

What All God Has Done For Me

The Katherine DiMatteo Jackson Story

By Katherine Jackson
and
Terry DeMarco

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Cover Design by Terry DeMarco

This book is a memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

Printed in U.S.A

ISBN-13: 979-8-4970-9618-7

Imprint: Independently published

DEDICATION

For all my friends, family, fellow church members and volunteers who were there for me and helped me pick up the pieces when disaster hit my home. I am so grateful. God bless you.

PROLOGUE

It was the early 1900s in Chicago. Electricity was introduced a few years before the turn of the century at the Columbian Exposition; Henry Ford was working out the kinks on his new idea for an automated assembly line so he could crank out his Model T's faster and cheaper; and baseball fans got a rare treat when in 1906 they witnessed the White Sox play the Cubs in the first and only all Chicago World Series. Immigrants were coming to Chicago from all over the world looking for a better life. Two such people were Frank DiMatteo and Antonina Sala. Frank and Nina were my parents. My name is Katherine and this is my story.

My father and mother were both born in Sicily, Italy. Dad was from Palermo and Mom's family lived in Salemi, a small village up in the mountains. The village is located in the province of Trapani. My

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parents were two young people from Italy who arrived in Chicago at about the same time. Dad was twenty-one and Mom was twenty-three. Their reasons for coming to the United States were very different. My dad came to America with his mother, two brothers, and a cousin. It was his intention to make a new life for himself. He expected to find a land of opportunity and to settle down and live the good life.

My mom, however, never intended to stay in America. She came at the urging of her brother Vince. Vince had been living in Chicago for some time and he wanted to bring more of his family to the states. He sent money to pay for her passage to America and convinced her to come. Her plan was to come and work in America while sending money back to her father, whom she loved dearly. On the day she left her home in Italy, she kissed her father goodbye and promised to come back soon. Then she boarded the ship with her cousins and headed across the sea to a new world. Sadly, Antonina Sala was never able to keep that promise to her father. In the end she stayed in her new country, got married, raised a family, and grew old. Nina and her father died in their own time a world apart, never having seen each other again.

My dad started a business as a peddler. He would load up his cart with fruits and vegetables and coax his horse to move slowly through the city streets, selling his wares as he went. His horse was none too happy about sharing the road with all the newfangled

automobiles, but he kept up his pace and did his job. The land of opportunity turned out to be a very difficult place. The work was hard and the pay was low. My dad never really found that good life he was looking for. Ironically, an opportunity did present itself when my dad's brother opened a small neighborhood grocery store and asked him for help. Instead of joining his brother in the grocery business, he decided to continue to earn a living peddling fruits and vegetables. His brother, Dominick DiMatteo, grew his business into a highly successful chain of grocery stores. While Dad was holding the reins of his horse as it clip clopped down the street, Dominick's *Finer Foods* became a part of Chicago history.

In the meantime, Mom had found a job in the garment industry. She worked long hours for very little pay sewing garments together. It was unfortunately one of the many sweat shops in old Chicago that took advantage of immigrants who were desperate for work and spoke little or no English. She lived with her brother and his family. It was an arrangement she quickly became unhappy with, He gave her carfare to get to and from work, but he took all the money she made. She would never be able to do what she really wanted to do. She wanted to go back home to Italy and be with her father.

I'm not sure how they met. I was the youngest of nine children. By the time I came around there was little talk of romance. So, I guess I'll just say they met

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and started a typical Italian courtship complete with chaperone. In 1914 my parents said their vows and became man and wife. I wish I could say my dad was a good husband and a good father. I truly do. But if I said that, I would be lying. On the day of their wedding, when the ceremony was over, instead of enjoying the day and planning their future together, my father decided to go on a hunting trip with his friends. This type of behavior became typical throughout their marriage. My father was a gambler and wasted a lot of the money he earned selling produce on card games. He was not around much. When he was at home, he spent his time making his wife miserable.

Fortunately for Mom, my dad's mother loved her and tried to help her both financially and emotionally. She was there for her when she needed a friend. My parents had a child the first year they were married. It was a girl. Sadly, the baby had some kind of eating disorder and died at three and a half months. During the next sixteen years, my mom gave birth to nine children. I was the youngest. I had four brothers (Dominick, Benny, Joe, and Sammy) and four sisters (Chris, Natalie, Gracie, and Mary). We shortened the names of some of my brothers and sisters to just their first initial. We called Dominick "Dee", Benny "Bey" (which is Italian for the letter "B"), and Natalie "N". I always called Benny "Benny" and I'd call Natalie "N" or "Nat", usually Nat.

By the time I was born, my older siblings had seen their share of hardships. My father continued to gamble away his money while my oldest brothers and sisters had to quit school and find whatever jobs they could in order to pay the bills. Money was tight and the last thing they wanted was one more mouth to feed. I was not a welcome addition to the family. My brothers and sisters wouldn't even come to see me for at least a week. They wanted my mother to give me away to my godmother. This upset my mother a lot. She loved all of her children and even though times were hard, she had no intention of giving me away.

The title of this book is *What All God Has Done For Me*. I'm sure by now you're thinking that with all the hardships and sadness I've told you about so far, where is God in all of this? Does life miraculously get better? The answer is yes and no. At the writing of this book, I am ninety years old. I have seen a lot of drama. But I have also seen a lot of strength, courage, and kindness; much of which was borne from the drama. I did not have a fairy tale life but I did have a good life. You can't truly appreciate the good things in life if you haven't worked to overcome the bad things. I have lived through some very tough times, but I have also experienced miracles. That includes the miracle I experienced last year that prompted me to write this book. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but let me tell you, it's a doozy.

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Now, don't skip ahead to the end. Let the story flow and lead you up to it. It's much more impactful that way. You can't fully appreciate a miracle unless you understand the back story. So if you want to know what God has done for me, I'll start with when I was born.

As I said, my brothers and sisters wanted to give me away. Understand that in those days it was not uncommon for a poor family to allow a friend or family member to raise one of their children. My mother, knowing full well the burden of raising another child, stood firm. If she did not, I would never have known the love and affection I have felt for my brothers and sisters who eventually accepted me into the fold. I thank God for giving her the strength to take on the responsibility of raising one more child.

* * *



Here's a picture of Mom with her parents when she lived in Italy. She was so young then.



This is a picture of my dad's family. That's my dad in the front row on the left. His mother is sitting next to him and his cousin is on the right. In the back row on the left is my Uncle Sam. He's the one who gave us money for the feast. Next to him is my Uncle Dominick. If you don't know him, I'll give you a hint...



He opened a little neighborhood grocery store and called it Dominick's. He used his first name because he wanted the store to feel homey. Here's a picture of his store in 1935. If you never heard of Dominick's Finer Foods, you never lived in Chicago.



This is my mom. I always liked this picture. She was so beautiful. I think it was taken sometime in the 1920s.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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