



A Tribute to Rita Smith by Don Lieberman

Rita was born in 1934 in Cranston, PA. She was one of three children. Both of her parents played bridge, and when they needed a fourth, Rita was recruited. She remembered this to be in her early teen years.

She moved to Arizona at age 14, when her father was transferred here for work. Rita attended Xavier high school in Phoenix. She then enrolled in nursing school and got a bachelor's degree. Herb, her husband, was transferred to Tucson in 1978.

Rita worked as a nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital.

She continued to work while having her large family of 8 children, 3 girls and 5 boys.

Susie, who refers to herself as number 6, was kind enough to supply many of the facts concerning Rita's life. She fondly remembers Rita coaching her in softball from the age of 4. Susie was a top-notch high school softball player and eventually got a full-ride scholarship for softball at the U of A.

Two of Rita's sons played professional golf. One son is a pilot for Southwest Airlines. All of Rita's children graduated college, and all have become successful.

Rita's husband died just before their 50th wedding anniversary. Rita developed many longstanding relationships at the bridge club and considered the club an extension of her family. She continued to live in the same house for 49 years, and hated to leave it last year; but it became clear, even to the alpha person Rita was, that the time had come to simplify things.

Rita had 19 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. Two of the great grandchildren were born after her death.

I met Rita just before I retired and asked her to teach me bridge. I also became her physician and, more importantly, her friend. She, as you know, had an aggressive style and traveled to many tournaments. She earned over 4,000 master points. She took me from 19 MPs, when we met, to life master and then bronze life master. I think she was more excited when I got my life master than I was.

You could always find the table where Rita was playing by looking for her card holder, which she used because she had carpal tunnel syndrome. The holder had pictures of all of her family members and was renewed each year with updated pictures to include new additions to the clan.

Even after her stroke a few years ago, Rita dragged herself daily to the club. Her skills suffered, but she never considered cutting back, because she enjoyed the game so much. It will be sad not seeing her at Table 6 in the future. I will miss her. We will all miss her.