

Clelia Ilacqua

Selected Audio Transcript

Well, I hadn't given it much thought until last summer, when I started seeing people taking statues down and damaging them, especially in Boston. And I'm not terribly attached to it, except that my grandfather was one of the businessmen on the North Side who put their pennies together and erected the statue. They commissioned it, and then they had all the parts sent from Italy, and they put it together. So there is a little bit of a tie there. And I thought "this is ridiculous", that there's a chance that someone could knock it down. I understand that there are quite a few statues that have come down, and many of them have been vandalized. So I wrote to the mayor, because I knew he was toying with this idea of taking it down, and he had a commission that was studying the idea. And I wanted to express my opinion, because I'm a North Sider; I'm an Italian American. I have an historic interest in it, somewhat. And I thought he should know that there are some of us who are in favor of him taking the statue down for the sake of the statue. It's a beautiful statue; it shouldn't be destroyed. And there is a little bit of history and heritage there that belongs to us. And I don't want it defaced.

I think one of the reasons they attached themselves to Columbus was because he's considered to be brave. You know, he took off on his own without knowing where he was going, he was adventurous, and that took a lot of guts. I mean, that's a trait that is admired by the Italian Americans, especially these men that were the first immigrants coming here. They did the same kind of thing; they left their home, never to go back again. This was a trait that they admired. So in that regard, this is a good trait, I think.

Biography

I was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse, New York, which is on the north side, which is the Italian neighborhood. I grew up here and went to school here. I went to Syracuse University. I studied biology and speech pathology. Then I went to dental school in Buffalo. I lived in Connecticut and New Jersey. I had my own practice there for 22 years. I sold the practice and came back home. So I'm back in Syracuse, I live on the north side. I came back here in 2011. So I've been here 10 years. I practice dentistry, but I do it part time, because I'm retired. I do volunteer work at the free clinic at the St. Joseph's residency program. I go to church at Our Lady of Pompei, and I sing in the choir there.