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MAGAZINE

CELEBRATING *DIVERSITY*

Lilli Trincherio's quest to end
bullying in schools

GIVING BACK

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STYLE STARS
*THESE RENO-BASED
DESIGNERS ARE ON
THE RISE*

FIRE STARTER

ONE WOMAN'S PROFOUND PASSION FOR ACCEPTANCE
IGNITES THE ANTI-BULLYING FLAME IN NORTHERN NEVADA

IF 60-SOMETHING-YEAR-OLD LILLIANA TRINCHERO COULD WRITE A LETTER TO HER 10-YEAR-OLD SELF, it's likely the younger version would find the correspondence utterly unbelievable.

Then, she was an underprivileged and bullied farm girl, dressing her size-0 frame in her mama's size 18 clothes for school dress-up days.

Today, Lilli sits in Walden's Coffeehouse, sipping a cup of hot tea on a brisk afternoon. A sophisticated raspberry cowl-neck sweater, black skinny jeans and French manicure serve as the perfect foil to an unruly, thick auburn mane of fiery curls.

Her past is a classic tale of overcoming adversity. Born to immigrant parents from Italy, Trinchero grew up picking garlic on her family farm in Reno and serving as referee between her mother and abusive, schizophrenic father.

"When my dad was so scary, I was the protector of my mom," she says. "I would race in there and try to stand between him and her. I tried to fix it all, and I took the caregiver role early."

Her mother and father divorced when Lilli was young.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

"Mama had such courage," Trinchero says, eyes welling with tears. "She only had a third grade education, she couldn't speak English and she didn't have a trade, other than picking vegetables. She went to an attorney and said, 'I have these two girls, and I want to divorce my husband because I can't sleep anymore — he scares me.'"

Despite the strong family role Lilli filled and the courageous role model embodied by her mother, the family's modest means set Lilli up for a childhood of teasing and mockery.

"Obviously, with the curly hair, being terribly skinny, and clothes that looked like I just got them from a thrift store, I was bullied," she says. "There were sneers and smart remarks constantly. And my mama always said, 'Oh, don't tell them we're Italian,' because there was still that anti-Italian sentiment in the late '40s and early '50s."

Lauren by Ralph Lauren silk top, Eileen Fisher sweater and Jessica Simpson belt, all from Dillard's at The Summit; Pants and boots are model's own.



Not one to let the bullying get her down, Trinchero turned to work to buoy her self-esteem and sense of purpose. She attended University of Nevada Reno and studied physical therapy, graduating in three years and embarking on a profession that would serve to foster the caretaking role she had assumed so early while also providing an unparalleled sense of success. She became a trail-blazer in the physical therapy field, sought after by corporations to train others on geriatric therapy best practices.

THE 'KRAUT DOG MOMENT'

But with all the turmoil and adversity she had faced in her life, it's perhaps ironic that a hot dog is credited with ultimately providing fundamental, life-altering change.

"I was traveling constantly," she recalls. "I was 48, I was exhausted, and I was in the St. Louis airport after conducting a training session. I had missed my flight to Vegas, and I'd have to catch one that would arrive at 2 a.m. I looked around and the only thing open was an Oscar Meyer hot dog stand. So I got a kraut dog thinking, 'well

at least I'm getting a little cabbage,' and I'm looking at this sea of people, and I thought, 'I'm not doing this anymore.' It was my epiphany. I had had my kraut dog moment."

Truth be told, she already had many kraut dog moments — now she simply had a phrase to embody the life-changing epiphanies that would characterize much of her life. During her career, she had given birth to a son ("My husband at the time wanted no children, I wanted six — so we had one," she laughed), who went on to pursue a career in medicine. And at the age of 24, when he was in his third year of medical school, he came out to his mom.

"I didn't handle it well," she remembers. "I hit the wall. I lost about 12 pounds in two weeks. After what had happened with my dad when I was little, I was so afraid of men. I didn't trust them. I never had a good concept of men, so I didn't know what was the right thing to do with my son at this point."

But reflection and introspection would force Trinchero to consider her own background — ridiculed for being different, ostracized for not fitting in and marginalized for things beyond her own control. And this chapter with her son,

who now is a successful general practitioner in San Diego specializing in research, functional medicine and anti-aging, would ultimately lead to the next kraut dog moment: Beginning an anti-bullying initiative in her hometown.

A MESSAGE AND A MISSION

"This community has been so good to me," she says. "And I had always wanted to do something about bullying, having been through it myself. This was around the same time as Columbine and Matthew Shepard, and I can't tell you how many nightmares I had about those tragedies. I wanted to help."

"She walks in — she was so cute, just so Lilli — and all she said was she had an idea," says Margaret Stewart, communications director with the Community Foundation of Western Nevada. The foundation is a philanthropic entity designed to connect people with charitable causes. "She had this amazing personal story, and she told us she just wanted to celebrate diversity and help kids be more accepting of one another."

With the help of the Community Foundation, thus was born the Celebrate Diversity Fund, which became a grassroots effort to get anti-bullying lesson plans and resources in the hands of Washoe County School District teachers and counselors.

"She truly has a passion for the most vulnerable populations, those who have been marginalized because of their ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation," says Katherine Loudon, coordinator of the Washoe County School District's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program. "What Lilli does is keep an interest in this national issue ignited in our community, and she does it constantly. She's not just a community donor or a funding source; she's a partner for the long haul, and that's a critical difference."

A partner indeed, she will even feed the troops who amass in her garage to build binders full of anti-bullying information. Trinchero invited friends, family and volunteers, fed them soup and spaghetti, and helped build materials for use by teachers and counselors.

Trinchero's Celebrate Diversity Fund constantly is reinventing, offering cash awards to schools with the most innovative anti-bullying initiative, sponsoring films and contests and providing Trinchero with first-hand access to children to spread her message.

"She's happiest when she connects with the kids and teachers," Loudon says. "That's her reward — you can see it in her eyes. I remember her meeting with a group of children at Spanish Springs Elementary School, and they were all hanging on her every word. It was so cute. And so important to those kids."

CELEBRATING SELF

Trinchero says the two things that bring her the most pride in joy in her life: Being a mom and helping start an anti-bullying conversation in our community.

And when she's not doing the hard work that needs to be done to inspire acceptance community-wide, she's constantly working to improve herself. She takes ballroom dancing, piano and golf lessons and works out with a personal trainer. She grows vegetables in her garden just south of Windy Hill. She visits her favorite local haunts, Whole Foods and Moana Nursery, or has coffee with a girlfriend. She travels with her boyfriend of eight years, Dick.

"I would say the thing that attracted me to Lilli was her genuine character," says Richard W. Blakey, a surgeon with Reno Orthopaedic Clinic. "With Lilli, what you see is what you get — and you get a lot! She is probably the kindest person I've ever known."

And she practices with her singing coach, trying to perfect Dick's favorite song, "On the Street Where You Live" from "My Fair Lady," and these appropriate lyrics: "People stop and stare. They don't bother me.

For there's nowhere else on earth that I would rather be. Let the time go by, I won't care if I Can be here on the street where you live."

It's a song of home. It's a song of love. And it's inspired by a timeless Greek myth and George Bernard Shaw play, "Pygmalion," with its critical social messages about embracing self.

For Lilliana Trinchero, this is clearly a message that resonates. ■



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WESTERN NEVADA
CONNECTS COMMUNITY AND CAUSES

Lilli Trinchero found a philanthropic home in the Community Foundation of Western Nevada — and many others in Northern Nevada have done the same for years.

"This year marks our 15th year in the community," says President/CEO Christopher Askin. "Our board underwrote our start-up costs to the tune of \$700,000, which was our operating fund for five years. Since then, we've grown to more than \$64 million in managed charitable funds, while distributing \$69 million in grants over the course of the last 15 years."

The foundation specializes in grants and scholarships — during 2011 alone, the Community Foundation awarded more than \$10 million. The Foundation also works with citizens on charitable requests to meet community needs. Appreciated assets in the form of homes and stock are welcome, as are gifts of cash.

"People who are interested in donating can set up their own charitable fund or donate to an established fund — such as the Community Fund — that the Board of Trustees will use to help when and where needed," Askin says. "We have funds that benefit education, children, arts, the environment — they run the gamut of causes."

The nationwide model — 700 Community Foundations dot the U.S. map — was first established in 1914.

"This is the fastest growing form of philanthropy in the nation," Askin says. "Our mission is to strengthen our community through philanthropy by connecting people who care with causes that matter — and we're honored to support such a beautiful community."

Details: 775-333-5499 or www.nevadafund.org.