



Joan S. Cook

MAR 25, 1930 - APR 20, 2018



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Joan Sfoungaras Cook of Mt. Dora, Florida, passed away peacefully on the morning of April 20, 2018, after a sustained period of failing health. She joins John, her beloved husband of over sixty years, who predeceased her in December of 2012. Joan was born on March 25, 1930, in Springfield, Massachusetts, and was the only child of Euripedes Sfoungaras, a Greek immigrant from Athens, and Blanche Frechette, a French Canadian immigrant from Quebec. Joan was just four years old when her parents divorced and she went to live with her father. He was a butcher by trade and found it difficult to care for his young daughter so she was sent to live in various foster homes. When she was ten, she was placed in a loving home in historic Deerfield, Massachusetts, where she found her “real family” and bonded with another only child, Jeanne Hampton. The “sisters” became inseparable. As two of only four adolescent females who lived in the small New England town adjacent to the (then) all-male Deerfield Academy prep school, Joan and Jeanne enjoyed many hilarious and unique adventures. Their stories of “boilermakers with the boys down by the river” are the stuff of legend.

Joan was one of those students who actually enjoyed her high school years. She attended Frontier (now Greenfield) High School where she was a member of the girls’ basketball team and played the bass drum for the marching band. Although she didn’t really have a talent for music, she took up the bass drum because girls were deemed too fragile to carry them. According to her, this meant she could ask any cute boy she wanted to carry her drum for her. When she graduated in 1948, there was only one practical path for a woman who wanted a career in medicine. Although she pursued a rigorous college prep curricula in high school, being a doctor was not an option for her so she decided to become a registered nurse (RN). She had begun a three-year RN college level training program when she met her future husband John. The rules were so different for women back then. Not only were they limited to



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pursuing just a few traditional occupations like teaching and nursing, but within those occupations, their marital status became an issue. Joan's RN program did not allow female students to be married. Since John was on military call and could be summoned to the Korean conflict on a moment's notice, she secretly married him anyway. Just five months shy of graduation, Joan discovered she was pregnant, had to confess she was married and got drummed out of the program. Though she couldn't practice as an RN, her substantial, albeit abbreviated, training enabled her to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN).

This led to many years of work as a floor nurse at Northampton's Cooley Dickinson Hospital (where she cared for Grace Coolidge shortly before her death) and Holyoke Hospital. From 1951 until 1969, John and Joan raised three children in Holyoke, Massachusetts: Sandra (born in 1951), David (born in 1954) and Susan (born in 1956). Since Joan was an only child and never established a meaningful relationship with her mother, she was determined that her children would not endure the same fate. She succeeded in her goal. And yet she never stopped working as a nurse during this period making her the only mom in the neighborhood who wasn't a fulltime stay-at-home mom. Nevertheless, she worked shifts which always enabled her to cook breakfast for her family (OK, so sometimes, she just served up cold cereal....) and arrive home at the same time that school let out. She used to say that when she took her maternity leaves, she would find herself talking babytalk all day long, so much so that she found it difficult to stop when John would come home after a day's work. This was her signal that her wellbeing (if not, her sanity) was inextricably tied to working outside of the home. She thrived in her occupation, garnering rave reviews for conscientious and diligent caregiving. She was compassionate in her own unconventional way.

In order to keep things humming along at home, Joan led the consumer movement by buying the latest in "home technology". As soon as any machine, gadget or other new product that could reduce housework came on the market, she bought it. Hers was the first house in the neighborhood to have a gas-fueled clothes dryer and an electric dishwasher. She also embraced the conveniences afforded by frozen dinners and Tupperware. In addition to being a busy working mom, Joan was an active



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member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and its Saints and Sinners Club. She also enjoyed a stint as the leader of her son's Cub Scout pack. She was a huge Elvis Presley fan and loved reading and watching murder mysteries when she could find the time. But it was the several weeks spent every summer with their children on the tip of Cape Cod that Joan and John really relished. Their love for these warm oceanside days led them to relocate to Florida so that all could enjoy time at the beach year round.

In 1969, the Cook family moved to Miami, Florida, where Joan continued to work as an LPN. In the early 70's on the verge of becoming an empty nester, she enrolled in the nursing program at Miami Dade Community College and got that RN certification that had eluded her earlier in life. Obtaining the degree meant hours taking tough pre-med courses in Organic Chemistry, Anatomy and Clinical Psychology. But she was determined and did it all in two years while working fulltime. Later on, she also managed to find time to do a little "acting" on the side serving as an extra in a few Miami-based movies. All in all, the 1970's and 80's were active and productive years, filled with family time, meaningful work, friends and exotic travels. When John took up scuba diving, Joan followed suit and joined him in many underwater adventures around the Caribbean. Both had a keen interest in Joan's Greek heritage prompting a trip to Greece and many excursions to the Greek community of Tarpon Springs on Florida's Gulf coast. Savoring Greek cuisine at Greek festivals throughout Florida was a favorite pastime. Likewise, a trip to Scotland piqued their interest in John's Scottish heritage leading them to join the Miami chapter of the Scottish American Society. This, in turn, led them to visit Scottish-American gatherings around the State of Florida and discover the friendly, quaint and charming town of Mt. Dora.

Seeking a quiet, but thriving, place to retire, Joan and John happily settled in Mt. Dora in 1995. They embraced their new community and attended many Chamber of Commerce meetings and other community gatherings. Joan went on to join the local Scottish American Society and found enjoyment serving as an usher at the Ice House Theater and "antiquing" at Mt. Dora's numerous festivals and shops. As time passed, Joan's health deteriorated and John left this world. But in a stroke of good



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fortune that can only be described as nurse's karma, Joan was blessed to be cared for by some extraordinary caregivers from Visiting Angels (Ellen Thompson, Kerry Whipple, Cindy Rafferty, June) and the local community (Diane Danner, Diane Davis). These compassionate women enabled her to live out her final years in the home she loved surrounded by the things that mattered to her. Joan loved dogs and always had one by her side. Thanks to her wonderful caregivers, she was able to enjoy the companionship of her beloved poodle, Bobbie, until his passing just last year. Joan had a long and rewarding life as a devoted wife and present mother. Although her early childhood was not the happiest of times and she was burdened by failing health in her last years, Joan lived a great life during the many decades in between. She will be remembered as a force to be reckoned with and for her protective devotion to her family. She was feisty, fun loving, outgoing and opinionated and possessed a strong will and fiercely determined spirit. Joan is survived by her three children: Sandra Hinton of Anaheim, California, David Cook of Mt. Dora, Florida, and Susan Cook (Fine) of New York City; as well as her devoted daughter-in-law, David's wife, Marty Cook, and her supportive son-in-law, Susan's husband, Drew Fine. She also leaves five grandchildren, eight great grandchildren, one great, great grandchild and lots of wonderful memories. Her family will miss her, but take comfort in knowing that she is, at long last, reunited with the love of her life, John, in eternity.



Tribute Wall

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Richard Pinard posted:

She will be missed along with her mother's sister, Rosalie Frechette

April 28 at 5:27 PM



Richard Pinard lit a candle in honor of Joan.



April 28 at 5:12 PM



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Joan by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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