian-Americans. It was a longitudinal study, which traced 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Borough Park and the surrounding areas in Brooklyn. There was a surprisingly high response rate and although it did not support her hypotheses regarding self-esteem, it did point to the upward mobility of this ethnic group. This research was last presented in 2011 at the European Congress of Psychology in Istanbul, Turkey.

In 1975 Carmela wrote a proposal for the first Italian-American Counseling Center in Brooklyn NY. It opened in Bay Ridge Brooklyn the following year and while at NYU, she acted as the director/ counselor of that program for two years. During that period she served on the President's Commission of Mental Health under Roslyn Carter. It was the largest commission of its type dealing with the mental health needs of diverse ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and geographical populations.

In 1978, Carmela married and moved to northern New Jersey. Her son Gene-Paul was born on Christmas Eve of 1980, a month after she finished her internship at St. Clare's Hospital in Denville New Jersey. Since 1984, the now Dr. Sansone has been in private practice where she has helped families, couples and individuals struggling with issues such as anxiety, depression, drug, alcohol and sex addiction, identity confusion etc. In conjunction with her practice, Dr. Sansone has been an adjunct professor at Montclair State College, written for Parent Guide Magazine and has been a guest on television's Straight Talk and Brooklyn Savvy.

Both her parents turned ninety in 2006. As a tribute to them and their lives Carmela wrote The Road They Travelled, which documented their many accomplishments. It was filled with testimonials from people whose lives they touched.

Having grown up during Vietnam War, Dr. Sansone was very distressed at our nation's decision to go to war with Iraq. She had treated many veterans and their families and had understood the toll the destructiveness of war had taken on their lives. In addition, she had experienced first hand this trauma in her life as her father was a World War 2 veteran. Dr. Sansone had wanted the world to appreciate their pain so in 2007 she developed and co directed a documentary dealing with the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) on Veterans and their Families. It was written for the Family Life Network where it was aired. Carmela had entitled it United in Pain since she wanted soldiers from both sides of the wars to be included. However the network revised it and entitled it America's Vets: The Invisible Wounds. They deleted the other veterans one of which was her father because he had been in the Italian army. His words were so poignant that she created Major Zachary Sansone, a small documentary on his experience with PTSD. Both documentaries were shown at the Italian-American Psychological Assembly in Sicily, Italy in 2008.

In 2002, after the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Sansone became very active with CURE (Community Understanding for Racial and Ethnic Equality), which is now a group under the umbrella of the Sansone Foundation. While working with this group, Dr. Sansone spearheaded research to devise a curriculum for preschool children, which would teach emotional/social competence and the embracement of diversity. Her belief was if from an early age children could be taught conflict resolution and respect for those different from themselves, the devastation of war and calamities like September 11<sup>th</sup> might be averted. This research was presented at the Laboratorio Larios Psychological Convention in Padova, Italy in July 2013 and will be presented at the European Congress of Psychology in Milan, Italy in June 2015.

Carmela piloted this syllabus in daycare centers in Brooklyn and it became the basis for The Sansone Foundation's Seed of Unity Daycare Center, which opened in the fall of 2013. This program is invested in the development of a new generation of children who no longer define others by their race, ethnicity, creed or sexual orientation but rather have a positive self-image that will enable them to work well with their peers and who will be prepared to go out into the world and succeed but not at the expense of others. The philosophy is that by planting these

seeds for a new generation of individuals, they can live in a more peaceful, harmonious world.

Dr. Sansone developed For Our Eyes Only based on her experience with an interactive journal she began with her son Gene-Paul when he was nine. Their journal greatly improved their communication and is today one of her most prized possessions. Taking from their work together and her years of therapy with children and their families, Carmela devised twenty (20) vignettes followed by thought provoking questions, which touch on topics relevant in the lives of children. It is an enjoyable way to enhance interaction between parents and children.

Sadly in 2010, Zachary Sansone died after a long and productive life. In recognition of his devotion to his community the street on which he lived for more than fifty years was named after him. He will live on in our hearts and minds of those who knew him for the wisdom he has imparted to them. Mary Sansone continues her active life committed to helping others and is one who never ceases to amaze.