



Diane L. Jonardi

April 15, 1932 - February 3, 2018

Obituary

Diane Lawrence Jonardi, born in Hartford, Connecticut, to Albert and Selma Lawrence, raised in Windsor, Connecticut, passed away from complications due to Alzheimer's on February 3, 2018 in Winter Springs, Florida. She was 85 years old.

Diane and her father were survivors of the Great Hartford Circus Fire of 1944. She attended Loomis Chaffee School in Windsor, two years at Connecticut College, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Oberlin College with a degree in mathematics although her lifelong love was acting. She worked for Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she was introduced to future husband, Raymond "Jeff" Jonardi, by his sister Lidia Jonardi Ludwig. Ray and Diane were married in 1957 and resided in South Park, PA until 2013 when they moved to Maitland, Florida.

Diane achieved recognition in Pittsburgh as an actress at The Pittsburgh Playhouse, Little Lake Theater, Odd Chair Playhouse, Baldwin Players, South Park Conservatory Theater, Pittsburgh Irish Theater, and the Jewish Community Center. She also appeared in several commercials, industrial films, and four movies. Diane was a Steelers and Notre Dame fan (Ray played football for Notre Dame). Diane is survived by her husband of 60 years, Ray, daughter Dale and husband Mark Burns, son Andrew and wife Lara, grandson, James Jeffrey Burns and his wife Chelsea, granddaughter Caryn Diane Burns and her fiancé, David Smiley, cousin Shirley Martin Dudley, sister-in-law, Valia Keller, brother-in-law Enzo Jonardi, and numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you please make a donation to either the Alzheimer's Association or Alzheimer's Disease Research.

A celebration of life will take place on February 24, 2018 at 4:00PM at DeGusipe Funeral Home, 9001 N. Orlando Ave, Maitland, FL 32751.

Diane Lawrence Jonardi

Her Story

Diane was born in Hartford, Connecticut and grew up during the Depression. Her parents were Albert Roosevelt Lawrence and Selma (Sally) Josephson Lawrence. She and her parents lived in her Aunt Isabel's (Isabel Lawrence House Procaccini) house in Windsor, Connecticut. Her father was of Irish and English descent. Her maternal grandparents came to this country from Sweden and built a house in Rocky Hill, Connecticut and a cottage at Point O' Woods Beach in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Her mother was famous for her excellent piano playing skills and introduced Diane to music at a young age. She would accompany her mother to war bond drives and sing while Sally played the piano. These were some of her earliest experiences with being on a stage.

Diane attended elementary school in Windsor, Connecticut, and then went to Loomis Chaffee preparatory school for girls where she was an excellent student. Her favorite memories were the summers spent at Point O' Woods Beach in Old Lyme, Connecticut with her aunts, uncles, and cousins on her mother's side. She was the youngest of the 6 cousins and her cousin Shirley took care of her and watched out for her. In her later years, when she would spend time at the beach with her family, she would say it was "home" to her.

When she was 12 years old, she and her father survived the Great Hartford Circus Fire of 1944 in which over 160 people died. When author Stuart O'Nan was doing research for a book he was going to write about the Circus Fire, he advertised in the Hartford Courant for survivors to send him their stories. Diane heard about it and wrote down 6 pages in long hand to tell her memories of that tragic day and gave it to Mr. O'Nan who used some of her comments in the book.

After attending Loomis Chaffee, she went to Connecticut College for women for 2 years and then transferred to Oberlin College where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a major in math. She was very proud of her Phi Beta Kappa key and wore it often. While she was in college, she continued to perform whenever she could. She would have liked to have majored in theater arts, but her parents told her that she needed to get a degree in something more financially stable.

After graduating, she worked at Connecticut General for a while and then moved to Pittsburgh where she worked at Westinghouse Bettis and met and became friends with Lidia Jonardi. Lidia wanted to introduce Diane to her brother, Ray, the Notre Dame football graduate. They met, dated, and ultimately were married in Hartford, Connecticut on November 30, 1957. Diane called Ray by his nickname Jeff or Jeff-Ray. They enjoyed going to the Willock Social Club to dance polkas and rhumbas. Diane took a job at the University of Pittsburgh in the scheduling department, using the large computers that were

in existence at the time. When Notre Dame was going to play PITT, she would put up ND stickers in the elevators when no one was looking. Thank goodness they didn't have security cameras back then. While she was working, she also was acting at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, again going back to her love of theater.

Prior to getting married, Diane attended the first Jonardi family reunion which was held in 1957. Over the years the family grew and the reunions, which are still going strong after 60 years, moved from just the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia to Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Diane would always insist on participating in the family softball game while wearing her pearls, of course. How else would you dress for a sporting event?

Jeff and Diane lived in an apartment in Prospect Park and after their daughter, Dale, was born moved to a house on Fidelity Drive in Pittsburgh. When Diane became pregnant with their second child, they moved to 6717 Ridgevue Drive, where they lived in for over 50 years. Their second child was a son, Andrew (Andy).

While the children were young, Diane was a stay-at-home mom along with other moms and families in the suburbs. After about 9 – 10 years, Diane decided to try and do some acting again, and performed at various theaters around Pittsburgh including Odd Chair Playhouse, Baldwin Players, South Park Conservatory Theater, Pittsburgh Irish Theater, Jewish Community Center and the place where she spent a lot of her time, Little Lake Theater in Canonsburg. She performed in musicals, comedies, and dramas, with a focus on Neil Simon plays. She was not known for her punctuality and caused many a scare for her fellow actors and the directors at Little Lake when she would come tearing into the theater parking lot right before the play would start.

With time, Diane even made some commercials (Tylenol, PageTime, Pittsburgh Theater Company) and is credited with 4 films on IMDB.com. Two of the films, Unstoppable and Shelter/Six Souls, still provide her with small residuals.

Attending Notre Dame football games was another joy for her, especially the football reunions for the 1949 unbeaten, untied National Champion team, and in later years, to see her son, Andy, in the marching band. He often referred to her as a "Rah-Rah" for her exuberance and joy every time she saw the band perform.

Diane loved her two grandchildren, James Jeffrey Burns (her "Little Darlin'") and Caryn Diane Burns ("Tweety"), and would "bust her buttons" telling people that her granddaughter's middle name was Diane. She enjoyed spending time with them but her great joy was when everyone would get together at Point O' Woods. During several of the vacations at the beach, she hosted reunions with the Josephson side of the family. Her cousins and their families would all gather for another chance to reminisce about the good old days at the beach. They enjoyed walking around and seeing what had changed but also how much was still the same as when they went there when they were young.

Diane loved going to Disney World and always said actors are kids who never grew up,

which is why she got such a kick out of going to the Magic Kingdom. She was known to have sung with the piano player on Main Street at the park on more than one occasion. She could draw an audience where ever she went!
Diane would want this time to be a celebration of the person she was.

Events

FEB **Visitation** 04:00PM - 04:30PM

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DeGusipe Funeral Home & Crematory - Maitland Chapel
9001 N. Orlando Avenue, Maitland, FL, US, 32751

FEB **Celebration of Life** 04:00PM - 07:00PM

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FEB **Reception** 05:30PM - 07:00PM

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Comments



“ 1 file added to the album New Album Name



Mark Mickunas - February 22, 2018 at 04:45 PM



“ Sweet Tenderness was purchased for the family of Diane L. Jonardi.



February 18, 2018 at 11:01 PM



“ All my thoughts and love are with you, Dale, and with your family during this sad time. Thank you so much for inviting me to read your mom's "story." I knew she was cool, but I learned so much more about her and am even more impressed. Phi Beta Kappa in math? From Oberlin? I guess we know where you got your computer brain. I'm sure your service on the 24th will be a great time to reminisce with your extended family about what a wonderful person she was -- she'd have to be to have a daughter like you and grandkids like Caryn and Jeff. Love you so much and wishing you peace of heart.

Shelly Riley - February 13, 2018 at 11:08 PM



“ Ray, Andy and Dale, We r so sorry, Diane was an amazing woman! We always enjoyed talking out in the front yard, she would always tell me I was doing great as a new mom which I so appreciated and I loved hearing her acting stories! I'll never forget the commercial of her on the motorcycle! We were honored to know her. Please know we are thinking of you all.
Suzanne, Chris, Maddy and Colin Kinevy
Pgh, PA

Suzanne Kinevy - February 07, 2018 at 11:40 AM



“ Dear Jonardi family....the Little Lake family is broken hearted as the news of Diana's passing reaches us. Forever in our hearts, know we are holding you close in our thoughts and prayers.

Leigh Ann Frohnafel - February 07, 2018 at 04:58 AM