

## LOVED AND LOST

# Lucy Sarappo had an unbreakable spirit

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Lucy Sarappo lived on her own in her Glen Rock home until she was 97.

She drove herself around until she was 96.

Usually, it was morning Mass at St. Anthony's R.C. Church in Hawthorne, followed by a check on her son at his office in Paterson, where he runs the family business, Electrical Equipment Solutions, founded by her late husband, Louis.



**Sarappo**

And her secret to living a long life? One beer every day.

As her daughter-in-law Arlene Sarappo remembered her, nothing was going to stop her from living life on her terms.

"She was fierce. She was extremely determined to live life in her own way," Sarappo said. "Her spirit was unbreakable."

However, a broken hip cut down on her independence as she was moved into the Christian Health Care Center in Wyckoff.

Sarappo died there on March 30 at the age of 98.

Arlene Sarappo said her mother-in-law recovered from the broken hip, but needed a wheelchair or other assistance to walk.

Still, Lucy was just as much a force of nature as she had been before she entered the home in September.

"She was very bossy, always giving orders to the people who worked there if they weren't doing their job right," Sarappo said. "And looking out for the other residents who did not have the wherewithal that she did."

For all her fierceness, the Paterson native had a giving side.

"She insisted every week that we bring money to the nursing home. And she used to try to give money to the aides but they were not allowed to take it," Sarappo said. Lucy devised a work-around: wheeling herself to a gift shop at the entrance, where she bought cookies and cake to give them instead of money.

Sarappo said the family plans to hold a memorial service for her mother-in-law when the pandemic subsides.

"We will then all toast her with a glass of Coors Light," Sarappo said.

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# Jimmie LaBarbiera of Garfield had gift of gab

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James "Jimmie" LaBarbiera, a family man with a penchant for baseball, talked up his beloved Mets at any opportunity.

"He grew up in a house of Yankees fans and we never understood how he survived," said his brother Richard LaBarbiera, the mayor of Paramus.

Jimmie, always with an "ie" and never a "y", enjoyed the simple pleasures of life and always had a smile on his face, said Richard. He died on April 22, at age 55.



**LaBarbiera**

LaBarbiera grew up in Paramus with four siblings and moved to Garfield 18 years ago to raise two sons, John and Michael, with his wife, Ula.

LaBarbiera was a salesman for many years, starting his career at a sporting goods store in Passaic. He also worked for PC Richards, Honda and Nightingale Catering. On his offtime, he loved being with his wife and children.

"Some of his most enjoyable Saturday afternoons involved going to football games with the family," Richard LaBarbiera said.

He began umpiring as a teen for Paramus Little League games. Back then, many 14- and 15-year-olds would ride their bikes to the baseball fields to umpire as a "rite of passage," said Richard LaBarbiera.

As an adult, Jimmie LaBarbiera continued to umpire games, from Little League to high school to softball.

"Jimmie always kept [baseball] stats and was always into the rules and regulations," said Richard. "He took that passion to the baseball and softballs games."

When LaBarbiera was umpiring a game, it was always going to last at least 15 minutes longer than a regular game. A lifetime "people person," he would chat up the players and the coaches, especially to discuss the 1960s Mets.

Even when things were looking grim for the Mets, he was never one to give up on his team, frequently impersonating Mets announcer Robert Murphy declaring "Ya gotta believe!" during games.

"When the Mets were out 19 games with 20 to go, he still thought they would win the World Series," said his brother.

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# Meredith Carroll, 'Grease' fan and Special Olympics athlete

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One only had to utter the word in the presence of Meredith Carroll to get her excited.

The word was "Grease," the title of the critically acclaimed musical film. But, Meredith did not care what the critics thought — she just liked the wardrobe.

Meredith, a lifelong resident of Bridgewater, died on March 26, said her father, James Carroll, a college professor of accounting and business. She was 40.



**Carroll**

Meredith, who had Down syndrome, spent six hours per day at a sheltered workshop run by The Arc of Somerset County in Branchburg. She stuffed envelopes and other tasks for a modest wage.

Meredith also was a Special Olympics athlete who racked up dozens of medals and ribbons in 50-yard walk and softball throw contests. Her bowling team was a shoo-in for 26th or 27th place, year after year. "They got their lit-

tle trophies," said Carroll, 72. "She never got a big trophy because her team wouldn't do that well, but it didn't matter."

Meredith was a glutton for competition, even as she and her father waited for their meals at a restaurant. They would roll up their straw wrappers into wads and flick them toward each other, to see whose white pellet teetered closest to the edge of the table, without falling off.

Meredith always won. "I can't begin to tell you the day-to-day stuff," Carroll said. "Every time the cuckoo clock cuckoo-ed there would be a game. There were a million little things, and it was fun."

Meredith did not always need a game to hold her attention. She only needed the soundtrack to her favorite movie, and the faux leather jacket that she bought at Party City to look like Danny Zuko. Then, her parents returned from a trip abroad with a souvenir: a necklace from Greece.

That was all Meredith had to hear before she yelled, "Grease!"

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These profiles are part of a continuing series called "Loved and Lost" about New Jersey family, friends and neighbors taken by coronavirus.

# Jersey City councilman lived the American Dream

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Michael Yun's political rise is a story that could only happen in America. And maybe only in Jersey City.

Yun, who died on April 6 after contracting the coronavirus at the age of 65, emigrated from South Korea when he was 24 and settled in Jersey City in 1981.

He told his family that when he stepped foot in Jersey City for the first time, it felt like home.

"And Jersey City's been his life ever since," said his younger son, Benjamin.

At the time, the city's population was rapidly diversifying: Yun was one of thousands of Koreans making Hudson County home.

He and his wife, Jennifer, soon bought Garden State News, selling books, magazines and more in a Central Avenue storefront. This is how many Jersey City residents first met Yun, who lived with his family in an apartment above the store.



**Yun**

Amy DeGise, now the Hudson County Democratic chair, said she sat in the shop for hours leafing through teen magazines.

"I didn't realize till I was much older how rude that was of us to do," she said. "And he never said a thing to us. He was just so happy to have us there."

Yun entered the political realm in the 1990s, as an aide to then-Mayor Bret Schundler. He ran for office in 2013, becoming the first Korean-born person to win a seat on the City Council. He was re-elected by a wide margin in 2017.

Yun sat next to Councilman Rich Boggiano at every meeting and the two became close friends.

"We worked together a lot, Michael and I," Boggiano said. "I'm going to miss going up to his store and BS-ing with him."

Benjamin Yun said his dad represented nothing less than the promise of America.

"My dad had said, the American Dream is not something achieved through personal wealth alone but through the service to those communities in which we both work and live," he said.

# Karin Mason didn't let her young nieces miss Beatles

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When Susan Jannucci and her sister were young, their aunt, Karin Mason, was their babysitter.

Their parents wanted them to go to bed early, and Mason complied. But one night, the Beatles were on TV — and she wasn't about to let her young nieces miss the show.

"She got us up to watch Ed Sullivan," Jannucci said. "She had us do jumping jacks to stay awake."

Mason, 77, of Montclair, worked in banking and was "an extreme intellect," Jannucci said. The two did crossword puzzles together and swapped books by authors they both loved.



**Mason**

They celebrated every holiday and birthday together.

Mason died April 1 at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston. A doctor there held his phone for Mason so she and Jannucci could say, "I love you."

"I'll probably never know his name," Jannucci said. "He was so compassionate."

Jannucci, her mother and Mason two years ago began building a house in Park Ridge. Jannucci's mother died in late 2018, but Jannucci, who is divorced, and Mason, who was widowed, still planned to share the new home. It was nearly finished. Mason had just picked out paint colors.

"She's just a joy to be around," Jannucci said. "I can't believe she's gone. I have to re-realize it every morning."

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# John Brennan, Little Ferry horse trainer who made it in 2003

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John Brennan had no wife, no children, no church, no vacation plans. What he had was the memory of a horse that he bought and trained and nursed. A horse that once took Brennan, an admitted minor leaguer, to the greatest event in harness racing.

That was the Hambletonian, in 2003. The trotter was a jittery, wild-eyed bay colt named Sugar Trader.

On March 10, Brennan, who lived in Little Ferry, became New Jersey's first COVID-19 fatality. He was 69. Friends and relatives talk of a big, 6-foot-three, 250-pound Queens native with a tough façade and a deadpan humor who knew how to get along with people and horses.

Brennan's father was a steamfitter who loved to gamble. "He'd bet on a cockroach," his son would recall.

Young John, who tagged along with his father to the racetrack, came to hate gambling and love horses. And so, after a few post-high school years in his father's trade, he eked out a living training small-time horses.

He was a familiar figure at the harness tracks — Freehold, Yonkers, the Meadowlands. Everyone liked John Brennan. No one feared him.

Until he got Sugar Trader. In 2001, Brennan and two other investors picked up the horse for only \$19,000. He saw something in him, maybe something of himself.

"You figure he's running as hard as he can and then, suddenly, he jumps ahead, keeps going," he told a reporter in 2003. "Most horses have this attitude: 'If I win, I win. So what?' Not Sugar Trader. Sugar Trader's always looking for someone to beat."

And looking for trouble. "He's all boy," Brennan said — not neutered. "He knows it and wants to do something about it."

He'd kick out the wall of his stall and rear up at the slightest provocation, like a bit or a hook. He kicked Brennan in the head. He kicked him in the back. The trainer took to wearing a helmet, only partly in jest.

Once, after winning a race, Sugar Trader got loose in the winner's circle and ran back onto the track.

That's where he was happiest. He lived for the competition. So did his trainer.

When Sugar Trader developed a throat infection in 2002 and had a bad reaction to an antibiotic, Brennan spent three days in the stable, feeding him fluids to keep him alive.

In 2003, his best year, Sugar Trader made it into the Hambletonian. Most of the horses in the field had been purchased for three times more. Brennan himself wasn't even in the year's media guide, recalls Ken Warkentin, the announcer who called the race. "That was going to be John's one shot."

Brennan knew it. If he won the Hambo, he said, "then they'll have something to put in my obituary."

Halfway through the race, Sugar Trader was leading. But he was passed on the inside and came in second by a length. Still, Brennan was proud, telling reporters: "He was as good as he could be."

The next year Brennan and partners sold Sugar Trader — with career winnings of \$730,898 — to a Swedish stud farm for \$700,000. Ever since, the horse has done the only thing he wanted to do, besides race.

As it turned out, they did have something to put in Brennan's obituary — the coronavirus. There was little or no mention of the fact that he was survived by a 19-year-old stallion, foal of Maple Frosting, sired by Trade Balance, who last year himself produced three foals.