



Christina (Nina) Vamvakaris passed away

Nina was born to Greek migrant parents Anargyros (also known as Andy) and Evangelia Aroney in Mackay Queensland on 2nd August 1944, and was christened "Christina Despina". She was the youngest of three girls, with Helen and Mary as her older sisters and grew up in Mackay during her schooling and early working years.

Nina's father Andy tragically died when she was 3, and her mother Evangelia was left to raise her three daughters in her adopted land, providing them with as much love and guidance as she could give.

Nina talked fondly of her childhood, whether joking around with cousins, playing Softball and Vigaro, or going to Sunday School with her sisters, in fact Nina never had a bad word to say about her childhood, except for her nasty piano teacher who used to hit her on the hand with a stick every time she played a note wrong on the piano, but I guess we can excuse her for that.

Nina had the privilege of dancing for Queen Elizabeth when she visited Mackay in the 1950's. Dressed as a Kangaroo, Nina took stage to dance for the Queen only to trip and fall on her face. She often used to laugh recalling that moment of fame. Nina had an ability to laugh at herself, and this was a perfect example.

Although Nina wanted to become a school teacher, circumstances at the time didn't permit, so she took a job at her High School upon graduating her Junior Certificate, and became the Principal's Secretary at the Mackay State High School.

She enjoyed her time working in the office, although she often had to excuse herself and leave whilst the naughty students were given the cane. This was perhaps a reflection of her gentle nature.

As a child she would dream of traveling to far away countries, and had pen-pals in France, America and England. In 1966 she got her chance to travel, and boarded a Cruise Ship with her Mother, and her Cousin Manuel and his family, bound for Greece.

Her overseas adventure, took her from the then country environment of Mackay, to the chaotic and exciting city of Athens, with its nightclubs, concerts, and European fashion.

She traveled across Europe in a car convoy with her mother and other relatives for the summer, making her way through places like the then communist Yugoslavia, Italy, Switzerland, France and Germany. She also got to go to the alps near Salzburg, where the Sound of Music, a film she had seen months before and loved, had been filmed.

Her travels also took her to newly discovered Pyramids and Tombs in Egypt, and she would often recall her experience of crawling through caves under the pyramids with merely a flashlight, even though she was claustrophobic.

Yes 1966 was an inspirational year for Nina, and often occupied her mind. It had fuelled her overwhelming passion for travel, which would eventually pass on to her children.

After being away for most of 1966, Nina would return to Mackay. It was there that she was courted by her eventual Husband Peter Vamvakaris. Peter would make the 8 hour drive each way, to and from Innisfail in order to woo Nina.

To win over his future mother-in-law, Peter would buy 12 live mud-crabs on the way to offer to her as his way of proving he could provide.

They went on to be engaged, and 4 months later they married. Their engagement may have lasted longer if the price of mud-crabs had not increased dramatically over that period.

They married in Innisfail on the 20th August 1967. Their marriage would go on to be a long and great partnership, based on love, compromise and loyalty.

Five months after they married, Peter was transferred to Rockhampton with Ampol, the company he then worked for.

Only months after their arrival in Rockhampton, Nina fell pregnant to their first child Elena. One Thursday evening during this time, Peter was driving home from a work assignment in Longreach and hit a Kangaroo about 1 hour out of Rockhampton.

He finally got home at around 1am, and immediately began writing his letter of resignation to Ampol. Nina awoke to find Peter and asked what he was doing. Peter replied "I'm resigning and we are going into Real Estate from tomorrow"¹¹. Nina had unwavering confidence in her husband and said "OK" and went off to bed.

They opened the office on the 2nd of August, which was Nina's birthday. They would go on to have 4 more offices, and would always open them on 2nd of August from that time on.

Nina would also become a Real Estate Agent, and as there was only a restricted number of licensing exam dates, sat her exam for her full Real Estate License on the 25th June 1983, only 1 day after giving birth to her 4th child Jason. She did return to the hospital after the exam for further rest of course. But this was an insight into the determination and toughness of Nina.

A lot of great things happened in Rockhampton, including the birth of all 4 of their children, Elena, John, Andrew and Jason. Peter and Nina also were heavily involved in the Greek Community which built the Greek Church of St Nectarios in Rockhampton. This is a church very close to their hearts, and Nina was forever keen to visit the Monastery of St Nectarios in Greece, for which the church was named after.

Nina was very involved in other community activities as well, and was the organizer for 7 years of the Cancer Door-knock Appeal, raising funds ironically for research into the battle against Cancer.

They had many great friends in Rockhampton, however their eldest children were reaching University age and would have to move to Brisbane in order to study, so they decided to move the whole family in order for them to maintain their close relationship.

Many wonderful years were spent in Brisbane, where Nina saw her children grow up, and go on to see two of them marry, John to his wife Sharyn, and Elena to her husband Peter. Nina was very proud to have Sharyn and Peter both as children, and treated them instantly as her own.

Nina's adventurous Overseas stories of her 1966 trip, 1974 trip with Peter and the elder two, 1983 trip as an entire family, and 1995 trip with their younger two, had fuelled an international curiosity in their children, and she encouraged them to travel or relocate, and to explore.

She would love to ring Elena in New York, Andrew and Jason in London, and John in Sydney, and even bought World Clocks to keep track of all the different time-zones her children were in.

She always dreamed of traveling, and in September 2005, she had the chance to go again. After battling cancer twice before and defeating it, an opportunity arose to reward herself with a trip to her beloved Greece.

This was a trip that gave her great joy. She was able to go to Athens, her father's island of Kythera, her mother's island of Kastellorizo, but most importantly she managed to visit Aegina.

Aegina for her was her holy grail, as it is home to the Monastery of St Nectaries, the namesake of Rockhampton's Greek Orthodox Church. She had often prayed to St Nectarios through her family life and previous cancer treatments, and was so happy to make the pilgrimage to pay her respects. She went twice while she was in Greece, once with Peter and their son Jason who had flown over from London, and a second time with Peter and their son Andrew who also had flown over from London.

This trip had been one of her most satisfying accomplishments, and gave her so much pleasure. She knew it would be her last, and she enjoyed every moment of it.

Her final years saw her focus much attention toward her grandchildren; John & Sharyn's children Kayla and Michael, and Elena and Peter's son Harry.

She would love to hear their stories, give them chocolates, or talk with them on the telephone or internet, and was a very



Christina (Nina) Vamvakaris
2 Aug 1944 - 10 Feb 2007

proud and doting Yiayia.

Nina's final Christmas and New Year saw her children and grandchildren come together in Brisbane for the first time in 5 years, and also saw the 90th Birthday of her mother on New Years Day. This was a wonderful occasion, and gave Nina the opportunity to see relatives and friends she hadn't seen in years.

Unfortunately, in early February Nina became ill again, and was admitted to hospital. She was told by her doctor that she would not be able to survive her latest on-set, and she would pass away in the coming week.

Without fear, Nina accepted the Doctor's advice, and was not upset in any way. She was able to see her family one by one over the coming days, and for them to say all they wanted to say to her and vice versa.

She didn't cry, she assured everyone that she would be watching us, and would always be with us. She was satisfied with the life she had lead, and was content to accept God's will.

Even though her physical strength was leaving, she still reminded Peter to cancel her chemotherapy she had scheduled for the following week, as she wanted someone else who was on the waiting list to get her place. She was always caring for people and looking to help, and this was evident until the end.

The 10th of February, was her grandson Harry's name day, and her husband Peter wrote a text message to him from her. It read:

Harry, this will be the last time you will receive a text message from Yiayia on your name day. Happy name day.

As Peter finished the message, the Nurse told Peter that she had passed away.

Nina was a beautiful lady who wouldn't speak ill of anyone, and would speak of their positive ways rather than their negative ways. To her end she smiled and laughed, and put others at ease in spite of her position.

A loyal servant of God until the end, she is now at peace.

From the Institute of Kytheraimos, we express our deepest sympathy to her husband Peter, to her four children, grandchildren and the rest of the family.



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