

# The Eternal Luminosity of Life



When it comes to angels among us, they take on many forms. I imagine angels to be selfless, simple yet magnificent. And today, I imagine a sweet lady named Patricia S. Staron to finally be an angel in Heaven, as she was on earth. Given her humility, thoughtfulness and care toward others, it doesn't surprise me that her obituary consists of the poem "Afterglow" and one sentence: "Patricia was born on November 29, 1941 and passed away on Tuesday, September 10, 2019." However, this wonderful lady gave so much to so many in those 77 years.

In 1981 or so, my family moved from Croatia to Riverside Court, a little cul-de-sac in a little town that was picturesque, safe and the perfect place to raise a family. I was about 8 or 9 years old when we moved into this street.

My father worked and my mother stayed home. She didn't know how to speak English yet, since we just moved to America. But she wanted to desperately learn the language and communicate. She was a social woman in Croatia and I know not having friends or anyone to visit with had to have been lonely and depressing. She tried an "English as a second language" course at the local community college. It was not for her. Oddly enough, she found a show on TV that she related to: *I Love Lucy*. Ricky spoke with an accent and she said she understood him better. So, with that show she began to pick up some English and was able to begin to communicate.

We were welcomed to Riverside Court and never really felt like outsiders. The fact that we were from another country was interesting to everyone. Next door we met Margie and her family. She made the best sugar cookies in this world. Her decorating skills were superb. And she introduced us to a lady a few houses down, toward the entrance of our cul-de-sac, Patricia, or Pat, as she like to be called.

Pat was tall, slender and spoke such proper English. I remember noticing the way she said her "s"es—they were crystal clear. She had cheekbones that any model would pay millions for, a shimmer in her eyes and a kind smile that was always blossoming on her face. She started off as, a neighbor and became the closest friend my mother and our family would ever have in the United States. In some way she and my mom understood each other. And Pat, Teta ("aunt," in Croatian) Pat, as we called her, seemed to know exactly what my mother needed: a friend, a true friend.

Teta Pat would take my mom out on occasion. I believe she even took some time to teach her how to drive. She would invite us kids over to play at her pool—which was a treat. She took me out once after school to buy a present for my mom’s birthday so I could surprise her. My sister and I went to our first-ever movie in a theater, thanks to Teta Pat. It was 1982 and the movie was *Annie*. After the movie she bought us each the official Annie doll to take home and remember our special day. And I did.

She was thoughtful. She never missed a special occasion, no matter how small it was. She brought us peaches whenever her family went on a daytrip to Fredericksburg. The first time I tried them, I fell in love with the sweet, juicy peaches of Fredericksburg. When she went to Big Bend National Park, she brought us T-shirts with our names on them. She was also there when life would take us down a path for which we weren’t prepared, like the time something was wrong with my legs and my parents called her first for comfort and help. Teta Pat’s mother even helped my father when he started his own business. She edited and typed letters for him. Teta Pat’s mom was the reason I wanted to learn to type well. Her fingers amazed me as they would fly over the typewriter. And today, because of her, mine fly over my keyboard. All of this was just friendship. This was Teta Pat and my mom. Teta Pat accepted a barely English-speaking woman and her family and welcomed us all into her heart and her family. And boy did she love that we called her “Teta Pat.” It always put a smile on her face. I think it made her feel like family; and she really was.

My favorite memories though were of Thanksgiving. In Croatia, of course, there was no such holiday. Teta Pat invited us over one Thanksgiving and it sort of became tradition. She introduced us to all of the customary foods from green bean casserole, stuffing, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, the four-cup fruit salad, the always-tender turkey, ham and the pies... oh the pies. My first taste of pecan pie and pumpkin pie was at Teta Pat’s house and my taste buds surrendered to her Thanksgiving cooking for life. To this day, no matter where we have Thanksgiving, I remember Teta Pat’s Thanksgivings with such a fondness. I try to have the foods she had. And, I firmly believe, it is because of her that Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. We’d have fun conversation, great food, amazing company and pure friendship. My mom had picked up more English, but even when words were lacking between them, Teta Pat was always able to know and understand what she was trying to say. They spoke the same language of friendship and it was enough.

Life went on, kids grew up, went off to college, but my mom and Teta Pat stayed. She was my mom’s first, best and forever friend in America. They both had obligations so they wouldn’t see each other often, but they would talk, bring dishes over to each other. It was a unique friendship—deep yet not time-consuming or filled with any demands or expectations. That is the only way I know how to explain it. Time didn’t exist; their friendship did.

A few years ago, my Dad carried the casket for Mr. Walt, Pat's husband. Today, he will be carrying Teta Pat's. She had been feeble for a long while since her husband passed. She was between hospital and home often the last couple of years. On one of these commutes, she just decided it was time to let go.

My mom has not yet spoken to me about losing her best friend. I don't know if she ever will, but I understand why she can't now. It's a hard topic of discussion. When you know someone for 40+ years, you don't even recognize the feelings that you have taking place within you at this moment of loss. But I do know that as much of an emptiness that is left in my mother's heart, in the hearts of everyone who knew and loved Teta Pat, there is a rejoicing in Heaven because she and her loving husband are reunited again. Her mother will be there with her stern, but loving manner, always saying exactly what's on her mind: "Why didn't you take better care of yourself?" Because she always made sure to take care of everyone else. Goodbye Teta Pat. May you finally rest without pain and in peace.

Obituary for Patricia S. Staron

Afterglow

I'd like the memory of me  
To be a happy one  
I'd like to leave an afterglow  
Of smiles when life is done  
I'd like to leave an echo  
Whispering softly down the ways  
Of happy times and laughing times  
And bright and sunny days  
I'd like the tears of those who grieve,  
To dry before the sun  
Of happy memories that I leave  
When life is done  
Poem By: Margaret Mead