

Local fund reminds her of great aunt’s story



Lisa Capobianco Observations

Tina Battaglia was just 14 years old when she became the caretaker of her siblings.

The oldest of nine children, she had to grow up quickly after the sudden death of her mother. Tina’s role in the family switched from big sister to a nurturing mother figure who cleaned and cooked dinner every night before her father came home from a long day of work.

A soft-spoken and reserved young woman, Tina always did as she was told, keeping track of her four brothers and four sisters, including my grandmother, who was the baby of the family.

She also never was able to finish school due to the responsibilities that resulted from this unexpected life-changing event.

Yet my great Aunt Tina never complained and never asked for help. Throughout the little time I knew her (unfortunately she passed away by the time I was in second grade), Aunt Tina never spoke about the challenges she faced when her mother died shortly after giving childbirth to my grandmother. Every time I visited her and my Aunt Josie (her sister) as a little girl, Aunt Tina would always sit peacefully in her pink chair, sharing a few smiles and giggles during our time together.

Looking at her pale wrinkled skin and small, squinty eyes, I always saw quiet strength and humility in Aunt Tina’s face. Although I was too young at the time to completely understand what my aunt endured growing up, her legacy recently became more apparent to me after covering the 2016 grant awards distribution of the Women & Girls’ Fund.

A community-based, permanent endowment of the Main Street Community Foundation, the Women & Girls’ Fund is a primary source of funding and a catalyst for programs that empower females of all ages. Since its inception 16 years ago, the fund has awarded nearly \$400,000 in program grants and immediate response support to local organizations that help women and girls gain the skills they need to lead successful lives.

From career planning and money management to literacy to healthy lifestyle choices, I have learned about a variety of programs supported by this fund—as well as the countless stories of girls and women who have benefited from it.

Looking back on my news coverage of the fund over the past couple of years, I think about the teenage girls who learned the ins and outs of apartment-hunting and changing a tire through “Skills to Pay the Bills,” a program offered by Bristol Youth Services. This program received a grant from the fund again in 2016.

I also think about the girls who will master simple home repair through the new “Entrepreneurial Program” at the Boys & Girls Club and Family Center of Bristol, which also received a grant funding last year.

In addition to that, the Bristol-based non-profit, For Goodness Sake, can now help provide additional household items like bed sheets and washcloths to local women who are making the transition to independent living—because of the fund.

It’s programs like the ones I mentioned above that remind me of the need for a source of funding like the Women & Girls’ Fund. It’s also the stories of women and girls (like my great Aunt Tina) that inspire others to help keep this fund alive.

Although my aunt never had the opportunity to receive support from a fund like this one, I know she would be proud to see how it has helped women and girls improve the quality of their lives.

I will never forget the sacrifices that my Aunt Tina made so her family could survive.

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