

Patricia A. Billman

On October 21, 2015, the world lost an outstanding lady and human being. Patricia Anne Billman (Mayher), Mom/Wife/Grandmother [Baba]/Patriot, passed away peacefully during her morning nap, finally succumbing to the ravages of scleroderma. Her body finally said “enough,” and Mom slipped the surly bonds of earth leaving behind a loving and adoring family, while joining a loving and adoring family who’ve passed before.



I know Peter Givanovich Givans, my father/her first husband who passed away soon after I was born, and my adopted father, Chuck Billman, who was her long time love, husband and companion and who raised her two boys with her, as well as my brother Garry, met her as she transitioned. Knowing our family, the welcome is raucous and well attended, being led, no doubt, by her loving grandfather, the man who brought our family from the Old Country (Yugoslavia) to the US.

A son could ask for no more outstanding mother. Nor could there ever be a more loving grandmother as she was to Dania’s and my girls (Brooke and Becca) and Garry and Mary’s kids (Nick, Erin and Danny). I am sure she met her soon-to-be-born twin great granddaughters of Nick and Lisa’s as they transitioned to earth as she transitioned away. In fact, both baby girls (Keira and Elena) were born healthy and happy three days after their passing...I am sure they got an earful during their meeting!

Born in 1938 in the steel town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Pat grew up in a close knit, Old Country family surrounded by loving family members and friends. Her two cousins, Danica and Maria, were like sisters to her throughout her life and they continually shared memories of their early years together

constantly. Many dear childhood friends would turn into life-long friends, and many of her family Old Country ways would carry her through the rest of her life. Up until she died, she enjoyed telling of her times growing up around her grandfather's bar, The American House, amongst the steel mill workers and other neighborhood characters.

After her grandparents left Pennsylvania for Arizona, Pat spent a lot of time visiting them and getting the bug to head west herself. After graduating Johnstown High School, she did just that, spending time with family between Arizona and California. In 1958, she met and married Pete, settling in Los Angeles among his close-knit Yugoslavian family. They soon had Garry, followed 18 months later by Gregg. Unfortunately, Pete died suddenly soon thereafter from a heart ailment.

Pat matured very quickly at that point, being left to raise two young boys. She quickly found work as an administrative assistant with American Airlines. Thankfully, her close knit old country families on both sides were there to shower her and the boys with much love and support. She moved back to Arizona to be close to her grandfather and family in 1964.

In Phoenix, she became an administrative assistant for Lockheed Aircraft Systems, supporting the F-104 program at Luke AFB, outside Phoenix. There she met the man who would be the love of the rest of her life, and the father who raised her sons. Captain Chuck Billman, USAF fighter pilot, saw the ravaging redhead in the Luke AFB Officer Club one night in 1967, just after returning from Viet Nam, and asked her out on the first of what became thousands of dates they would have over the rest of their lives together. Major Chuck Billman married Patricia Anne Givans at the Luke AFB Chapel in August 1968, and Pat and her kids became a complete family again, with Chuck adopting and raising Garry and Gregg as his own sons.

From there, the world literally became the family's oyster. Moves to Japan and Hawaii highlighted the remainder of their time as a military family. Following Chuck's retirement from the USAF, they ended up in what became their adopted home for the rest of their life, Saint Croix, United States Virgin Islands.

Pat often spoke of her Virgin Island years as the best ones of her life. Chuck flew seaplanes through the Caribbean for Antilles Air Boats, and Pat worked as the Chief Pilot's administrative assistant. AAB was like being in the best fighter squadron in the world because the friendships gained there were so deep, and proved to be life-long lasting. Later, Chuck joined with two friends to start their own airline, Sunaire, and Pat and Chuck spent many more fun years growing the airline.

Becoming close friends with many of the islanders, including some famous names who lived or frequented there, was a hallmark of those wonderful years. Surviving hurricanes (including Cat 4 Hugo), regular power outages, island issues, running low on fresh water due to cisterns drying out, driving on the left in rusty cars, homes cooled by the trade winds, etc. all became just part of the enjoyable deal of being a transplanted Cruzan. Though challenging and frustrating at times, she always said she would love to live out her years there, and in fact, visited the island and her island friends often in her later years.

Pat and Chuck moved to Florida in the mid-1990s to be closer to Garry and Gregg and their growing families. They enjoyed visiting Garry and family on their beautiful farm in rural Missouri and chasing Gregg's family around the country on his various USAF assignments. They took an extended sabbatical from their lives to assist Gregg on an assignment to Colorado Springs to help raise Dania and Gregg's youngest daughter Brooke while Dania was finishing nursing school at Auburn. In fact, both Pat and Chuck were extremely devoted and loving grandparents to all their grandchildren, dropping everything to assist whenever and wherever needed.

In 2006, Pat experienced her biggest loss ever when her oldest son Garry passed away unexpectedly on his 48th birthday from a very rare blood disease. This was followed by the family's loss of Chuck in 2013 due to brain cancer. Her health began to decline rapidly at this point, eventually being diagnosed with systemic scleroderma, a degenerative disease affecting skin and internal organs. Blessedly, she did not have to experience the typical late stage symptoms associated with the terminal phases of this disease, peacefully dying in her sleep due to the disease's effect on her heart.

A close family friend used to call Mom a force of nature. I found it oddly comforting that the largest western hemisphere hurricane ever recorded, but producing barely any damage or loss of life, formed on the day of her death...Hurricane Patricia. Coincidence? I think not. She was laughing all the way to the Heavenly welcoming party.

RIP Mom. It was a wonderful life! And as her favorite singer Frank Sinatra crooned....She Did It Her Way!!

A Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, November 21, 2015 at 10:00 AM at the Patrick Air Force Base Marina. A Celebration of Life will immediately follow at the Marina Tiki Bar.