

Max DelSignore: We are back with another edition of the Northern New York Community podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. You've made a great choice in listening to this upcoming conversation, we have with Nancy Del Borgo. A North Country native, Nancy's life has threaded through many forums, local and global, from healthcare to the arts, she's played a vital role in every institution and organization she's been involved with. We'll explore Nancy's childhood and her early career aspirations. She will share her love for music and the time in meeting her husband, Elliot. We'll also reflect on the meaning of philanthropy and how it's impacted her and her family. Nancy, I'm glad that we have you on the podcast. Thanks for coming on.

Nancy Del Borgo: I'm happy to be here, Max. Thanks very much.

Max DelSignore: Let's start at the beginning with you parents, your mom and dad. Your father was a doctor, Dr. Lawrence Withington, your mother, Alice, was a science teacher, both of them well respected and well known in this community. What do you remember most about your parents as a child?

Nancy Del Borgo: Things I heard about them from other people, dad's patience, my mother's friends among the teaching community. We seem to have two really close sets of friends, those in medicine and those in education. I remember the stories from relatives, even a professor of chemistry at Potsdam, who said that during a certain period of time if you were a kid in Watertown and you learned to swim, either my father or my mother taught you how to swim up at the Thompson Park Pool. That's where the romance started.

Max DelSignore: It was at the pool, huh?

Nancy Del Borgo: Yes, it was at the pool.

Max DelSignore: What were your career interests in high school? As you said, your father was certainly a doctor, a very well-known physician here, mom being an educator, but as you were growing up and as you entered high school, what were you thinking of pursuing?

Nancy Del Borgo: Very definitely medicine. But in those days, it was a little unusual for a gal to go into medicine and to make a goal of it. I liked music as well so I decided to go in the music route. I haven't regretted that, I love music and it has provided a wonderful professional life for my husband and me, and I'm still running our little company, but medicine is my real love. I did get back into it briefly when we moved to Cape Vincent because there was a picture of the ambulance that appeared in a Thousand Island Sun, and it said that unless we got more volunteers, that would be the last ambulance they'd ever see. I talked it over with Elliot and I said, "You know, I think I could do that," so I volunteered to go to EMT school, and wound up putting in nine years until we pulled up stakes and moved to Florida for the winters. That's when I had to step down, but it was a

wonderful experience and it was a way of giving back to the community that I had never anticipated.

Four years after I started, Elliot decided, "Well, I work at home, I could drive the ambulance." He volunteered to drive, and for one year we were pretty much it. That was a tough year, but he often told me that it was the most satisfying thing he'd ever done in his life.

Max DelSignore: Why is that?

Nancy Del Borgo: Because he felt as though he was really, really helping people. It's an indescribable feeling when you have someone actually die in your arms as he did. It's also a wonderful feeling when you can say that this is a volunteer service and you're not going to be billed. I think that's a tenuous situation right now, but back when we were doing it, that's the way it was. We were the ones that showed up at 2:30 in the morning.

I don't think other than a few people in our village really knew what he did for a living. He was the ambulance driver as far as they were concerned who would show up, among others of course. The ambulance squad still exists. In fact, I have to go to a meeting tonight.

Max DelSignore: I feel like some of that education and knowledge of medicine, which you learned from your father, really carried over pretty well when you were a volunteer for the EMT.

Nancy Del Borgo: It did and I wish I could do it now. I've been asked but I'm a little long of tooth, I think. I would have to start all over again. Now I've moved on to other interests, I'm a senior warden at St. John's Episcopal Church in Cape Vincent, and I really enjoy doing that. I have another year in that term, and that's a full-time volunteer job. We're searching for a priest right now, that adds to the burden, and so I don't want to take on anything else. But health and church are the two that I'm most interested in and that's where I put my time, talent, and treasure.

Max DelSignore: Some of that talent really began as a child when you were able to go on house calls with your dad. I know you shared a few stories off the record about that, but could you share, as part of this conversation, just some of those memories on going some of those visits with your father?

Nancy Del Borgo: I used to love to go on house calls with dad. He would do some in the morning before rounds at the hospitals, there were two then, and then he'd go into the office for afternoon office hours and then he'd do more house calls before dinner, and then if he hadn't finished, he'd go out after dinner. I loved the after-dinner part. I saw a lot of kitchen table surgery. He had to carry everything that he thought he might need even then, as a general practitioner, he did a little surgery. He did a lot of things that internists now don't do. It's not necessary. But the people were so wonderful. I love the North Country. I love the people

who live here. My family's been here for many generations and it's home. I don't feel that comfortable anywhere else. I've been very fortunate to have been some beautiful places, but this is home.

Max DelSignore: You pursued a career path in music, and you mentioned that love for music as you were in high school, what inspired that affinity and love for the arts?

Nancy Del Borgo: A couple of teachers I had, I suppose. I studied piano with the Sisters of St. Joseph for 12 years and I was in the band. There was no orchestra at Watertown High School. I did sing in the chorus my senior year. Charlie Brewmaster said on my application to college that I had a small, average voice. He was absolutely right about that. I think he was being very generous frankly, but they let me in anyway. I did go to first Manhattanville College down near New York and then I transferred up to Crane and finished out up there and taught for three years following my Master's Degree and then got married and had a family and just stayed.

Max DelSignore: Can you talk a little bit about meeting Elliot, too? Because around that time is when you first met. What was that meeting like?

Nancy Del Borgo: I had transferred to Crane in February of 1965. He was asked to come in to fill in for a trumpet teacher who had gone on sabbatical in the spring of 1966. At the first meeting of Crane Chorus and Orchestra of the semester, they introduced the new faculty, and Dr. Hosmer introduced Elliot Del Borgo. I turned around to see who he was and he stood up and I wound up in his band sitting next to last chair because I was undergoing a change in embouchure, everything. I sat next to a piano major, which is very humbling as a clarinet major to sit next to a piano major in a band, but that's about the quality of my play.

I remember being impressed in rehearsal when he started Elsa's processional to the Cathedral, Wagner, 34 times in one rehearsal. I kept thinking every time he'd stop us and start us again, and I'd say, "We can't do this any better. This is it. This is all we can do up." Well, he'd stop and start again, and darned if we didn't do it better. At the end of that I thought, "Wow, this guy knows what he's doing." That was my introduction to Maestro Elliott Del Borgo.

Max DelSignore: As you mentioned before about being volunteers as EMTs in Cape Vincent, not many folks knew what an accomplished musician and composer he was-

Nancy Del Borgo: They still don't know.

Max DelSignore: Tell me just a little bit about Elliot's accomplishments-

Nancy Del Borgo: Profit without honor in all of that. When we first moved to Cape Vincent in September of 1994, people there were very nice and they invited us to cocktail parties just to get to meet us and I went to the first three or four of them alone, well, that started the gossip going because "Is she married? Is he really

somebody? Where is he?" I know that's what they were talking about, but he was on the road. They just happened that way. He did a great deal of work outside of the North Country.

His forte was educational music that he wrote for use in schools at all levels. What he did, I think that was not only unusual, I think it may have been unique in that he was able to write the kind of music that the kids could handle and yet still sound good, so that the audience would enjoy listening to it because it was played well. It was written well and scored well so that the balance was right and the kids weren't scared. It wasn't beyond their ability to play. A lot of directors, music directors, a lot of them succumb to the temptation to play music, which is a little bit beyond what they know the kids can do, and the reason for that is there's a certain cachet in playing level 4.5 or 5, or Lord help us in high school was 6, and sometimes they attempt that and the results are not good. They would do much better to play easier music that is well written and the kids can play and they can still come home with a trophy.

Max DelSignore: You both were steeped in that music education for many years and worked with students, how fulfilling was it to help build so many aspiring musicians, even if there were high school students just in the band?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, for him, it was everything. It was his life. As a matter of fact, I got a call last night from one of his former students who ultimately went to Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, which is the place to go in the United States if you want to perform. They give certificates and they let you out when they say you're ready to graduate.

Mitch is now retired from teaching in California and he called last night just to chat, he was a kid who describes himself as just kicking around and he was in Elliot's junior high band in Philadelphia, and he looked at ... The look on Elliot's face and his eyes when he was conducting and he said, "Wow. This fellow really is ... He's in another world when he's doing this. This is his passion. There must be something to this music thing." So he started practicing 14 hours a day and wound up at Curtis and then took jobs with symphonies in Hong Kong and Singapore and then came back to the states to teach.

Max DelSignore: Wow. Let me give you a couple of quick fire questions, are you ready?

Nancy Del Borgo: Sure.

Max DelSignore: Promise they're easy.

Nancy Del Borgo: I have three easy answers.

Max DelSignore: Okay, let's do this. What is your favorite piece that Elliot composed?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, I have to say ... You asked me this one before and I should have the answer on the tip of my tongue. I'll say Irish Rhapsody, and the reason I say Irish Rhapsody is that I am part Irish, not as much as I thought I was but I am part Irish, and it's a band piece that was built on three Irish tunes. Please don't ask me to name them, but they're well-known. It has a different feel to it than the usual Del Borgo music, which is very heavy on percussion, very heavy on brass and generally has a fugue hidden ... Well, not hidden, but it's in there somewhere. That's the Del Borgo stamp, and this is totally different. It's very lush, it's very Romantic and it's a treatment of the folk tunes that just speaks to me and I think it sells well so I think it must speak to audiences as well. That'll be my favorite.

Max DelSignore: Which of his works do you listen to the most today?

Nancy Del Borgo: The last one that was published. He's got one coming out right now that's an arrangement of a tune by Mosie Lister called "Goodbye World, Goodbye" and it's an up-tempo, toe-tapper that he arranged. I found the score in the cellar among his music, and that has just been published by MSB Publishing in Pennsylvania.

Max DelSignore: You've traveled the world, you've seen many performances, if you could pick your favorite venue for a performance where would it be?

Nancy Del Borgo: I think either Lincoln Center or, well, strangely enough, Hosmer Concert Hall up at Potsdam. Beautiful Hall. The acoustics are excellent there. Wasn't ready for that one?

Max DelSignore: No, that was different than what we talked about before. Do you-

Nancy Del Borgo: If I could remember where we were in Washington when he did the ... He did a commemoration overture for the 50th anniversary of the Navy band, and we flew down for it. I talked him into it because my family are mostly Navy people and I thought, "Oh, I really want to hear this." Plus, I used to proofread all his music, so I had proofread this piece and got invested in it a little bit.

We got invited to go, and we did, and it was ... I just remembered where it was, it was at Kennedy Center, and we were sitting down in the orchestra section, main section, and I remember looking up along the sides and seeing, when they stood up at the end to applaud, all these uniforms with lots of ... I was very impressed. That was great fun.

Max DelSignore: Do you enjoy any of today's genre of music. If so, who are you listening to?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, I can turn that back at you and say define today's genre, but I think I know what you're talking about so I won't put you on the spot. No, I don't enjoy ... What I enjoy that is popular right now is bluegrass. I like bluegrass. Bluegrass is genuine folk music of the United States. It and jazz are really the only two music

genres that are truly American, unless you get to Native American music, which also is very interesting because it has a lot percussion in it, but much of what is played today is not what I would call music. It's not well written, it requires no skill and it has no really good message. I'm sorry to have to say that. I guess I'm music snob.

Max DelSignore: No, it's not, it's perspective based on what you hear. Now, you've been really instrumental in carrying on all this music, he passed away four years ago, but as you mentioned earlier in the conversation, you still are able to share some of his music, either for folks looking to buy an accompaniment or whatever the case may be. Can you talk a little bit about the business?

Nancy Del Borgo: That is really a sidelight right now. I do it as I can, but I did get into some of his music that was stored in Cape Vincent. I found that there were some scores that had not seen the light of day anywhere and I thought, "Well, this is something I can do. I can see that his music lives on and I will get all of these pieces out in front of the public one way or another." So I started the project four years ago, it was a project that we had already been working on together but now I had to take it over myself and decide which ones had been published, and this was just the pencil score, and which ones had never gone to a publisher at all. Once I sorted through that, then I started sending them around and you have to decide who publishes what kind. You don't go to an ensemble or a chamber music publisher with a band piece, for instance.

I have one now that is ready to go to a band publisher, and it was the score for the closing ceremonies, just the closing ceremonies, of the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid. It's for chorus and orchestra. There isn't a lot of market for that, but it's a beautiful piece. You can still here it on YouTube, some of it so I'm going to send that probably to ... Well, some of the larger publishers that I know of that he's worked with. He had several that he worked with, but that's an ongoing project.

The hurdle that I had to get over personally was to get it from the pencil score into an electronic format because that's what everybody wants now, and that requires knowledge of the language such as finale, which is what Elliott worked in. The three manuals for that are about like this, each one of them. No way, I have other things to do in life. So I found a student through a business of music class in Potsdam where a friend of mine taught that class, and she just had me come up, she's now retired, but she used to have me come up once a semester and talk to her class about what I do and, as it happened I managed to get some interns out of those classes who knew how to do what I needed to have done.

Max DelSignore: Perfect.

Nancy Del Borgo: Perfect, because that was the one thing that I wasn't willing to attempt, and so I hired them as interns. I had to do reports on them, how their work ethic was and all that stuff, that was fun.

Max DelSignore: Continuing the education.

Nancy Del Borgo: Yeah. We're at a hiatus right now because it's the summertime and they're all home, but I'm getting the works in electronic form so I can send them out and, yes, Where Dreams Are Dreamed from the Olympics is one of them. It's done.

Max DelSignore: Very cool.

Nancy Del Borgo: Yeah. I'm excited about that. I'll probably send it to Warner Bros. We'll try that.

Max DelSignore: You and Elliot have given so much, not just through music and the arts, but as you mentioned before, the community at large. It was very important for you to give back wherever you lived.[inaudible 00:21:44] most of the music and the arts, how did that experience, educating, mentorship, how did that impact your personal philanthropy and those values that you each possessed?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, I can't say it did while we lived in Potsdam. We were busy living our lives, bringing up our two daughters and I went back to work in 1985 for the college, and I was part of the advancement division of the college so I got to see how fundraising is done, meet some people who did it for a living and some of the donors who gave to the college, and I thought, "Wow, that's a nice thing to do." I think that's where that started, but neither of us was really impacted until we were helping people who had health problems in Cape Vincent. That was such a rewarding experience. It didn't matter who they were or who we were, they needed our help, we were there to give it. I got a Christmas card from one man who thanked us, he was fortunate in his case, and he wrote back a Christmas card that said, "You and Elliot were the first two people in about 15 who made it possible for my wife and me to spend Christmas with our children in Texas." He had its known as a AAA, an aortic abdominal aneurysm, say that fast three times, and we beat feet between Cape Vincent and Watertown. He was airlifted to Strong Memorial and he survived, but he had a very small chance of survival. That gave me the warmest feeling, and Elliot, he glowed when he read that card. That was wonderful.

Max DelSignore: You once told me that love inspires you to give.

Nancy Del Borgo: Yes.

Max DelSignore: Can you explain that a little bit?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, it's at the heart of who we are. I have discovered that, particularly since Elliott died because now with our children on their own and as a widow, I get to determine what it is that I do and how I do it, with whom and when. That's quite an opportunity, and it's the way I choose to look at the situation that I am in. I got involved with the church because my family is in New England. I found a community, family, not just gathering but we love each other as sisters and brothers in that community. Our new Junior warden says, "You're my sister by a

different mother." So we call each other sis. I really mean that, she's not my blood relative, but other than that she is very much my sister, and I treasure that.

We had a rector with whom many of us are still very, very good friends, and he instilled in so many people in Clayton and Cape Vincent and in the North country, the love that we should have for each other and how we can express that through doing things for each other and living the golden rule, really. That's where it really began to hit home for me. I found the ability to overcome some of the difficulties of a new widow.

I recall one instance, I was going home from Clayton after a brief group meeting that he instituted with me and another, a parishioner from Clayton who is now a dear friend of mine, and the group would meet monthly. About 24, 30 people, men, women, all faiths, all economic strata. I was going home one night, beautiful night in October, and I turned on the radio to listen to NPR, I guess it was, and I heard Beethoven, one of the symphonies, I don't remember which one, and flashed picture of Elliott standing on the podium as I had seen him so many times over the years in rehearsals and school auditoriums from here to wherever across the country, and I reached for the radio to turn it off because it felt painful. Then I thought, "No, Nancy, this is Beethoven. You never turn off Beethoven." So I drew my hand back and I look at it from a different viewpoint, and I watched in my mind Elliott conducting a symphony orchestra in that particular piece and instead of it being painful, suddenly it was a gift that he was giving to me. I sat up and I noted that, went home and texted the Pastor and I said, "This is what happened to me on my way home," and he said, "I think you're really onto something." That's where the word love comes in.

I don't do what I do, small as it is, and I don't have the means to do all I would love to do, I'm not Bill Gates or Warren buffet, but what small things I can do, give me great satisfaction because of what I see in the faces of people who enjoy or receive what it is that I do. I think you would find that from anybody.

Max DelSignore: The demographics, as you know, a little bit of the country are changing quickly, and it's the same here locally as well, things are changing fast, future generations are going to give in a different fashion, in all likelihood, than your generation has and has done very well, how do we prepare that next generation for the importance of philanthropy in communities where they live?

Nancy Del Borgo: That question has been on my mind for some time. It's not an easy question to answer. It's not easy because of the culture that we're in at the moment, which many of us are not happy with, and it doesn't foster the doing good that you'd like to see, not as much as it should, so it's a harder task. It's an uphill task. I think the best thing is by example, but most people who do give of their time and talent and, especially treasure, prefer to remain in the background, so young people don't necessarily hear from people that do that. I am encouraged however, because there are so many stories that are exceptions to that, and that's where I think we have to start.

As a matter of fact, I wrote to General Electric the other day, I just couldn't help myself, they have an ad on television that I will not turn off. It is among the best I have ever seen. It's especially good for girls and women, but it's good for everybody. It applies to everyone. It features Millie Dresselhaus' house, who won the first national science award, she was a physicist, she died in February but they must have had this one in the can for a while, and the ad is just wonderful in terms of having each person sit up tall, without saying anything at all, say this is who I am and this is what I can do, and it's a good thing. You don't hear her say a word, but the message is as clear as a bell, particularly when she poses for a photograph for the front of a magazine called Inside. That look of confidence and of love and of giving and of making the world a better place is unmistakable. Talk about body language. Of finally I said, "I've got to let them know that they really hit a home run with this one." So I wrote to them, and they responded, and I was very pleased.

Max DelSignore: When you reflect back, the Withington family, Del Borgo's, both of your families together have done so much for this community, North country as a whole. how do you hope both of your families will be remembered long after your generation is gone?

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, Elliott's former student and I were talking about that last night because there is a Facebook page for Elliott for those who knew him to contribute. I have put a couple things up there. I need to put more up. He can't understand why more people don't do that. Well, he's an unusual fellow, Mitch is. Elliott was his guru. Elliott will be remembered ... Well, he's still publishing. He has over 700 published works now at last count, and schools will be playing his music because of the quality of it, not because they remember him, but simply because it's good music, very playable and goes over well with audiences. He doesn't have anything to worry about being remembered and I don't worry about being remembered at all, frankly. I would just assume, do what I do and let the chips fall where they may. I don't need to make a statement, I don't want to leave my name on a building or anything like that even if I were able to do that it wouldn't appeal to me. I have one family whose name is on a school building, and that's enough, one family member. Being remembered is ... I just hope my family remembers me, those whom I love and know. I don't want to be flashy. I like being in the wings. I'm a little shy maybe.

Max DelSignore: You've worked pretty well in the wings, Nancy, I must say. Well, you've said to me before in previous conversations that if it came to you, you would hope that the message would possibly be that she tried and she hoped.

Nancy Del Borgo: She tried and she hoped, yes. That's about all anybody can do is try and hope. Well, teachers are lucky in some ways and so are medical people because sometimes you do see the result of your work, sometimes, and it's very gratifying. Teachers less so because you get the turn over and they graduate and they go on and they live their lives and they may be anywhere, but Elliott would hear from former students and some of them would come back to reunion and look him up, so that's very gratifying and that's enough,

Max DelSignore: Well, you've tried a great deal for this community and it's been very well received.

Nancy Del Borgo: Well, I hope to keep trying.

Max DelSignore: Yeah. You're not done yet either.

Nancy Del Borgo: No. Well, I hope not.

Max DelSignore: No. Well, I'm glad we could have this conversation, be able to share you and your family's story on the podcast, Nancy. Again, our sincere thanks for coming on and for all that you've done for this community in the North country.

Nancy Del Borgo: Thank you. My pleasure.

Max DelSignore: As we wrap up, I want to thank our supporters of the podcast, WPBSDT and the Northern New York Community Foundation. Every interview is easily accessible and always free, whether it's online or on your mobile device. Find us on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Play or other podcast platforms when you search for the Northern New York Community podcast. Check out our podcast website, which also features interview highlights, transcripts, photo galleries, and much more. Just go to www.nnycpodcast.com. Thanks again for tuning into our interview with Nancy Del Borgo. This has been the Northern New York Community podcast.