



Anthony I. Gianunzio

September 15, 1922 - June 29, 2019

Anthony I. Gianunzio, 96, passed away on Saturday, June 29 in Orlando, Florida. Prior to his passing he celebrated a full and meaningful life. Even in the most recent months, he was speaking at events honoring veterans, encountering new ideas, sharing stories with retired teachers and creating more lasting memories with his family.

Often childhood dreams don't materialize but Tony's nearly did when the Chicago Cubs drafted him at age 19. Unfortunately, another draft – a military draft – happened at the same time and Tony was soon serving in the U.S. Coast Guard, 14 months of which were spent in the Pacific theatre.

Baseball would stay on his mind and in his heart but his thirst for knowledge led him to the library instead of the ball field. Studying Philosophy, Political Science, History and Literature, Tony earned both B.A. and M.A. degrees from Western Michigan University. He knew exactly what he wanted to do going forward.

"My dream really ended with the war, because after the war and late in the war I knew I wanted to get a college education," Tony said. "I wasn't going into professional baseball – as much as I loved it – because my real love was in teaching."

The hours he spent in the classroom capturing imaginations and inspiring writers was the essence of his life's work. He began his career as a high school English teacher in Sundance, Wyoming in 1950. Then, he taught at Mattawan High School and Portage Central High School before he became the first teacher hired at Portage Northern High School when it was built in 1965.

He retired with 53 years of experience teaching subjects in the English field, including Composition and Creative Writing. At Kalamazoo Valley Community College, he taught Writing from 1987-2003. Tony often attended reunions and enjoyed reconnecting spontaneously with former students, who would often recognize him, say hello and share fond memories.

Tony's "pride and joys" were his daughters, as he was a devoted father. He enjoyed trips with the girls to parks to sled in the winter and swim in the summer. They also frequently visited Kalamazoo's museum and library. Tony could be seen buying hot chocolate, warming hands and rubbing frozen toes after ice-skating at the outdoor rink. He encouraged listening to your own voice and doing your personal best. Tony brought vivid colors, beauty with no boundaries, and the deepest joy into their world.

Tony's unique ability to effortlessly string together words made him a great conversationalist. He had a point of view on many subjects and he was eager to share his insight and wisdom. His respect and love of life was reflected in his personal habits of daily walks and healthy eating.

In his later years, he spent hours pouring his energy into writing. His book, *The Last Romantic War*, was published in 2013. The experiences chronicled in his book led to him being interviewed for the documentary, *A Salute to Honor*, featuring World War II veterans who sacrificed personal dreams to serve in the war.

The producers of the film contacted the Chicago Cubs management, who confirmed the details, and a spectacular event happened for Tony: he threw the opening pitch at Wrigley Field for the Chicago Cubs on May 31, 2015 at age 92. "That's a moment that I will never forget," said Tony in a recent interview. "It was also difficult to be out there, walking through the infield, because I knew that I would have been doing that as my job had things not gone differently. It was really like living in two different dimensions at the same time. It was surreal in a lot of ways.

"I don't regret anything, though," he added. "I've been blessed to live a wonderful life full of love and vivid memories."

Survivors include: Carolyn Gianunzio, wife, of Kalamazoo. Daughters Denise (Thomas) Valeko of Portage, MI and Alexandra (Jan Michael Loomis) Marquette of Orlando, FL, and their mother, Jeanne Nikitas, of Orlando, FL. Grandsons Ryan Valeko and Michael Loomis. Sister Santina Garcia, and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents Nunzio and Isabella (D'alphonso) Gianunzio, brothers Romeo, Joseph, Rudolph, Louis, John and Fiore and sisters Mary De Grave, Elaine Ferguson, Dominica Schroud and Olympia Gianunzio (infant).

He will be missed beyond words.

Funeral arrangements in his hometown of Iron Mountain, MI are being planned by Erickson-Rochon & Nash Funeral Home.