



## Joann Giovannelli

October 29, 1934 - January 25, 2022

Joann Giovannelli, 87, passed away peacefully Tuesday, January 25, 2022. She was born October 29, 1934 in Canton, Ohio to the late Thomas and Mary (Stefanko) Ross, who also had an older daughter, Joann's late sister Irene (Ross) Hooper.

Joann was, first and foremost, tough. She was a 65-year survivor of breast cancer, after being diagnosed and having a mastectomy less than a month before her scheduled wedding in 1957. She somehow saw her cancer as a blessing, in part because it empowered her to devote many years and countless hours volunteering for the American Cancer Society, counseling breast cancer patients on not only coping with their diagnosis, but helping them to move on and thrive despite it. She consistently advised those patients, and all around her, that "attitude is everything" and that a positive outlook coupled with hard work becomes self-fulfilling. Joann was an almost incurable optimist believing that no matter how bad things are, there is always hope. Well, with one exception, of course. As a lifelong fan of the Cleveland Browns and Indians, she firmly believed that no matter how good things looked, they would inevitably lose. Sadly, she was often not wrong.

Joann graduated from Canton McKinley High School in 1952 and then worked as a secretary at the Canton Repository where she was widely regarded as perhaps both the fastest and most accurate typist in the company. She later

worked at home and as a mom, before returning taking a “temporary” position helping the wife of a medical inventor write his biography, ultimately working for more than 20 years with their family offices as a chief of staff and ultimately caregiver. In the dedication to that autobiography, Joann was described as being “heaven-sent”, a sentiment that would be echoed many times by many others throughout her life.

She married the late Dick Giovannelli in September, 1957 after recovering from her surgery. Dick was, without any doubt, the love of her life. He and Joann fiercely loved each other and maintained a touching, romantic love affair for nearly 50 years until his death in 2005. Like all things with Joann, this love was an active one, as she and Dick constantly did things together, especially working side-by-side on projects around their house, in Joann’s immaculate flower beds and Dick’s bountiful garden, all of which entailed many trips together to craft and home improvement shows.

One of their favorite activities was traveling with the “fun bunch,” made up of Dick’s late brother, Ronald Giovannelli, his wife, Donna, his late sister, Yvonne Manos and her late husband, Bob. Those trips were filled with laughter, practical jokes, and fights only over who got to pick up the checks at meals. Joann often won those fights because she had a knack for winning huge jackpots on the nickel and quarter slot machines that she loved to play as they toured a great many casinos throughout the US. It became a running joke because these were the kind of jackpots that draw the attention of the whole casino – involving blazing lights, blaring sirens and, to Dick’s dismay, mandatory reporting to the IRS. Those fights over checks created in Joann what her grandson later described as “ninja skills” and often involved cutting sneaky deals with waiters to pay for meals, utterly unbeknownst to her dining companions, even before being seated at the table.

Her immigrant parents also inculcated in Joann a love for America and the

American dream, which she carried throughout her life as a supporter of many veterans' organizations. But again, this was also a participatory, active love that involved being active in many school and civic organizations. She deepened that love by seeking out and seeing all parts of the country. Joann has driven on coast-to-coast road trips across the country at least 5 times, first with her parents as a young child and later with Dick, as they visited more than half of the National Parks and many large and small American cities, usually avoiding interstate highways for more interesting byways.

Joann and Dick are survived by their only child, Rick, who is a lawyer in Charlotte, North Carolina. From his earliest years, his mom created in her son the expectation that he would be the first in the family to go to college. As early as elementary school, he was told that that someday "when you win your first case as a lawyer," he could buy her a nice dinner. (Oddly, her ninja skills largely prevented this.) She thought of him as a lawyer from early days in part because he frequently tried (and failed) to win arguments with her. As her friends frequently reminded Joann, Rick "comes by his stubbornness honestly." Ironically, those same friends would lovingly remind Rick of exactly this in Joann's later years as she refused to let declining health change her as she insisted on living her life independently and fiercely on her own terms.

Joann loved being Grandma G to her two grandchildren, Cecelia Sanborn who works for Palantir in New York City, and Matthew Giovannelli, who is a student at Rollins College in Winter Park Florida. She loved visiting with them and Rick's wife, Selena. When the kids were younger, Joann could frequently be found crawling around on the floor playing pretend games with dolls, stuffed animals, action figures and even roughhousing with Matthew. She, Cecelia and Rick would complete a jigsaw puzzle every year at Christmas, often staying up into the wee hours to finish it. She enjoyed attending Matthew's sports games, where she occasionally needed to be reminded that

the referees and umpires really were trying their best.

Joann fiercely poured her blood, sweat and love into supporting those around her. She was beloved as Aunty Jo by her many nieces and nephews and their children. She became a caretaker for those in her neighborhood and many of her friends as they battled their own illnesses. After Dick's death, she once again turned a painful experience into a positive, becoming a counselor and a shoulder to lean on for many of her friends when they lost their husbands.

Her final years were marked by yet another fierce battle with cancer. Despite declining health, she continued to be a beacon of hope and strength to those around her. Her informal "Comrades in Cancer" group became fierce friends as they met regularly for lunch or dinner, more importantly for support, and most importantly for ... pie, which was a required feature at nearly every meal.

But no restaurant pie could match Joann's. She was renowned as a cook, and especially a baker, having learned at home how to make everything from bread to baklava. For many years, Joann and her "sister", Anne Locke would bake Christmas cookies, often making more than 100 dozen at one time. These were treasured by their children and their children's friends who still talk about those cookies, especially Joann's dad's special "Greek cookies" (koulourakia). Most memorably, Grandma's apple pie was a family treasure and will be sorely missed.

Joann lived a rich life in all the ways that she wanted to be rich. She believed that hard work as a reward unto itself. She believed in the dignity and pride that come from doing things "the hard way on purpose." She believed fiercely in her Catholic faith. She believed that a positive attitude would see you through anything. But mostly she believed that family and friends come first, and she fiercely demonstrated that belief until the very end. Her family is comforted by the fact that Joann lived her life to the end on her own terms and

that she and Dick are now together, continuing their unbroken love.

Joann and her family are blessed beyond measure by the kindness, love and support from her friends and family. Chief among these are her three surviving “sisters”, Renee Keller (Rick’s godmother), Anne Locke and Donna Giovannelli (and Donna’s daughter, Annette Davis), but there are countless others who looked after her in ways great and small. There simply are not words sufficient for her family to express our gratitude to each of these saints living among us.

A memorial mass in honor of Joann will be held 10:00 a.m., Saturday, January 29, 2022 at St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church, 8540 Mentor Ave., Mentor, OH 44060, with a small reception after.

One of Joann’s great loves was planting and tending to her flowers every spring and summer. But Joann had strong opinions about flowers. She believed that they should be enjoyed as living things and by living people. She relentlessly drilled into her friends and family that she did not want any flowers at her funeral, decrying that to be a “waste of money and of perfectly good flowers.” So, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Hattie Larlham Foundation, 9772 Diagonal Road, Mantua, Ohio 44255, which provides support and opportunities to intellectually and developmentally challenged children and adults.

Arrangements entrusted to the Brunner Sanden Deitrick Funeral Home & Cremation Center, 8466 Mentor Ave., Mentor, OH 44060.

Offer condolences at [www.brunners.com](http://www.brunners.com)

# Previous Events

## Memorial Mass

JAN **29**. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Of The Assumption Church

8560 Mentor Avenue

Mentor, OH 44060

(440) 255-3404

<https://stmarysmentor.org/>

# Tribute Wall

PH

“ I didn't know Joanne or her famil, but after I read her obituary in the Gazette I see how much she will be missed by her family. What a wonderful life and how fortunate your family is.for.having her.

A daughter of Italian immigrants who lost my 99 yr. Old mother one year ago

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**Patricia DeAngelis Haskell** - February 06, 2022 at 09:11 AM

JP

“ Joann's husband Dick worked with my dad for many years at Republic Steel. They did a lot together as couples over the years. After Dick and my dad passed, me, my mom, and my sister continued the friendship, going out to dinner often and trying a different restaurant each time. We so looked forward to including Joann in our birthday dinners especially. She was a wonderful friend and will be truly missed.

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**June Print** - January 30, 2022 at 07:04 PM

AW

“ I am the grand daughter of the couple that Joann helped meticulously and with impeccable grace and love for twenty years. I was growing up around my Grandparents (who adored her) and she was always there with a warm and genuine smile and kindness for me. I loved her, and she made an enormous impact on my life with her poise, grace, professionalism and beauty. I remember admiring how she kept her office, and how her beautiful cross, a testament to her obvious, well-lived faith, always shown brightly around her neck. Joann showed me so much kindness and love growing up as a kid. Throughout my life, and still to this day, I remember her as an example in my mind of a true follower of Christ, and of the best way to be professional in employment, while still to working always with gentleness, endless patience, and love. She has and will always inspire me.

*May God speed you to Heaven Gracious, Classy Lady!*

*My condolences to all of your family and loved ones.*

*Much Love and Many Thanks,  
I will never forget you!!!  
Annie*

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**Annamaria Wolfe** - January 28, 2022 at 07:31 PM

JH

“ Joann was a beautiful Christian example-she truly walked with Jesus and, now, is joyfully enjoying life with Him eternally.

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**June Hurley** - January 28, 2022 at 08:21 AM

CA

“ Carol lit a candle in memory of Joann  
Giovannelli



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**Carol** - January 27, 2022 at 03:19 PM