

# Race directors turn tragedy into triumph with Lake Como 5K

LAKE COMO 5K RACE DIRECTORS ELIZABETH MAGGIO & JERRY FRAZEE

BY KAITLYN KANZLER  
THE COAST STAR

Not everyone can turn a terrible tragedy into something that inspires and helps others. But Elizabeth "Liz" Maggio, of Lake Como, and Jerry Frazee, of Manasquan, have done just that. They have turned what used to be a typical road race into something much more: they make sure to keep the memory of Liz Maggio's sister, the late Gránia Maggio, alive by holding the Lake Como 5K in her honor.

On July 2, 2005, Gránia Maggio, a former Lake Como resident, was struck from behind and killed by a drunk driver in Saratoga Springs, New York, while walking along the road after a Dave Matthews Band concert.

For the past decade, the Lake Como 5K has been run in her memory.

#### GRÁNIA MAGGIO

According to Liz Maggio, her sister was the youngest of six children.

"She was the baby," Ms. Maggio, who was older than her sister by four years, said.

Ms. Maggio said she and her sister were close to both each other and the rest of their siblings.

"The whole group was really close," Ms. Maggio said.

Gránia Maggio had attended the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia [USP] to follow in her mother's footsteps, aiming to become a physical therapist.

Her older sister said Gránia Maggio was "a lot of fun," and she enjoyed spending time with her.

At the time of her death, Gránia Maggio worked as a physical therapist in the Rehab Department at Health South Medical Center in Toms River.

Ms. Maggio said her sister decided to move to Lake Como after driving through the town and falling in love with the shore area.

She also enjoyed traveling far and wide.

Her trips included Dublin, Ireland, to complete in an academic internship at Trinity College. Her love of

travel took her on vacations in Europe, and to several U.S. state parks.

College is when Gránia Maggio's interest in running peaked.

She returned to Dublin after graduating to compete twice in the Dublin Marathon.

"I don't think she ever did any marathons here," Ms. Maggio said. "She only ran them over there."

She had planned to compete in the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., prior to her death.

According to Ms. Maggio, the man who killed her sister, Alexander P. Bennett, was arrested and went to prison for Gránia Maggio's death. He pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter, first-degree vehicular manslaughter and leaving the scene of a fatal automobile accident.

"He got off light," Mr. Frazee said, to which Ms. Maggio agreed.

#### REMEMBERING GRÁNIA

Ms. Maggio said she approached Mr. Frazee about a year after her sister was killed and told him she wanted to memorialize her sister via a race.

She said she thought a race would be a good way to best remember her sister.

"She was a member of the running club, she lived in Lake Como," Mr. Frazee said. "It was a perfect fit. It was still the Lake Como 5K, but now we have a vision of someone to dedicate it to."

Mr. Frazee said before the race was dedicated to Gránia

Maggio, it averaged around 200 to 250 runners.

It was not as popular because they did not give out prizes to the top runners in the age brackets, just the top five runners.

"A lot of people who may win in their age group aren't going to win and if a 20-year-old is going to come in third place, they're not going to get first in the 50-to-55 age range," Mr. Frazee said. "A lot of those people didn't come out. Once we started to dedicate it to someone and raised the money and paid it to the scholarship fund for [USP], we actually doubled our numbers."

The annual run now sees a large number of participants each year.

"It's picked the numbers up," Mr. Frazee said. "We still get the regulars who like to have a beer after the race and a hamburger or a hot dog."

According to Mr. Frazee, because of the increase in participating runners, they are able to donate more money the Gránia Maggio Study Abroad Endowment at USP that was established in her honor.

Last year, they were able to donate \$2,500 to the scholarship fund.

The goal of the program includes preparing students for professional life by exposing them to globally diverse cultures through education and hands-on experience resulting from living in that culture.

Additionally, the race has donated \$500 to the borough's Giving Tree for the past five or six years, Mr. Frazee said.

According to Ms. Maggio, her sister would have hated all the attention being given to her because of the race.

"She would probably be so embarrassed," Liz Maggio said. "She didn't like attention. She always liked to go along and have fun, but not make too many waves — but I think she'd be very impressed."

She also believes her sister would be very happy with the efforts of everyone involved. She said her sister



RYAN MAVER/ THE COAST STAR

The late Gránia Maggio's sister, Elizabeth "Liz" Maggio [left], approached Jerry Frazee about holding the Lake Como 5K as a memorial to her sister.

would have especially enjoyed the after-party at Bar Anticipation.

Ms. Maggio said most of her family walks the race, but her mother, Dawn Maggio, always runs through the finish line.

Liz Maggio said she runs the race each year.

Mr. Frazee said there is always a large contingent from Staten Island, New York, that comes and participates.

"We must have 40 people that sign up from Staten Island," Mr. Frazee said.

"We call them the Staten Island Crew," Liz Maggio said. "It's very mysterious."

She said they have nothing to do with her sister, and believes they run for one of their friends.

"We never get the details because they're always there and then they're gone," Liz Maggio said.

But regardless of their reasons for running, they are helping keep Gránia

Maggio's memory alive by participating in the race.

Additionally, Gránia Maggio's former coworkers and people from USP come out and participate in the run, also keeping her memory alive.

"My family and I appreciate all the work that the Jersey Shore Running Club does to make this race possible, and it's a lot of fun," Liz Maggio said. "It's a good time and I think it's exactly what Gránia would like."

#### 2015 LAKE COMO 5K

The race is on Saturday, April 25.

The pre-registration fee for the 2015 Lake Como 5K is \$20 until April 14, \$23 from April 15 to April 24 and \$25 for race day.

Race day registration and check-in begins at 8:30 a.m. at Bar Anticipation.

Early t-shirt pickup will be at Bar Anticipation on Friday, April 24, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Registration includes a post-race party consisting of free barbecue, soda and drink specials at Bar Anticipation.

Awards will be given to the top five overall male/female finishers.

Mr. Frazee and Liz Maggio also thanked the race's sponsors, including Safe Harbor Financial; Health South Rehabilitation; Dynamic Engineering; Aqua Terra Environmental; Sorelle Salon and Spa; Turnstile Coffee Roasters; Matt's Automotive; Bogota Savings Bank; P.S. & S. Engineering; Dome Sheetmetal; Lynx Demolition; Advanced Physical Medicine; Bar Anticipation; JerseyRunner.com, and Electric Ian.

The course is a USA Track & Field-certified course. For more information, log on to [www.jsrc.org](http://www.jsrc.org) or email [lmaggio@yahoo.com](mailto:lmaggio@yahoo.com). Register online at [www.jerseyrunner.com](http://www.jerseyrunner.com).



The late Gránia Maggio (left, and seen right with her father, Vincent) was an avid swimmer and member of the Jersey Shore Running Club. She ran several marathons in Ireland. The photo is courtesy of Elizabeth Maggio.



COURTESY OF ELIZABETH MAGGIO