



Naida Santo

August 8, 1917 - July 26, 2017

Naida Santo of Sunizona and formerly of Florida died in Tucson July 26, 2017 at the age of 99. Naida lived a long full life just 13 days short of 100 years. What changes the little baby born on August 8, 1917 to Ukrainian immigrant parents Sophia and Elias Fiyalko would see in the world around her. But what would always remain most important to Naida, was the world of the family around her.

Born the second of five children, her parents moved from her birthplace in the steel town of Monessen, Pennsylvania to Warren, Ohio where her father continued work in the steel industry and her mother kept chickens and cows, and housed borders to add to the family's meager income. Naida lost her only sister early on, but she and her three brothers grew up wild and free on the acreage of the old farmhouse their parents rented in Warren. They would laugh as adults looking at photos of the four of them in pants with knee holes and hand me down clothes. "But we were happy" brother Leo would say. The family was active in the local Ukrainian society. Sophia's sister and Elias' brother also lived in Warren with their families, so there were cousins and aunts and uncles all speaking Ukrainian. Naida laughed telling the story to her grandchildren and great grandchildren that she failed kindergarten. School was her first exposure to English and truly they held her back to give her the chance to catch up. As an adult, she loved doing crossword puzzles, so her learning continued, but she was pretty darn proficient with language skills. Extra time in kindergarten paid off!

In 1929, her parents finally had saved enough to buy a lot and build their own home. Naida remarked how wonderful it was to have an indoor bathroom, especially in winter! But labor strikes resulted in job loss and a blacklist status for Elias. The Depression forced Sophia to find a job working in Klingensmith's Pastry Shoppe to earn money to keep the family home. Naida and her brothers continued with school but did extra jobs themselves to contribute to family income.

In January, 1936, Naida graduated from Warren G. Harding High School. Shortly after, she moved to New York to live with relatives there and find work. But big city life wasn't for her and after a year she returned to the family home in Warren and found work.

Naida's passion in those young adult years was dancing. She had learned to dance in the Ukrainian Society and also in the orchard of that farm house where her father and uncle built a dance platform where local ethnic societies held frequent dances. Naida and her brothers would watch and teach each other the dances they saw. So later in that era of big band music, she and her cousin Olga, hitchhiked to all the venues around Warren where dances were being held. Naida would be the first to tell you that she was a really good dancer and there were always partners seeking a dance with her, so she never sat out for a moment.

In the late 1930's while working for Federal Machine and Welding as a secretary, she caught the eye of a tall, handsome guy named James Santo who also worked there. They married in August 1940. They lived with Sophia and Elias to save money, to help manage the house while her mother worked, and also to take care of her father who suffered from bouts of illness later diagnosed as cancer.

Naida gave birth to three children in the decade of the 1940's—son Jim, daughters Nadine and Elaine. She watched her brothers go off to World War II and she welcomed them home at the end. She and husband Jim continued life in her parents' home.

In 1950, when her mother Sophia bought the bakery where she had worked

for 20 years, Naida became her mother's partner in its operation. Sophia was the baker and Naida managed the business end all the while raising three children. Within the first few years of the 1950's Naida's father died, Naida and Jim bought their own home, and moved Sophia to the new home with them. The next twenty years, Naida's middle adult years, were given over to raising her family and managing the bakery. She and Jim worked hard to pay off the mortgage for their home so they would be able and ready to send their children to college. But she still found time to develop some new interests. Since husband Jim was not a dancer (her one regret was falling in love with and choosing a life partner with two left feet), she learned how to play golf and to bowl. She became quite good, played in leagues, made many friends, won quite a few awards, and enjoyed both those activities with Jim.

In 1970, with their youngest child's graduation from college, Naida and Jim retired, sold their house in Warren, Ohio, sold the bakery, and moved to a brand-new home they built on Augusta Boulevard in Seminole, Florida. Naida's mother, Sophia, moved with them. Their back yard was the thirteenth fairway of Seminole Country Club where they were members. Life was good. They had earned it!

Naida and Jim spent their retirement years together well. Lots of new friends, plenty of golf, bowling, parties, travel, and best of all, watching their family grow to make them grandparents—four granddaughters—Michelle, Tracy, Leslie and Stephanie--who would grow up to eventually give Naida nine great-grandchildren: Katelyn, Ryan, Logan, Seth, Myah, Sabrina, Alexandra, Jace Eli, and Avery.

Naida's mother died suddenly in 1975. Except for her one year in New York, Naida had never lived without her mother in all her 58 years. She never stopped missing her. Twenty years later her husband Jim was diagnosed with cancer and died a year later on Valentine's Day 1996. For the first time in her then 78 plus years, Naida was living alone. With her signature spirit, she moved to a condo in the senior community of Five Towns in St Petersburg,

Florida, and re-invented a life for herself.

She enjoyed multitudes of visits from and to family, played bridge, poker, and bingo nearly every night of the week, enjoyed cruises on ships whose casinos afforded her the opportunity to gamble to her heart's content. She thrived in the years of her independent life for 21 years! Many predeceased Naida and all of us will eventually follow her. Take this moment to celebrate her life, so full and so well lived. Then turn back to your own lives and go forth and do likewise!

In lieu of flowers please donate in her name to Casa de la Luz Hospice, 7740 North Oracle Road, Tucson, AZ 85704 or on line at casahospice.com or you may donate to your local hospice in your community.

Tribute Wall



“ *Naida Santo*

January 30, 2023 at 12:50 AM



“ *Happy 100th Birthday Mom, We love and miss you*

Elaine and Jessica

Elaine - August 08, 2017 at 08:31 AM



“ *We are all saddened to learn of Naida' s passing. She served faithfully as director of our group for many years and was a kind manager, a fierce competitor, and above all a much loved friend. She is sorely missed. With deepest sympathy to Nadine, Elaine, Jim and your families, the Five Towns Bridge Group*

Nancy Hassell - August 02, 2017 at 09:45 AM



Nancy and Ed, Thank you for kind and thoughtful words. The Bridge Group and poker group were the highlite of our Mothers day not only because she enjoyed the games and competition but those evenings were also an important social outlet for her. Please let all the members of the group know how important thir friendship was to her.

JIM SANTO - August 02, 2017 at 04:32 PM



You bridge players are a most wonderful bunch. I received an email from Ellen Chisholm. I told her and will tell each of you that if you find yourself sitting at the table with an awesome bridge hand, give Naida a nod and a smile, as she may very well be shuffling the deck for you. Thank you all for following her journey out west all the way to the end!

Nadine Santo York - August 03, 2017 at 03:32 PM

EB

“ *Naida, you are surely missed our Monday and Wednesday bridge games at Five Towns. Now your aches and pains are gone and you are at peace. Our sympathy to the family.*
Ed Barr and Gladys

Ed Barr - August 01, 2017 at 08:10 AM

TK

“ *3 files added to the tribute wall*



Tracy Kitchen - July 31, 2017 at 04:39 PM

TK

“ My grandma was - and will continue to be - a very influential person in my life. She was 13 days shy of turning 100 and was the matriarch of our family. She was such a strong woman who had lived through the Great Depression, many wars, and remarkable technological and sociological changes. She was so adaptable that she even used an iPad during the past 10 years to Skype family and friends and play games. She was brave, determined, fiercely independent, hardworking, and so nurturing. She also knew how to have a good time! My favorite thing about my grandma was that she knew no stranger. She loved everyone she met and was accepting of each person regardless of ideological differences. I think of her every day and hope that I can become a fraction of the woman she was. Until we meet again, Gigi. I love you.



Tracy Kitchen - July 31, 2017 at 04:35 PM

NP

“ Thank you for sharing all the wonderful pictures of your lovely family. What a beautifully delightful person Naida was! She will be sorely missed by all.
Much love, Nama & Robin

Nama Priya - July 31, 2017 at 11:42 AM

EL

Thanks Nama both for your wonderful words and the visit you paid to hospice.

Elaine - July 31, 2017 at 01:49 PM



“ I remember how often my parents, Ralph and Esther Meacham, would gather around a bridge table with Naida and Jim. Sincere condolences to Nadine and Elaine.

Nancy Meacham - July 29, 2017 at 01:13 PM

EL

Thank you Nancy. I too remember bridge nights at our home, and how we kids would have to be quiet and basically disappear. The worst part however was not sharing in the dessert and candy at the table. They loved their bridge and Naida played twice weekly until we moved her here to Arizona.
Be well
Elaine

Elaine - July 29, 2017 at 02:52 PM

NY

Thank you from me too Nancy. Warren was a good place to grow up and our parents all made good lives for us. Big hug to you from the Santo clan.

Nadine Santo York - August 03, 2017 at 03:35 PM

ST

“ A beautiful family with humble beginnings...a generation of siblings now gone but not forgotten. Naida, I hope you know how much you were loved.



Sandra Taylor - July 29, 2017 at 09:49 AM

JE

“ *I loved reading about Naida's life. Thank you for sharing that. So many adventures, a life lived fully. Condolences from Carol and me.*
Jerry

jerry - July 29, 2017 at 09:45 AM

NA

“ *1 file added to the album New Album Name*



nadine - July 29, 2017 at 08:18 AM

SS

“ *Nadine and family,*

Please accept our sincere condolences. I had the great pleasure to hear about Naida's life through Nadine's writing. She was an amazing person.

Signe Sather-Blair and Chuck Blair

Signe Sather-Blair - July 28, 2017 at 06:02 PM

TF

“ Smiles for the memories and laughter you always gave me, Aunt Naida... and my tears at the hole left with your passing. I can only celebrate we got to enjoy you for so long... Some my love to you all in the family as we share our tears. Below one of my favorite photos with Naida giving some love to her older bro, my dad, Leo. Love to all



Terri Fiyalko - July 28, 2017 at 04:32 PM

LG

“ 6 files added to the album Naida family



Leslie Garcia - July 28, 2017 at 04:00 PM

NA

“ 1 file added to the album New Album Name



nadine - July 28, 2017 at 03:07 PM

EL

“ 1 file added to the album Naida family



Elaine - July 28, 2017 at 12:35 PM

NA

“ 25 files added to the album Naida family



Nadine - July 28, 2017 at 10:44 AM