

Miss Lynn
A Delusional Life

(First few pages.)

By

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Introduction

Meet my mom, Evelyn Savastano Acciaioli, who would eventually become known as Lynn Simmons after several marriages.

1955 was steeped in family tradition: households had a mom and a dad. Dads went out to work each day while moms remained home, tended to their children and maintained an immaculate household; being sure all dirty laundry was scrubbed clean – usually by hand – daily and hot meals were prepared from scratch morning, noon and night.

Although these well defined roles for men and women, particularly in the Italian culture, may have worked for everyone over the centuries, mom sought a life and career far from the scrub board.

Dad gave her an ultimatum, surely egged on by his *familia*: stay home and be a good wife and mother because that is where women belong...or else. Mom accepted dad's "or else" challenge. They divorced and she set out to show Big Andrew, my dad, and "the other end", his family, they were the ones who were stuck in the past with their closed minds while she set out on her journey to have a career despite having a five year old child, me.

Mom would not have to think outside the box as she refused to be boxed in. This game of life came with rules, rules which were never meant to apply to her.

Whether in her career(s), her life or her relationships reality – past or present – was as she said it was rather than what actually, factually transpired. An example of this would be during her elder years when she insisted she only visited a gambling casino close to her home only twice since it opened a number of years ago. The reality was she was there at least once sometimes two or three times weekly as proven by her ATM cash withdrawals recorded on her bank statements and her image captured by casino security cameras. When confronted she

maintained her position, *her reality*, of having frequented the casino only two times since it opened threatening to sue anyone who said otherwise.

Mom deluded herself with her portrayal as a savvy travel business owner when reality clearly showed this was far from the truth forcing me to step in and take over her successfully bankrupt enterprise, turn it around before returning it back to her with a clean balance sheet so she could ruin it again. And again.

After three marriages and a series of men in our home, one would think she would have a handle on relationships. Far from it. Sad to say her true love, her soul mate, her one-and-only was a fictional character called David who was simultaneously a wealthy Wall Streeter, a surgeon, a lawyer and commanded an aircraft carrier during the Gulf War. Most children leave their imaginary friends back in their younger years, mom's David remained as real to her when she was dying as the day she first encountered (invented) him in New York City over fifty years ago while attending training classes to sell hair products.

Whether at home with mom as a youth, away at school or during my thirty-five year marriage, mom would author groundless hate letters which suited her momentary mood in response to her perception of what had happened rather than what actually occurred. I, along with most everyone else, was out to undermine Miss Lynn. It was all a conspiracy and she spent her life trying to get to the bottom of it.

Her actions and words either in the form of vilifying letters lacking an iota of truth (some included in this book) or nasty telephone conversations would drive people away. Yet after they would no longer bother with her, she would wonder where they went.

This was the case with my four children, her grandchildren. The way mom treated my wife and I, as seen from their youthful vantage point, caused them to not want to have any relationship with their nana.

The only two people remaining with Miss Lynn during her topsy-turvy life and ultimately be by her deathbed while she agonized in a semi-conscious state for days were mentally bludgeoned by her for decades: Kathy, my wife, and I.

Chapter 1:

At the Cuzzoni's

In 1950 an apartment complex here in Rhode Island would be considered a triple decker tenement house. When responding to a question as to where you lived, your answer would not be a street address as today but more as who owned the house where your apartment was located. After mom and dad married they lived at the Cuzzoni's which was located on Silver Spring Street, Providence, a couple of miles from where either of them were born and raised.

While at the neighborhood "baby doctor", pregnant mom met pregnant Liz in the waiting room. As living in Rhode Island would have it, Liz and her husband lived diagonally across the street from the Cuzzoni's. In mom's estimation, Liz should be driven to the hospital immediately and offered to call my dad to bring her to Women and Infants. When Liz said the *baby doctor*, Dr. Zinno, felt as though it would be a week or two before she would deliver, my mother responded, "What do these doctors know?"

A week later, Liz delivered her daughter, Jeanne. I followed three days after Jeanne. Mom and Liz became lifelong friends as a result of that chance meeting and the subsequent overlapping hospital stays. Jeanne and I also have enjoyed a 63 year friendship oftentimes commiserating about our mothers. I assume our moms had similar conversations about us.

Two weeks after I was home, mom convinced Liz it was time they put us in strollers and bring me to meet my Grandmother Savastano, a two mile brisk fall walk in each direction. As a result of this lengthy excursion, Liz ended up back in the hospital hemorrhaging.

A few weeks after this, mom and Liz were chatting when mom confided to Liz she had already started me on Pabulum. Liz said Dr. Zinno instructed her not to give Jeanne Pabulum so soon. Mom responded, "He told me the same thing, I defied him and started giving it to Rusty in

his formula.” *Hence my weight problem lasting all my life.* “And I’ve already started potty training him. All I do is hold him on the potty seat until he goes.” *Hence my rushing to the bathroom at the slightest urge to purge.*

It was not long before a first floor apartment became available right next to the Acciaioli compound on Langdon Street. Zero options on this one, the Acciaioli’s at the Cuzzoni’s would join the Acciaioli compound, sort of.

I could roll in any direction and find a cousin. Life was simple, life was good.

Not that I have any direct memory of when I was three but pictures show we had a wedding for my cousin Mary in our yard. She was the daughter of my mother’s sister, Nella, who had a husband, Joe, refusing to give permission for his daughter to marry. Enter Auntie Evelyn, my mom, to break the Italian tradition of parental marriage consent or no marriage. She provided a wedding reception venue for Mary: our backyard.

This was the first memory of my parents fighting: dad wanting to retain the fatherly right to approve who would marry his daughter and mom not allowing a custom to get in the way of throwing a wedding bash for her niece and the man she loved.

According to mom during the years following my birth, she attempted to be the perfect wife and mom. Yet she wanted more.

It turned out the *more* was a sales job with the local Ironrite ironing machine dealer.

Chapter 2:

Lights, camera, pillowcase.

In the late 40's and early 50's a new ironing appliance found its way into a number of American homes. Housed in a large metal box, about the size of two computer desks pushed together, was a machine that would free up happy homemakers from the arduous task of standing at an ironing board, pushing and pulling a heavy, heated iron: the Ironrite Ironer.

The Ironrite had a large muslin covered roller which would press against an equally large heated metal surface; rotating and pulling the item to be ironed. Your hands were free to position what had to be ironed as the roller was controlled by your knees: right knee against the lever would cause the roller to clamp against the heated iron tray and activate the roller, left knee against the left lever would stop the roller ridding those pesky creases with extra heated pressure.

The Ironrite Ironer Company based in Mount Clemens, Michigan established a local dealer network to distribute its innovative ironing apparatus to eager housewives across the nation. Among them: Evelyn Acciaioli.

I was four when our Ironrite invaded most of the space in our tiny living room. As any curious young child, I nagged my mother into letting me give it a spin. She instructed me to never place my tiny fingers near the roller before allowing me to iron a flat piece such as a pillowcase or dish towel. *Who irons pillowcases or dish towels? Obviously happy housewives in 1954: finding housework pleasurable and ironing therapeutic.*

One pillowcase and I was hooked. Other kids would beg to go out and play, I would beg to iron.

The Ironrite's roller was not the only wheel turning. The wheels started to twist in Evelyn's imagination. Having seen live, local television commercials for the Ironrite, she

thought it would be a novel idea to use me on TV demonstrating how uncomplicated this ironing machine really was: even a four year old could use it.

After contacting the local Ironrite dealer, she pitched the idea of having her son demonstrate how easy it was to use an Ironrite on television. They agreed to this novel sales approach.

In those days all local commercials were done live in the studio; your set was alongside the set of where the newscasters sat. Relying on my memory of 59 years ago, I believe Art Lake delivered the news while Bunny North was assigned to be the weather “girl” on WJAR’s newscasts. Once Art said “We’ll be right back after a commercial message from Ironrite”, the lights went dark on Art and Bunny and came up on mom and me.

Later in life when I pressed mom for the details of my television stardom, she recalled saying something like: “Hello, ladies, I’m Lynn Wright and this is my four yea old son, Andrew. We’re here to show you how quick and easy it is to make ironing less of a chore. With the Ironrite Ironer, you can sit and relax while you feed all of your wrinkled clothes and flat cloth items through our revolutionary roller system. Andrew will now show you how he can iron a wrinkled pillowcase.” *Lynn holds up a wrinkled pillowcase to the camera. I iron the pillowcase. Lynn holds up the wrinkle-free pillowcase to the camera.* “Wrinkles are gone in seconds with the Ironrite. So simple, my four year old son can use it.” Mom said I added (while the camera was still rolling): “I iron shirts, my dad’s pants, sheets...”

Lights out on us. Lights came up on a chuckling Art and Bunny. Art remarked, “Quite a worker you have.” Lynn Wright called back from the darkened set: “I only let him iron a pillowcase every now and then.”

There you have it. A star was born. Not me. The star, or at least she thought, was Lynn Wright.

Adios Evelyn Savastano Acciaioli. Hola Lynn Wright.

We celebrated our celebrity by walking from the WJAR-TV studio, located on an upper floor of the Outlet Department Store in downtown Providence to the nearby Woolworth's lunch counter overseen by my mom's sister-in-law, my Auntie Tina. I probably ordered my favorite: mashed potatoes with gravy. Instead of a small side dish, my aunt would use a large plate to plop a mountain of potatoes covered by what seemed like a bucket of brown gravy.

Lynn Wright probably had a coffee and cigarette anxiously awaiting someone from TV-land to discover her at the Woolworth's (Providence, RI) counter as a result of her new fame: the Ironrite girl.

As for me, being a one commercial wonder was okay. A four year old has much bigger things to be concerned about: can we go home so I can play with my cousins and friends?

We arrived home greeted by my seething father. Not sure which triggered his anger more: his wife leaving the house as Evelyn Acciaioli and returning as Lynn Wright or have his "women should stay at home" thinking violated by a wife working and on public display, seen by viewers across the entire state.

Who would have thought a mother would have used her four year old to not only sell more Ironrites but to launch her own television persona?

It would appear mom's career goals were at odds with my dad's – and his family's – vision of what a typical Italian wife's role should be in their *familia*.

According to mom, confirmed by my dad, we would go to various family events and I would play with my cousins while mom and dad would go their separate ways. The only other

time they would be reunited was when we would leave. Occasionally mom was AWOL having to demonstrate the ironer or be the Ironrite girl somewhere. As though my father was not already fuming that his wife was not by his side (at least arriving with him), his mother would stoke his flames by wondering who wore the pantaloni in our family: him or my mother.

In those days families would live close to each other as though they were living in a Godfather type of compound. Replacing the secured fenced perimeter and fortified gates would be an old Italian woman, wooden spoon in hand more vicious than any pit bull ever created if you harmed her young. The price Italian mamas would expect to extract from their children was not much: only absolute control over every facet of their lives.

My Grandmother Maggie Acciaioli was no exception. According to my mother, grandma along with dad's family was the cause of their constant bickering: they desired to control our family and my dad lacked the cojones to tell them to stick their wooden spoons where the sun did not shine.

Dad argued this had nothing to do with his family but everything to do with ours and mom not being a *normal*, stay-at-home wife and mother.

Within a year, Mr. Acciaioli and Ms. Wright divorced.