



## Rita Luczynski Brzezinski

May 3, 1926 - April 23, 2016

Rita Marie Luczynski Brzezinski was delivered by a midwife at 190 Avenue E, Bayonne, New Jersey, on May 3, 1926. Her mother, Lucille Fryczynski Luczynski, was a first-generation American, having arrived alone as a teenager to Ellis Island in 1918 on a ship from Sierpc, Poland, speaking no English and knowing only a handful of the inhabitants of her new country. Her father, Edward Luczynski, also of Polish descent, was a physician who received his medical degree from Georgetown University in 1929, at the onset of the Great Depression. She and her younger brother Ed grew up in Bayonne; for a time they lived above their uncle's funeral home while their father studied medicine. She attended No. 2 Elementary School in Bayonne until the 9th grade, where the nuns shook their heads at her left-handedness and strapped her left arm to her side until she learned to write with her right. She was ambidextrous for the rest of her life. After elementary school she moved to St. Aloysius High School, also in Bayonne, where she graduated in 1943. She then attended Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, graduating in 1947 with a degree in Home Economics and a minor in Biology. Returning to Bayonne after college, she briefly lived with her parents; her father had opened his medical practice in a portion of their home, which meant that she occasionally had to serve as an unpaid, untrained medical assistant. She would sometimes be called upon to monitor patients after procedures like tonsillectomies while her father made house calls or rounded at the local hospital. On April 23, 1946—exactly 70 years before the day she died—her

life changed forever when she met John Charles Brzezinski. Recently returned from the World War II battlefields of the European Theatre, where he had been severely wounded by an exploding mortar shell, John was about two years older than Rita. They fell in love immediately; he drove to Philadelphia every Friday for the next year to visit her as she completed her senior year of college. During that year he wrote her several times a week and taped dimes to his letters; she saved every one and when they were married in June of 1948 they totaled more than \$300, which in those days was enough to fund a two-week honeymoon that took them to Quebec and New England. Rita worked for New Jersey Bell as a service representative from 1947 to 1950, earning the princely sum of \$35 per week. After she and John married, they followed the family tradition of living above her uncle's funeral home for a time, with Rita supporting them on her Bell salary until John completed his degree at Seton Hall University. After their first child, John Jr., was born in 1951, they moved to Summit, New Jersey, where they lived until 1955. They then moved to Nomahegan Court in Cranford, New Jersey, to a brand-new, split-level, three-bedroom home for which they paid \$18, 500. Rita taught Home Economics for a year and did some substitute teaching, but she was mostly very busy at home. The next 16 years saw their happy little family grow as they enjoyed a neighborhood full of people of similar ages, many with growing children of their own. By the late Sixties their family had seen the addition of three daughters, Elise, Bonnie, and Denise, and a son, Robert. In 1971 John accepted a job with Lone Star Brewing Company and Rita gamely agreed to pack up their children and head west to San Antonio, leaving behind all of their family, friends, and everything they knew. They bought a house on Waydele Circle in Castle Hills, where Rita joined the Garden Club and made many lifelong friends. In 1982 John took a position with Pabst Brewing Company in Milwaukee, and she again packed up the house and their youngest son and made the move to Grafton, Wisconsin, where she and John added many names to the long list of friends they had made around the country. They returned to San Antonio in 1985, where they would remain for

the rest of their lives. John passed away in 2007, after more than 58 years with the love of his life. Rita carried on gamely, buying herself a convertible; in several years of ownership it's believed that she put the top down one time. She welcomed three great-grandchildren in the final years of her life, an enduring source of joy to her as were her 10 grandchildren. She was a longtime volunteer with organizations like Meals on Wheels, WellMed, and Christus Santa Rosa, and donated money tirelessly to seemingly every charity of which one can conceive. She was a devout Catholic and member of Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church for the better part of four decades. An amazing cook, she could, and did, whip up 3-course meals seemingly out of thin air, 7 days a week. At Christmas she would produce more than a dozen varieties of incredible cookies, in enormous quantities; she would then store them in secure locations around the house, where it would become the mission of her children to sneak as many as possible without being caught. She was perhaps the most consistent golfer ever—each shot was about 100 yards long and arrow-straight. Like most children of immigrants who had survived the Depression, she liked her fun in small quantities—a single cup of coffee, tiny dessert portions, and one small glass of wine with ice cubes in it after dinner. She was a lover of morning walks and orange juice in her iced tea. Her wit was as dry as the Sahara Desert but unfailingly funny; watching the uninitiated struggle to determine if she was being serious was always priceless. She corrected our grammar unendingly as kids, which we found irritating as could be but for which we are eternally thankful now. You always knew where you stood with her, and she never dipped her blunt manner in a sugary coating of tact—if she thought you had gained weight, she told you; if she thought you looked great, she told you that, too. Good or bad, you could always take her comments to the bank. Known by her husband and family as "Babcia", "Great Babcia", "Buv", "Ritz", and "Ritzy", she will be missed more than can be expressed in a few words. She died peacefully on April 23, 2016, a sunny Saturday morning, to be reunited with her husband precisely 70 years

to the day after they first met. She joins John, as well as her younger brother Ed, her parents, parents-in-law, her beloved sister-in-law Helen Karpinski, and all of the family and friends who went before her in eternal rest. She is survived by her son John Jr., daughter in law Debbie, daughter Elise Rickman, son in law Dennis Rickman, daughter Bonnie Dennis, son in law Joe Dennis, daughter Denise Rucker, son in law Mike Rucker, son Robert, daughter in law Stanette; grandchildren Ryan Zuehl, Jamie Shenton, Blaine Rucker, Taylor Briggie, John "Trey" Brzezinski III, Jordan Dennis, James Cameron Brzezinski, Mica Rucker, Madison Brzezinski, and Carson Brzezinski; great-grandchildren Georgiabelle Shenton, Grayson Zuehl, and Finley Briggie; sisters-in-law Sally Luczynski and Sue Micek; and many nieces and nephews across the country. Her family would like to thank Heritage Place Assisted Living in Boerne and Alamo Hospice of San Antonio for their compassionate and attentive care in Rita's final months. A church service will be held at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church at 10 a.m. on May 10, 2016, followed by a burial service at 11:30 am at Ft. Sam Houston Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, her family respectfully requests that donations be made in her name to the American Heart Association or the American Cancer Society.