

News Review

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Ridgecrest, California

Book Review

'The Sugar's at the Bottom of the Cup'

By Elda Del Bino Willitts and Patricia Lynn Henley

By LOLA DE JULIO DE MACI
Ridge Writers News Review Columnist

The “Sugar’s at the Bottom of the Cup” is the story of a life — Elda Del Bino Willitts’ life— from start to finish. The youngest of eight children, Teresa Elda Del Bino was born in Lucca, Italy, in 1909 and immigrated to America via Ellis Island at the age of seven.

San Francisco became home to the Del Bino family and, with the help of author and journalist Patricia Lynn Henley, Elda recounts her family’s lives in that community from beginning to end. Henley writes Elda’s story in the first person, allowing the reader into the heart and soul of this extraordinary woman. Reading around the clock, I found myself experiencing the joy, pain, laughter and tears of this Italian-American family.

At age 32, Elda married Bill Willitts, and together they started their own business enterprise. Eventually their only child, Billy, took over the business and perpetuated the success of the company his parents worked so hard for.

Throughout Elda’s life she found the sugar at the bottom of her cup, but there were times when anything but sweetness plagued this determined, ambitious woman. Elda writes of her difficulties and heartaches while her husband was away during World War II, when he had an office romance, and when his death threw her into immense despair. She also suffered at the hand of her brother, Rico, whose mental illness plagued Elda and her family throughout their lifetime.

Elda Del Bino also takes us step by step through her four bouts with cancer and reveals how she outlived all four to reach the age of 95, concluding, “How would I know happiness if I never knew sorrow?”

One of the pinnacles of her life was to go back to her hometown in Lucca and visit the house in which she was born. There she realized that America had become home to her after all these years and California was where she belonged.

Elda shares family recipes at the end of her story. No Italian story is complete without them. I found myself heading for my kitchen and opening my recipe book to the biscotti and pizzelle section. The aromas of anise and other flavorings soon filled the room as thoroughly as the images of Elda’s journey had flooded my mind. “The Sugar’s at the Bottom of the Cup” has much to savor. Buon appetito!

This weekly column is presented by the Ridge Writers, the East Sierra Branch of the California Writers Club. Meetings are generally held the first Wednesday evening of each month at the Ridgecrest Branch Library, and free programs are offered throughout the year. Visit www.calwriters.org or www.ridgenet.net/~curtdan/ridgewriters for information about membership and upcoming programs.