



A GIFT OF  
INDIVIDUALITY



Valvano

VALVANO SALON SPA

134 Niagara Street, St. Catharines  
905.684.5580 · www.valvano.ca

# WHO ARE YOU fighting FOR?

The story of Ann, Barbara & Sandra Mantini

By Gizelle Lau | Photography by Stephen Dominick

■ For Ann Mantini and her sisters, Barbara and Sandra, it all changed with a promise.

The Mantini Sisters, as they're known in the public eye, have been singing on stages and captivating audiences across Canada and the United States since 1985 when they first performed together as a featured act at the Charlottetown Festival in Prince Edward Island. Since then, they've performed with 60-piece symphony orchestras, have sung for audiences in the thousands, and worked with music industry giants like Howard Cable, composer of the original "Hockey Night in Canada" theme song, and Mark Lalama, music director for "Canadian Idol." ▶



► Their musical careers all began at home, right in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the Mantini sisters grew up in a family of seven children.

“We’re a very close, large Italian family. There would always be music playing in the house – from the Beatles to Elvis or Sinatra. It was a warm home and our parents instilled in us the idea that family is one of the most important things in life – you can always count on your family to be there for you. I can’t imagine life without my siblings,” says Ann, the sixth of seven Mantini children.

It was in 1998 when the Mantinis learned that their youngest sibling and brother, Aldo, a husband and father of one-year-old Robert, was diagnosed with cancer.

“Aldo was closest to me in age, we grew up and went to school together. He was the baby of the family, fun, lovable – the kind of guy that people just gravitated towards – he always had a smile on his face. Even when he was diagnosed, he never had that attitude of defeat or asked ‘why me?’ Instead, he was thankful that it wasn’t any of us.”

Aldo looked for support in the Niagara area – both for himself and his family – but came up empty. His story was similar to that of Anne Armstrong Gibson. Gibson, a Toronto lawyer and cancer victim saw a lack of support in the medical institutions that were supposed to help cancer victims and their families cope with the life-changing illness. In 1992, Gibson started Wellspring Toronto: a community-based centre that would provide support, education, and coping skills to individuals and families – all at no cost.

It was Ann who introduced Wellspring Toronto to Aldo. “We all understood the seriousness of my brother’s illness and the fear of losing him was crippling – but I wanted to keep fighting. Wellspring was a place that helped me cope with the stress in my life and my family’s.

Aldo saw the difference that Wellspring made for me and thought the rest of the family and the Niagara community could use the same kind support. He didn’t believe that people should be alone in coping with cancer – not everyone was as lucky as he was to have such a big family. So he began to speak with his friends and healthcare practitioners about a centre in Niagara.”

Aldo passed away in 1999, just one year after being diagnosed with cancer. Before he died, he asked Anne to continue his dream to develop a cancer support centre for families in Niagara.

“He made me promise him that I would continue his work and develop the centre. When I told him that I didn’t know where to begin, he said ‘You can do it, I know you can. I’ll be with you.’

The timing was right and there seemed to be a need. I spoke to individuals in the community – those who knew Aldo and believed in the centre – and put together a start-up committee.”

Wellspring Niagara opened in June 2001 as a not-for-profit, charitable organization and an affiliate of Wellspring Toronto. Since then, the centre has welcomed hundreds of families and has had over 28,000 program attendees including men, women, and children. Members can take part in a variety of professionally-run programs including art therapy, body-mind meditation, drumming, discussions, journaling, quilting, tai chi, yoga, peer support groups, and a well-stocked resource library.

The centre offers free services and programs without grants from the Canadian Cancer Society or government

grants and so relies heavily on donations, fundraising events, and contributions (in time and money) from local community members.

In fact, it’s the help from the community that really makes Wellspring Niagara what it is. There are 150 community volunteers that help in different capacities, serving on the board of directors, manning the front desk, or helping with fundraising. One such fundraising event is the Rankin Cancer Run in Niagara that helps fundraise \$100,000 for Wellspring Niagara each year, covering about 25 percent of the annual cost to run the centre. Also recently, the Meridian Credit Union generously donated space rent-free for a satellite Wellspring Niagara location in Stevensville to facilitate better accessibility throughout the Niagara region.

Closer to home, the Mantini Sisters are one of Wellspring’s biggest supporters and use their musical talents to help fundraise and bring awareness to Wellspring, keeping Aldo’s memory alive. Aside from various fundraising concerts throughout the year, the sisters also perform at the annual Wellspring Gala that takes place at the Shaw Festival Theatre.

“What started out as a promise to my brother has turned into something bigger than I could have imagined. When people come up to me or one of our staff and say ‘I don’t know what I would have done without Wellspring,’ – it’s that responsibility to help support our members to make their journey easier – is what it’s all about,” says Ann.

“There’s still a huge void without Aldo,” says Ann, “but Wellspring Niagara is dedicated to his memory. Aldo would certainly be proud of what we’ve done.”

There are still some challenges that Ann is facing as Interim Executive Director for Wellspring. One of her biggest goals in the next two years is to find a new location to enable the centre to meet the growing needs of the community and offer the same high-quality programs.

“For years to come, we want to be able to help meet the needs of people who are living with cancer the best we can. Hopefully one day, we’ll be able to close our doors because there won’t be a need if there’s a cure. Until then, we’ll be here. If you know someone that might need Wellspring, tell them about it. It could really change their lives.”

Wellspring Niagara serves the entire Niagara region including, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Port Colborne, Thorold, Fort Erie, Lincoln, Grimsby, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln. The main Wellspring location is at 3-3250 Schmon Parkway, Unit #3 in Thorold while a satellite location is located at 3-2763 Stevensville Road in Stevensville (open Tues-Thurs).

Today, the Wellspring network has reached a dozen communities across Canada, with two centres in Toronto and affiliate centres in London, Halton Peel, Brampton, and Calgary. A new location in Ottawa has just broken ground and centres in Edmonton and Halifax are in development. **NLM**

**For more information, to donate, or to learn about upcoming fundraising events for Wellspring Niagara, please visit: [WellspringNiagara.ca](http://WellspringNiagara.ca)**

**For more on the Mantini Sisters, go to: [www.MantiniSisters.com](http://www.MantiniSisters.com)**