



Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso

May 18, 1932 - December 3, 2025

UTICA - It is with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of our dear mother, Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso, on Wednesday, December 3, 2025. She was 93 and a half years young. She loved her life and the people in it and brought joy to all who knew her. She exhibited amazing grace despite the loss of her beloved husband at a young age and mobility impairment, and she continued to be the house Rummicub champion despite legal blindness. Thanks to all who shared her earthly journey; she loved you all.

Bernice was born at the family homestead on Blandina Street on May 18, 1932, the youngest of six first-generation American children born to Senatro and Philomena (Izzo) DiLeo, immigrants from Missanello (Province of Potenza, Region of Basilicata), Italy. Her sister Nell, age 15, suggested the name Bernice—rather unusual for an East Utica Italian-American girl—that helped define the unique gift of her life.

It was a Depression-era childhood, but her memories of it—and her memory remained strong for her entire life—were grand. They owned a two-family home and, often, one or another of her older siblings was starting their married life downstairs. The property invited you in through a rose arbor that gave way to grapevines front and back, a cherry tree, a pear tree, a prized fig tree, and, of course, a bountiful garden. The neighbors were friendly, many of them intermarrying and bringing forth another generation: Leones, Ziobros,

Marcheses, and Mattias. Sundays were often spent traveling to her maternal grandmother's house in Herkimer, first by train, until her brother Joe was old enough to drive and buy a car.

Bernice forged friendships that lasted her the rest of her life: her girlfriends Connie (Spetts) Mott and Theresa (Lombardo) Vetere preceded Bernice in death by only a matter of a few months, but for nine decades they laughed and cried together and raised their children together. Girlfriends Mary (Caruso) Gentile and Armen (Topouzian) Boghosian, who left this earth years before them, and Esther (Mallozzi) Caccozza were beloved members of the sisterhood, with Theresa's husband Leonard leading the pack.

Bernice attended Roscoe Conkling School and was a proud graduate of TR Proctor High School, Class of '50, graduating early in 1949. The gift of a watch for graduation brought her to visit Kay Jewelers on 215 Genesee St., where she discovered they were hiring for their credit department. She decided to apply for the job and was selected from over 200 applicants. After a couple of years, she moved to Sears, Roebuck to work in their credit department. When her district manager from Kay's heard she had left, he visited her and offered her incentives to persuade her to return, and she did. Despite being assigned to the office, she was the highest producer during the store's "Dynamic Diamond Days" two years in a row. The first year, she won a trip for two to New York City (she brought her sister Jane), all expenses paid, including tickets to the Broadway show Kiss Me, Kate. The second year, she passed on the trip, and they offered her whatever she'd like—and she chose a 17-inch floor-model television set, the family's first TV and her father's pride and joy.

It was also at Kay that she met her future forever friend, Loretta Sunderhaft; they would also end up working together at the Mohawk Valley Federal Credit Union in the Utica State Office Building, which, remarkably, occupied the site

previously housing—wait for it—Kay Jewelers! Together, they traveled to conferences related to their husbands' mutual union activities.

Altogether, she worked at Kay's for four and a half years, until, in 1953, she moved to Monrovia, California, to live with her sister Rose, brother-in-law Arthur, and family; her brother Joe and his wife Dora and daughter Sandy lived down the street. She worked for Sears on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena and later in the technical library of Aerojet General Corporation in Azusa, making dear friendships at each place.

In 1956, she returned to Utica “temporarily” to nurse her mother after a surgery. While there, she was introduced to her friend Mary Caruso's brother Phil, and a few months later they were talking marriage. On June 1, 1957, at Saint Agnes Church, they married, a loving relationship which brought forth three sons: Joseph, Philip, and David. Theirs was a faith-filled home, starting out on Kemble Street and advancing to the DiLeo family homestead on Blandina Street when her parents moved to California. They were parishioners of Saint Agnes Church—the foundation of their lives together—and the children were students of Saint Agnes Grammar School.

When Bernice and her family bought and moved into the DiLeo Blandina Street homestead, the downstairs neighbor, Giovannina (“Jennie”), became like a foster mother to Bernice and a grandmother to the boys.

Bernice and her family enjoyed getting together with their large extended family and did so often. Phil was nine and a half years Bernice's senior and the eldest of six children, while Bernice was the youngest of six. Christmas Eve was usually spent with the Carusos, and Christmas Day usually—but not always—spent with Bernice's side of the family. As the Caruso cousins married and started families of their own, David and Tricia welcome us into

their home for Christmas Eve, where we enjoyed the company of the Colaccios.

1973 brought a move to Armory Drive and the resumption of a work life outside the home. Phil had started the Mohawk Valley Federal Credit Union for New York State Employees, and Bernice became its first employee. She was beloved by credit union members and her fellow employees. She also enjoyed supporting and accompanying her husband in his volunteer pursuits with the Credit Union and the CSEA and PEF unions. Additionally, she was an involved parent volunteer at Saint Agnes Church and school.

Armory Drive brought to life a whole new world for the young family, including new neighbors who became friends: the DeTraglias and the Haddads, DiPietro, Ciccholellas, and Roefaros, and later the Contentos and the Sturrs – and I would be remiss if I didn't mention our wonderful dog, Trixie. Mom often noted that when we moved there, we were among the few young people on the block, and 52 years later, she was the oldest!

Monrovia and her sister Rose's family home, to which her parents moved after retirement, remained an integral part of the lives of Bernice and her young family, who traveled to Monrovia every couple of years—first by train (a three-day trip!), then by car, and later by airplane. Eventually, her niece Patti Ann (Haddix) Martin and family moved to California, as did Patti's parents, Jane and Jim.

In 1988, Bernice's world was rocked by the passing of her beloved husband, Phil. Her devotion to her sons was the encouragement she needed to soldier on, and she did so with her signature grace, stoking the fires of home for the benefit of her family. The family grew with the marriages of Philip and David and the birth of her three grandchildren: Sonny, Gio, and Sophia.

Those childhood friendships prevailed, with her girlfriends' husbands and children becoming part of each other's extended family, sharing dinners and summer nights out for a Hanna Park concert or ice cream, and attending Saturday night Mass together.

For years, Bernice visited her family in California as often as possible. She was often sought out by her extended family members and others for her counsel and compassion. You could be sure that if you took her into your confidence, she kept it and carried it with her to the end.

After retirement, she underwent back surgery in 1997 and had to deal with additional ailments that followed. Still, she delighted in making Sunday dinners for her grandchildren, who especially loved her meatballs and signature Italian lemon cookies.

Bernice was courageous in her pursuit of therapy to combat her growing mobility impairment, seeking out water exercise therapy at a variety of outlets—a stretch for a person who was not a swimmer! She also enjoyed Shelly Nunno-Evans' STEP program at the Parkway Senior Center, a program of the physical therapy department at Utica University. She sought assistance from the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) for her significant vision impairment.

With advanced age came more ailments and increased dependency on others, including the addition of home health aides who became like family: Jackie, Michele, Cheryl, Jean, and Jordan. She acknowledged the increasing need, often using the adage, "It takes a village..." embracing the change rather than shrinking from it.

Bernice revived her interest in the game Rummicub, which she used to play in California. She became evangelistic about the game, introducing more and

more people to it, even inspiring a Rummicub group that met weekly at the Parkway Senior Center. She recruited her children's friends to come to the house to play the game with her, which they did—often late into the evening—and enjoyed, even though she usually won despite her visual impairment, giving credence to the meaning of her name (in Greek): “Bringer of Victory.”

Bernice was fond of saying that she was “getting younger,” and this was borne out by her ever-increasing curiosity about the world around her, including her interest in the news and popular culture. She rarely missed the local and national evening news and loved the musical reality shows *The Voice* and *America's Got Talent*, with an uncanny ability to pick the winner, even those performing music from another generation. She was also their best cheerleader, overjoyed to celebrate their fine performances.

Bernice often said, “Whatever you do, don't take away my phone.” She was on a first-name basis with her friend “Alexa,” regularly seeking out her knowledge on the weather and a variety of other subjects, and using her to make “phone calls” because, well, she remembered your number—a lost skill in this day and age. She especially cherished many a regular call with her nieces, nephews, and Goddaughters, Nina and Christine. But most especially, Alexa put her on the line with Frank Sinatra by simply saying, “Alexa, play Siriusly Sinatra on Sirius XM.” And she did. Every day. Almost all day.

Sometimes, it really was all fun and games. As soon as she moved to her recliner chair, she would pull out her Kindle to play Solitaire, always attempting to beat her previous time—another opportunity to keep the mind sharp!

Bernice loved her home, a place where hospitality was its hallmark and all were welcome. One of Mom and Dad's first purchases for the new house was

a pool table for the basement family room, thinking it would encourage their children's friends to gather there – and it worked! She loved that the home was adaptable to someone like herself with physical impairments, increasing the likelihood that she could continue to live there. She also especially enjoyed “Wanda Wednesdays,” when her friend and hairdresser came to the house to keep Bernice looking her best.

In short, Bernice loved her life and the people in it—likely because of the people in it—despite the physical difficulties of everyday life. She saw these difficulties as a trade-off, accepting them if she could only keep her mind—and she did! Till the end. She won.

She would want me to thank you for being a friend—to the end—that was the best thing! And she would want to leave you with her favorite inspirational saying, often recited and prominently displayed on her favorite coffee cup:

“One day at a time –
Don't look back and feel sorry about the past,
For it is gone;
Don't worry about the future,
For it has not yet come.
Live in the present,
And make life beautiful.”

Bernice was the last living member of her generation on both the Caruso and DiLeo sides. She was preceded in death by her husband, Philip; her parents, Senatro and Filomena DiLeo; her parents-in-law, Joseph and Lucy Caruso; her brother, Joe DiLeo, and his wife, Theodora; four sisters and their husbands: Catherine and Patsy Marino, Nell and Nicholas Arokhaty, Jane and U.S. (“Jim”) Haddix, and Rosemary and Arthur Battaglia; her in-laws, Harold and Rita Caruso, Mario and Louise Caruso, Mary and Joe Gentile, and Sylvia and Joe Guarini; and three nieces: Donna (Arokhaty) Kierzstyn, Rosemary

(Battaglia) Gabeldon, and Vinny and Marilyn Marino.

She is survived by her sons, Joseph, Philip and Darlene Torchia, and David, and daughter-in-law Tricia; three grandchildren and their spouses: Philip “Sonny” and Samantha, Giovanni, and Sophia and Quentin; 27 nieces and nephews; 48 great-nieces and nephews; 34 great-great-nieces and nephews; and a legion of friends of all ages.

The family wishes to extend their gratitude to Jackie Panetta, Michele Sbiroli, Cheryl Moehringer, Jean LaMarche, and Jordan LaMarche for their compassionate care for nearly a decade, building a relationship with the entire family.

Visitation will be held on Monday, December 8, 2025, from 4:00-7:00 p.m. at the Eannace Funeral Home, Inc., 932 South St., corner of Hammond Ave. Those unable to attend may be present virtually at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85418703770>. Memorial contributions in Bernice’s honor may be made to Green Utica online at <https://www.greenutica.org/ways-to-give/donate/>, or to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital online at <https://www.stjude.org/donate/donate-to-st-jude.html>; envelopes will also be available at the funeral home. Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend Bernice’s Mass of Christian Burial and Celebration of Life, which will commence on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., at St. Mary of Mt. Carmel/Blessed Sacrament Parish, 648 Jay St. Those unable to attend may be present virtually at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88999176365>. Interment will follow in Calvary Cemetery.

This tribute of Bernice’s life was lovingly written by her family.

Cemetery Details

Calvary Cemetery

2407 Oneida Street
Utica, NY

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 8. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Eannace Funeral Home, Inc.
932 South Street
corner of Hammond Ave.
Utica, NY 13501
(315) 724-6714
eannacefh@roadrunner.com

Funeral Service

DEC 9. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary of Mt. Carmel/Blessed Sacrament Parish
648 Jay Street
Utica, NY 13501
(315) 735-1482
<https://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com/>

Tribute Wall

RB

“ Joe, Phil, and David, We were so very sorry to hear of your mom's passing. She was such a kind and gentle spirit. Our deepest condolences. Ray Chanatry & Doug Brown

Ray Chanatry Doug Brown - January 11 at 02:50 PM

SN

“ 1 file added to the album Tribute Wall



Shelly Nunno-Evans - December 08, 2025 at 03:43 PM

TL

“ The Brothers of TKE Lambda Lambda planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.

The Brothers of TKE Lambda Lambda - December 08, 2025 at 09:44 AM

TL

“ The Brothers of TKE Lambda Lambda purchased the Strength & Solace Spray for the family of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.



The Brothers of TKE Lambda Lambda - December 08, 2025 at 09:44 AM

RA

“ Robert A. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.

Robert A. - December 08, 2025 at 08:16 AM

MB

“ Mary Murray and Frederick Bauer planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.

Mary Murray and Frederick Bauer - December 08, 2025 at 08:07 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.



December 08, 2025 at 08:07 AM

FC

“ My sincerest condolences to the Caruso family. May Bernice rest in God's eternal peace.

Frank Calaprince - December 07, 2025 at 03:34 PM

MD

“ Bernice was a warm, caring and gentle woman. I was pleased to know her as an "almost neighbor". She leaves a loving legacy for her family to treasure.

MBDonnelly

Mary Beth Donnelly - December 06, 2025 at 12:03 PM

ST

“ Scott Thomson planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.

Scott Thomson - December 06, 2025 at 10:37 AM



“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.



December 06, 2025 at 10:37 AM

LR

“ Lucille, Paul, Michelle and Richard planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.

Lucille, Paul, Michelle and Richard - December 05, 2025 at 10:19 PM



“ Lavender Reflections Spray was purchased for the family of Bernice Eleanor (DiLeo) Caruso.



December 05, 2025 at 10:19 PM

MS

“ Our deepest condolences on the loss of your Mom.

She was such a beautiful, kind and caring person.

Know that you are in our thoughts and prayers and may beautiful memories bring comfort to all during this difficult time.



*Love,
Marian and Mike S*

Mike and Marian Sturr - December 05, 2025 at 07:12 PM

MS

Will be dearly missed wonderful woman was blessed to have met her and family beautiful memories love Michelle sbirol

Michelle sbirol - December 06, 2025 at 09:33 AM

LD

Thank you for this wonderful obituary for your mother my grandmother grew up on blandina Street and shared similar memories what an inspiration your mother was a good long life well lived

Lauren Darman - December 09, 2025 at 10:09 PM