



Vito Mario Martino

June 21, 1941 - November 13, 2025

Vito Mario Martino, 84, a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, educator, and proud Sicilian American, passed away peacefully in his Mooresville, North Carolina home on November 13, 2025, surrounded by the family he cherished above all else.

Born on June 21, 1941, in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily, Vito was shaped early by the resilience of post war life and the strength of his mother, Leonarda, whose determination brought her six children to America one by one. His childhood in Sicily was modest but rich in independence, family, and the closeness of siblings who learned to rely on one another. He often spoke of running barefoot through vineyards, racing his brothers and sister, gathering figs, prickly pears, and grapes straight from the vines, and savoring fresh fish and seafood from the coast when they could get it. There were broomsticks to sell, small chores to take on, and dreams to imagine, an early lesson in making your way in the world with resourcefulness and grit. When he boarded the ship to the United States at nine years old, he wore his very first pair of shoes.

In 1950, Vito arrived in Brooklyn, NY, not yet speaking a word of English. Like many immigrants of his generation, he arrived not yet understanding the power that education would one day hold in his life. That truth revealed itself slowly, through the patience of a few encouraging teachers who recognized his potential and through his early successes in mathematics. His perfect

score on the New York State Math Regents exam became a defining milestone, not only a personal triumph, but a turning point that showed him the transformative force of education. It was a realization that shaped the rest of his life.

Vito often spoke of the extraordinary woman who, seeing his mother's exhaustion and tears, lent Leonarda the money she needed to bring her children to America more quickly. That act of generosity imprinted something permanent in him. From that moment forward, "paying it forward" became a quiet but unshakable philosophy he lived by, one that influenced his career, his parenting, and his everyday kindness toward others.

Growing up in Bushwick with his siblings, Sal (Antonia), Charlie (Tina), Vincenza (Anthony), Joseph (Francesca), and Tony (Carmella), Vito navigated the challenges of a new language, a new country, and a new life. He embraced every opportunity, eventually becoming the first in his family to graduate college, earning a BS from Polytechnic Institute of NYU, and an MA from Hofstra University.

His education opened the path to the work he loved most, teaching, mentoring, and leading. Vito began his career as a math teacher, moved into school leadership, and ultimately served 16 years as the Middle School Principal of I.S. 53 in Far Rockaway, Queens. Colleagues remember him as a steady, fair, and creative leader, someone who believed deeply in the potential of every student. He encouraged young educators, led with integrity, and inspired students to recognize their own strengths. His creativity extended even into schoolwide initiatives, he once organized what became the largest Monopoly game ever attempted, aiming for a Guinness World Record.

In 1964, Vito married the love of his life, Eileen (Frawley). The two first met at a college dance, an Italian and Irish love story that began with a spark and

never dimmed. After that night, they began "seeing each other from opposite ends of Brooklyn", Bushwick and Flatbush, which, as any New Yorker will insist, might as well be long distance. But the miles didn't matter, what bound them was deeper. They shared the same values, a profound love of family, an unwavering work ethic, deep respect for their parents and upbringing, an instinctive generosity toward others, and a shared determination to build a life united in purpose. Together, they set out to create a future filled with opportunity, stability, and success for themselves and the family they hoped for, and ultimately, the family they built with pride and devotion.

Together, Vito and Eileen raised three children, James (Nieves), Cathie, and Lisa (Jorge), with love, structure, and the belief that family should always be one another's greatest source of strength. Vito was immensely proud of his grandchildren, Ariana (Jay), Blake, Amity, Danilo, and Tiago, and spoke of their accomplishments with the same joy and wonder he felt watching his own children grow. He savored family gatherings, long conversations, and time spent sharing stories of Sicily, Brooklyn, and his path through education.

Vito delighted in the foods and traditions of his homeland, figs, prickly pears, grapes, fresh fish and seafood, olive oil, and Sicilian cookies and pastries, and passed them on with pride, ensuring his family understood the journey that brought them here. He and Eileen made homes in Brooklyn, Rockville Centre, Mount Sinai, Palm Beach Gardens, and finally Mooresville, NC. No matter where he lived, his Sicilian roots remained central, and he built community and connection wherever he went.

Vito's personality was expansive and unmistakable. He was a natural problem solver, offering thoughtful advice because he genuinely wanted to help others find their way. His stories were numerous, rooted in memory, experience, and the pride he felt in the life he built, and people often called him a "character",

not for jokes or exaggeration, but because his presence was strong, memorable, and deeply felt. When Vito entered a room, his warmth, his voice, and the depth of his love for family created an atmosphere of connection. He carried himself with purpose and sincerity, and he left an impression on everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

Vito is survived by his beloved wife, Eileen, his children and their spouses, his grandchildren, and his brothers Joseph and Anthony. He is predeceased by his parents, Leonarda and Gioacchino, and by his siblings Sal, Charlie, and Vincenza.

A memorial scholarship fund has been established in his honor to support immigrant students pursuing a career in education, an enduring way to "pay it forward", just as Vito believed in doing throughout his life. This scholarship reflects the generosity shown to his own family and the gratitude he carried for the opportunities that education opened up for him as a Sicilian immigrant in Brooklyn. Contributions may also be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a cause he held close to his heart.

The family extends its deepest gratitude to Kimberlee for her tender care, companionship, and compassion during Vito's final months.

Services will be held at Cavin Cook Funeral Home, Mooresville, NC on Monday, November 17, followed by services at Park Funeral Home, in Garden City, New York on Saturday, November 22, with entombment at Holy Rood Cemetery in Westbury, NY.

Vito leaves behind a legacy of perseverance, generosity, and love, rooted in the remarkable journey of a boy from Sicily who became a leader, a source of strength for his family, and the heart of his home.

"In my Father's house are many rooms; I go to prepare a place for you." John
14:2

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to <https://bold.org/funds/vito-martino-memorial-scholarship-fund/>

Cavin-Cook Funeral Home & Crematory, Mooresville, is serving the Martino family. Condolences may be made to the family at www.cavin-cook.com.

Cemetery Details

Holy Rood Cemetery

Westbury, NY 11590

Previous Events

Receiving Friends

NOV 17. 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Cavin-Cook Funeral Home
494 E. Plaza Drive
 Mooresville, NC 28115

Funeral Service

NOV 17. 6:00 PM - 6:45 PM (ET)

Cavin-Cook Chapel
494 E. Plaza Drive
 Mooresville, NC 28115

Tribute Wall

NP

“*Jamie, Nieves and family, please accept my most sincere condolences. Vito asked me if I knew Bank of America's founder was Italian. As the son of an Italian immigrant who also became a teacher, his stories were familiar. May he rest in peace. Nicholas Procopio*

Nicholas Procopio - December 22, 2025 at 07:41 PM

JP

“*Dear Eileen and family,we are so sorry to hear of Vito's passing.we remember him as a very personable,friendly,giving big as life man and were always comfortable in his company.i know he will be missed by everyone.our thoughts and prayers are with you.Joan & Tony Petruzzelli*

Joan Petruzzelli - November 25, 2025 at 06:38 PM

AC

“*Dear Lisa, Laura and I send you and your dear family our sincere condolences for the passing of your beloved father. You are the best neighbors and friends that Ariane, Dan and the kids could have ever had and we thank God for that. We hope and pray for your consolation. Sincerely, Laura and Antonio Ortiz Cobos.*

Antonio Emilio Ortiz Cobos - November 22, 2025 at 05:09 PM