



## Napi Joy Blake

August 13, 1928 - January 6, 2015

### BLAKE, NAPI JOY

Joy was born Napi Joy Fitzsimmons August 13, 1928 in Passaic, New Jersey to Robert and Edna Fitzsimmons, and was a granddaughter of the former World Heavyweight Boxing champion Bob Fitzsimmons.

Joy and her sister Jean grew up at their parents' home on Greenwood Lake, New York, and were swimming early and well. In 1943 when Joy was just 15 she was beating her sister (who was 5 years older), in competition and dominating the New Jersey A.A.U. Swimming, setting record after record in freestyle events. The sisters soon began swimming professionally and by 1953 had perfected the top synchronized swimming act in the Nation, and achieved star status, being featured in the Weismeller Swim Show playing at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. One afternoon at the pool before the show, Joy met an Air Force pilot, Jim Blake, who had just completed combat crew training at Nellis AFB and was waiting assignment. Two weeks later on July 5, 1953 Joy and Jim were married in Las Vegas and Joy now entered a 13 year career as an Air Force wife, doing an outstanding job in supporting squadron activities and demonstrating a real talent as a hostess, whose entertaining was highly regarded by all.

Six of those Air Force years were spent overseas, mainly in Germany, and as a natural athlete, Joy was a beautiful skier, and she and Jim were able to ski a majority of Europe's top resorts including St. Anton, Davos, Lech, and Garmish, thoroughly enjoying some of Europe's finest slopes during the overseas tours.

While stateside, mostly in Texas, Joy enjoyed a home on Lake Texoma with water skiing the sport of the moment in which she also excelled. Snow skiing also continued, with trips to Stowe, Vermont, Park City, Utah, and Mammoth, California, enjoying more of the best skiing ever.

In 1966 Jim left the Air Force and became a pilot for American Airlines, providing Joy with a new 25 year career as an Airline pilot's wife, a role in which she also completely excelled.

In 1969 Joy discovered a beautiful home on the cliff in Santa Barbara overlooking the Pacific and the Channel Islands. She and Jim immediately bought the house, having both fallen in love with the property at first sight. Joy said from the beginning it was her

retirement home and she was 100% correct. Joy quickly proceeded to completely re-landscape the yard and re-model the house, with her efforts achieving outstanding results in every respect.

Living in Santa Barbara boating became a favorite pursuit, and Joy, who had enjoyed considerable boating in her early years, proved an outstanding skipper of the beautiful skipjack which was kept over 18 years in the harbor, always eagerly enjoying fishing trips, overnight stays in many of the coves in the Channel Islands, and scuba diving with Jim. The scuba adventures stretched from New Zealand to Hawaii, along with the Santa Barbara Channel Islands where she made many dives. Joy's skill as a world class swimmer made her an exceptional diver, and on many group dives Joy returned to the boat with more air in her tank than anyone else.

Besides maintaining a lovely yard and household Joy was an avid gardener, successfully growing avocados, oranges, lemons, figs, tangerines and artichokes. Along with keeping up the home and yard Joy also found time to raise two sons, Jon here in Santa Barbara, and Jan in Northern California.

About 1970 a whole new dimension entered the picture with the acquisition of Jim's polo horses, but Joy never missed a beat and absolutely loved the horses, caring for them completely when Jim was away on an airline trip and helping keeping them fit for the games. Within a very short time Joy acquired excellent skills as a rider and horse woman, enjoying beautiful long rides on the beach with Jim and through the lovely trails of Hope Ranch. Before long the horse interest included thoroughbred race horses and Joy's first thoroughbred was foaled one evening in her barn with just Joy and the vet present. Joy practically raised the colt in her yard and when "Rulente" went to the track he won his first start in July 1973 at Hollywood Park by 5 lengths, leading all the way with Joy cheering every stride. For a number of years Joy and Jim attended the entire summer race meeting at Del Mar, booking the same hotel room in Encinitas each year and thoroughly enjoying the races from our lovely box on the finish line. In the mornings before the races and on "dark days" Joy enjoyed the warm water and lovely surf at the beach, and would body surf even the larger waves. Also there were many swims beyond the surf and her enjoyment of the Del Mar beach was complete. At the track she soon met and enjoyed many new racing friends and in short order Joy became an excellent handicapper, sharing bets with those friends and then playing individual wagers on a race or two each day for herself, and never experiencing a losing season, with some years quite rewarding! During the racing years her horses won over a dozen races from Del Mar to Hollywood Park to Golden Gate, each win greatly enjoyed by Joy and all her family.

For over 15 years Joy joined Jim in annual trips to Langara Island in the Queen Charlotte's in British Columbia, for some of the worlds' best salmon fishing. During these trips Joy mastered the wooden direct drive (no drag) Peetz reel, often called the "knuckle buster", and using 15 pound test line with same, boated numerous King salmon in the 30-40

pound range, a feat accomplished by a relatively few anglers.

The commute to Vancouver, Canada, where the Langara trips started, was made in her own plane with Jim flying and Joy thoroughly enjoying the ride. In fact she was a very happy flier, and made many trips with Jim to Del Mar, Catalina, Portland and Columbia, etc., and never hesitated to jump in and go, if only for a tour of the channel islands and a check on the rookery on San Miguel.

Always happy, eager and ready, Joy was a perfect partner in all endeavors, flying, fishing, racing, riding the horses, swimming, scuba diving and skiing. Simply an amazing, talented and beautiful woman who enjoyed and lived life to the fullest. Joy loved her boys, the horses, her dogs, and her lovely home on the cliff. Joy passed away peacefully in her sleep on January 6, 2015 at the age of 86, a woman who was truly the best possible friend and wife, accomplished and talented in numerous endeavors, all of which combined to make her the love of my life, who will live on in my memories forever, cherished for who she was and how she lived - a truly beautiful person and life, and may you now forever rest in peace my love.

# Comments

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**Scott Reid** - January 22, 2015 at 11:48 AM