

MARIA PANTELEO...Creative, Courageous, Confident

My image of Maria is one who sparkled, who worked hard, loved to dance, loved to meet people and share her stories. Newcomers to The Heritage- residents, employees, and visitors-were entertained by Bella Maria, Senora, "auntie", historian of all the events and people who came and went in the 26 years Maria lived here.

Maria came to America from Italy in 1956 to help her older sister raise four children. She didn't speak English and studied long hours into the night to pass the papers to become a citizen. Although Maria became a US citizen she was very proud of being born into the Panteleo family in Italy. She never lost her Italian identity or accent.

When working 33 years for Maison Mendelsson, an upscale clothing store in St Francis Hotel, Maria was a top sales person. "My six Jewish (male) bosses liked me. They put me in charge and gave me bonuses." Maria was not shy when meeting famous people who stayed at The St Francis: Queen Elizabeth II, Presidents Nixon, Ford and Regan. All Maria's customers were given royal treatment and respect.

Clearly Maria's work ethic was still intact when she arrived at The Heritage. "I volunteered in the Health Center. I worked in the kitchen. I made pasta and worked with David, the pastry chef until they said residents couldn't work in the kitchen. Tony Lawrence and I worked on decorations for every holiday. I always decorated the small Christmas tree in the dining room. Everyone called it Maria's tree.

I miss Tony. We were best friends."

Maria had many friends among residents and staff. It was a sad day in the dining room when we learned that Bella Maria had died in the night.

The Heritage isn't the same without you, Maria, our ambassador of goodwill, who wore the large sombrero for the Cinco de Mayo celebration and danced the Tarantella with your friend, Stela.

May you be at peace, making pasta and perhaps decorating your place in heaven with Tony Lawrence.

