



Joan Marie Sparks

January 6, 1930 - February 22, 2025

Joan Marie was born January 6, 1930, in Gary, IN to John and Anastasia Lincoln. She was the youngest of three. Joan married Leland Sparks and together they had two children, Bradley James and Michelle Diane. Leland was killed in a car accident in 1963 and Bradley passed away in 1982 at the age of 27. Both losses leaving an irreparable void in Joan's heart. Joan was a proud grandma to daughter Michelle's three children Bradley (Stephanie), Christen (Rob), Alec (Nikolina), Jack's daughter Morgan (Tushar) and great grandma to Ari, Memphis, Jameson, Lorelei, and Oliver.

Mother-in-law to Jack Knight and the late Dennis Cook. Sister in law to Rose, Charlotte (Chuckie) & Lou, Richard & Nancy. Aunt to John, Annette, Janet, Jimmy, Mark, LeeAnn, Diane, Kim, Stacy and their families. Dear friend to many.

Her presence made the world a better place. She is an inspiration.

Joan wasn't just a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, aunt, friend. She was a musician, scholar, entrepreneur, radio show host, actress, teacher, librarian, realtor, insurance agent, saleswoman, and a boater.

Joan's life was intricately woven into the tapestry of the Region- specifically the City of Gary. As a young girl, following the Great Depression, she worked at her father's Candy Kitchen/Family Theater located at 5th and Broadway,

where she said, "they produced the finest ice cream and locals gathered to enjoy an afternoon of movies and popcorn for 25 cents." Joan attended Emerson School where she graduated top of her class. At Indiana University Bloomington Joan enjoyed college "party" life then graduated with honors from the School of Music. With her husband Leland, Joan opened and as a widow operated Sparks Piano and Organ Company. The store was located at 3901 Broadway with several satellite locations throughout the region. Joan's musical and theatrical endeavors included performing with the Northwest Indiana Symphony. She spoke fondly of her opportunity to perform under the direction of Arthur Fiedler as well as her friendship with pianist Van Cliburn. Many years as musical director/actress were devoted to The Gary Music Theater where live performances once graced the Gary Methodist Church's Seaman Hall stage. She was the Women's Director and talk show host for WLTH radio station. She was a Real Estate Broker with Phipps & Funkey. She was the District Insurance Agent for the Better Beneficial Union of Pittsburg serving NWI and Lafayette, IN. Joan was the choir director and organist for Lakeside Presbyterian Church located in Miller Beach. She was the Music Coordinator at Lake Ridge Schools. After receiving her Masters of Library Science, Audio Visual, and Educational Media she was the librarian at Lake Ridge where she updated and revamped the middle school's outdated library. After 42 years of service Joan retired in 2013 from Lake Ridge Schools. Joan worked part-time in the Fine Jewelry Department at Rosalee's Ladies Shop and later in Designer Sportswear at Carson Pirie Scott both located at Southlake Mall. She taught piano, organ, flute and voice to many Regionites young and old, at one point traveling to their homes to teach. With her brother Jim and sister Georgia, she owned and operated the "Lady Qwestor" a 75' dinner and cruise boat out of Michigan City. With her brother, Joan owned and operated "Qwik Step Bait Shop" once located on Hwy 20 in Portage, IN. After retirement, Joan enjoyed many adventures. She loved to shop local businesses especially Little Bear Traders in St. John and The Schoolhouse Shop in Chesterton. Lunch dates with her retired teacher friends was a

monthly highlight.

Joan loved the water, boating especially, so she reveled in her visits to granddaughter Christen's home on the Fox River! The "Fox Box" as it is named was her favorite getaway. She loved to just take in the view of that idealistic setting, sharing her stories, and when the river allowed boat rides! In August 2024, Joan moved into a group home for seniors in Crown Point. Here she left her final indelible mark on her Two Hearts family and in return they left theirs on us. Traditions provided support and hospice care to Joan during her final days

Music, the vocal or instrumental sounds combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion... this is the definition of Joan.

Mom, you are forever my sunrise, sunset, my North Star. You are irreplaceable. You carried so much in this life yet never wavered. A mighty force in a tiny frame. Your very essence softly lingers. You cannot and will not be forgotten the memories of you everlasting. We will do our best to make you proud. Until we are reunited "Stick with Me."

A private ceremony for Joan has been planned with her immediate family. In lieu of flowers, please take a moment to listen to or perform your favorite song or think of a special moment that reminds you of Joan. She would like that. Burns Funeral Home & Crematory, Crown Point, IN, entrusted with arrangements. www.burnsfuneral.com

Tribute Wall

CL

“ So very sad to learn of Aunt Joan's passing and obituary today in December as I happened upon a internet search as Her and Aunt Georgia crossed my mind today for some reason. Joan, her sister and their brother my Grandfather Jim were really formidable special people who I wish I could have known better in life, but will always cherish the memories that I do have of them from a much better time. My deepest condolences to Michelle and all the family on your loss of this great lady and hope everyone is doing well.
Sincerely,
Christopher Lincoln
Crown Point



Christopher Lincoln - December 03, 2025 at 05:24 PM

KV

“ Joan was a beautiful lady inside and out. I taught with her for 27 years. She was the music teacher and music was a big part of her life. Joan always wore beautiful jewelry and a beautiful smile.

After retirement, a small group of teachers would meet once a month for lunch. She was witty and a great conversationalist. Joan will be missed by all.

My deepest sympathy to her daughter, Michelle, and her family.

Kathy Villalobos - April 11, 2025 at 07:26 PM

ML

“ I remember Mrs. Sparks (as this is what we called her) from Gary Music Theatre and then she moved with Brad and Michelle to Birch Place where I lived. I remember cutting through her backyard from school and she never yelled at us but her next door neighbor did. And so we learned where her property line ended. Michelle, please accept my condolences. Your mother was a great woman.

Marc S. Lichtman - March 14, 2025 at 11:28 PM

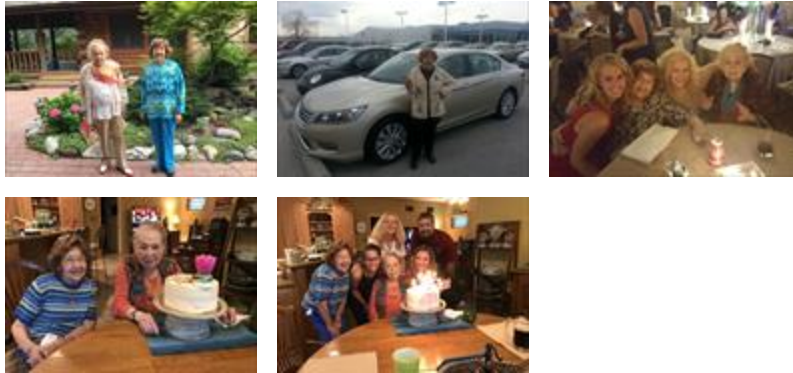
DD

“ She was my organ teacher for many years. She will be fondly remembered and greatly missed. My heartfelt condolences to her family. Debbie DeVault

Debbie DeVault - March 14, 2025 at 09:09 PM

MK

“ 46 files added to the album Joan



Michelle Knight - March 14, 2025 at 09:58 AM

DR

“ I am so sorry to hear of Joan's passing. My thoughts and prayers are with the entire family and friends.

I met Joan back in the late 60's. She hired me at Sparks Piano and Organ Co. I worked for her several years and one day she said 'why don't you buy this business from me.' So we looked into the options and opportunities. Next thing you know is I was the new owner. However, only way I would do it is if she could stay 'on board' and she said yes. She stayed at the store with her thoughts, ideas, support and teaching until I sold in late 1978.

We remained close via phone and messenger over all those years since. I must say Joan is the smartest, hardest working, most thoughtful person that I have ever met. I consider myself 'privileged' to have worked and known here all those years.

One thoughtful moment I must bring up. I was just a 20 something and the NAMM (national assn of music merchants)for dealers came up and she wanted to go, so we both agreed. We were ready to leave for Chicago and she threw me the 'keys' to her Chrysler New Yorker and said DRIVE. Must say I was a nervous wreck to drive JOAN to Chicago, yet so flattered she would let me drive. It was all good and arrived back at the store SAFE. That was just ONE of the most proud days of my life to get to do that!

So, Joan, YES, I just played MISTY for you on the piano. She liked my version of Misty. And I SMILED while playing, yet shed a little tear AS I remembered it all.

Doug Row

Doug Row - March 13, 2025 at 05:49 PM

PK

“ *Joan will be missed...my deep sent sympathy to all her family for her transition into heaven.*

Peggy Kolarik

Peggy Kolarik - March 13, 2025 at 02:19 PM

CS

“ *Just wanted to let you know that we send our deepest sympathy and prayers to you all. May god bless and keep you all in this most difficult time. The Sansone's.*

Caroline Sansone - March 12, 2025 at 01:24 AM

GZ

“ *I first met Joan when I was teaching with her at Lake Ridge. The days we were in the building, on the same day, we made sure we always ate our lunch together. We bonded over our love of music and our fondness of IU Bloomington. She loved to talk about her days growing up in the area and her family. Joan was always there to offer a hand when someone needed help. You never saw Joan without a smile on her face. The monthly lunch with the ladies was not complete without her. Prayers ascending for Joan, her family and friends.*

Gail Zmierski - March 12, 2025 at 12:27 AM

MK

“ 14 files added to the tribute wall



Michelle Knight - March 11, 2025 at 10:30 AM