

## A Tribute to the Life and Work of Cynthia A. Narvaez (née Biondi)

(June 22, 1947 – January 11, 2011)



I write “life and work” as though they are two separate activities, but anyone who knew my Aunt Cindy knows that life and work were to her inextricable. Nearly all my memories of her are tied up with seeing her hard at work. From running dry cleaning and liquor store businesses to cooking, gardening, and tailoring clothes—always with focus, good humor, and unflagging energy—Aunt Cindy was not one to sit still. When she and her husband kindly took me on a trip to their place in Puerto Rico, she undertook a multi-day “spring cleaning” of their condo and checked in on some of their businesses around our sight-seeing excursions.

Born in Queens, NY, Cynthia was the eldest child of Armand and Evelyn Biondi, with sister Arlene (my Mom) and brother Armand coming along over the next several years. A straight “A” student who turned into a rebellious teenager, she was determined to make it on her own. While waitressing at several diners, she studied to become a certified seamstress and designed and created outfits for weddings and proms. She met her future husband, cook William Narvaez, while working as a hostess in Flynn’s Seafood Restaurant in Bay Shore, NY. After she and William married, her seamstress skills added to the services of their dry cleaning business.



Lots of hard work, several businesses, and one child (Leonard Narvaez) later, Aunt Cindy had achieved a level of success and financial security that some might choose to coast on or retire early. Not her! As if all that wasn’t enough, in her early 40s, Aunt Cindy decided to switch careers and resume the pursuit of her lifelong dream of learning about and putting into practice her interest in child psychology. She did this by earning a Psychology degree from St. John’s University and then seeking certification as a Montessori Children’s House guide.



Before she was able to put her newest hard-earned skills to work in a classroom of her own, she had seizures and collapsed from the pressure of a growing benign brain tumor. This did not dampen Aunt Cindy's spirits. During a decade of surgeries and medications, she fought to overcome her illness, as she had fought to overcome all other obstacles throughout her life in pursuit of her goals—gracefully, with a smile on her lips and laughter in her eyes.

Her tumor grew, though, and became malignant. Then sadly, not long after suffering a stroke, she succumbed to illness at the age of 63. The world is poorer for her absence.

Aunt Cindy always inspired me with her fierce independence and how she never settled for conventional benchmarks of success. May this tribute to her indomitable spirit inspire others to seek out and create value, especially through education that cultivates independence and insatiable curiosity in the young.

