Efigenia Johnson

September 21, 1928 ~ February 2, 2015

Efigenia Abacan Alcaraz Johnson (Effie), World War II survivor, globetrotting army wife, slot-machine whisperer, Turner Classic Movie channel's greatest fan and special guest star in the Thunder from Down Under La Vegas show, passed away peacefully at Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, Utah on Monday, February 2, 2015 on Ground Hog Day, the namesake of the only comedy movie, which she hated. She was born September 21, 1928 and graced Planet Earth for 86 years.

As a teenager growing up during WWII throughout the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, young Effie marveled at the graceful beauty of U.S. and Imperial fighter planes dogfighting in the skies above her farm. To wide-eyed Effie,the battling aircraft looked just like giant fireflies dancing together in the heavens.

During the war, young Effie cut her hair short and wore a baseball cap and baggy boys' clothes to hide the fact that she was a developing teenage girl. She often recounted her harrowing story of hiding in a mango tree while bloodthirsty, bayonet-wielding Imperial Army soldiers searched the mango groves for Filipino guerilla snipers.

Because of her own war experience, she is the only mother I know who can sincerely smile and encourage her war correspondent son, who soon will be stepping into a hot battle zone to, "Have a great war!"

Effie had "educated feet." Whenever one of her young rambunctious children misbehaved in a restaurant, she quickly removed her shoes under the table and pinched the offending child with her crab-claw-like educated toes. The surprised offender would instantly snap to attention as if by magic. Instant discipline. All the public would ever see or hear was a kid squealing in momentary agony while their calm, angel-faced mother sported an innocent vanilla ice-cream-eating grin.

To Effie, no one was ever a stranger. If her grocery cart was parked behind yours at the local Smith's Market, by the time you arrived at the cash register, she would know your entire life's story and you would know hers.

She adored romancing and shaking hands with one-armed bandits throughout the world, especially at Circus Circus in Las Vegas. Just as with people, Effie naturally knew how to charm slot machines and get the most out of them. In gambling circles she was fondly known as the Slot Machine Whisperer.

In the kitchen, Effie was a magician,Ä¶ a true artist. On a shoestring budget with six children, she could turn the simplest ingredients into a feast fit for a king and his court. Except for one cooking-challenged offspring, Effie taught all her talented children how to become gourmet chefs either professionally or personally, just like herself.

The only skill she never shared with her six children (Lani, D.J., Mike, Aislinn, Pete, and Margie) was her native Filipino language of Tagalog. Tagalog was her secret code language, which she would only share with her beloved husband of 55 years, Edward (Jimmy, Jocko Jones) Johnson. Instead of spelling out their secrets like many parents do in front of their children, Tagalog was their personal Enigma Code.

Effie loved spending time with her eleven grandchildren (Travis, Susan, Marcelle, Alexis, Erika, Kiel, Allen, Joshua, Phillip, Robert, Jonathan) and six great grandchildren (Kai, Trysta, Gavyn, London, Pyper, and Mable).

Effie was an open book. She had no hidden agendas. And she had absolutely no brain-to-mouth filter. Whatever she thought, she said out loud...very loud. And speaking of loud, she would always be the loudest fan in the bleachers during her son's high school football games.

While taking her final trip to the hospital in an ambulance a week ago, she marveled at how fun it was to see and hear the lights and sirens. "I love it. It's like a festival."

Effie was always giving free advice to the lovelorn. She was the self-appointed Filipino version of Dear Abby. She would gladly give love advice to anyone with romance issues, whether they wanted it or not.

On her trip to Italy, her husband, Jimmy, was afraid that she would invade the Vatican and give the Pope romantic advice on how to corral the future Mrs. Pope. Luckily for the Pontiff and his Swiss Guard, on the day Effie arrived in Rome, the Vatican suddenly closed its holy gates for unexpected repairs.

Whenever she shared her cooking wisdom with her children and didn't have the exact ingredients for the recipe, her favorite mantra was, "substitute." To Effie "substitute" meant to use whatever resources you had available and simply make it work.

Or, as Effie's oldest daughter paraphrases it, "Do the best with what you've got. That's the only true recipe in life."

Effie was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Edward and daughter Aislinn (Michael) Bellinger. She is survived by her children, Evelyn "Lani" Anderson (Joe), Dolores "DJ" Johnson, Michael Johnson, Peter Johnson, Margaret Johnson; her brother Marciano Alcaraz, and sisters Lucila de Jesus, and Fe Perez; her eleven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.

We will greatly miss her love, strength and spirited personality.

A Vigil and Funeral Mass will be held at Saint Vincent DePaul Catholic Church, 1375 Spring Lane (5000 South) in Salt Lake City. The Vigil is Friday, February 6th at 6pm with Mass Saturday at 11am. A memorial reception will be held at Larkin Sunset Gardens, 1950 East Dimple Dell Road (10600 South) in Sandy, from 2pm-4pm on Saturday. For a full obituary and online condolences go to www.larkincares.com