



Pete Encinas Celaya

June 29, 1932 – October 20, 2025

Pete Encinas Celaya, 93, returned to his eternal home on Monday, October 20, 2025. He passed away peacefully surrounded by his family and wife, Sally, by his side. His journey on this earth was one marked by his unwavering faith and his deep love for his family. His passing has left a void in the hearts of his family, friends, and many more whose lives were touched by him.

Pete was born on June 29, 1932, in Florence, Arizona, to Arturo and Consuelo Celaya. He was the fifth of eleven children including Art, David, Freddie, Louie, Tommy, Tony, Eddie and sisters Carmela, Flora, and Angie. He was born during the Great Depression to a poor

devout Catholic family where finances were hard but love in the home and sibling bonds were strong. He always shared that Nana Celaya was a great cook and somehow always managed to have a meal on the table for all to enjoy. Being a part of a large family shaped his core values of faith, hard work, and family which he carried with him throughout his life.

He received his formative education in the Florence school system where he excelled academically and developed a greater love for sports including football, basketball, and baseball. Basketball was his favorite.

During summer breaks, Pete joined his older siblings working in the fields of Arizona and California picking cotton, fruit, and other crops to help support the family. He fondly recalls their travels to California as a family adventure, enjoying the cooler weather there, sleeping under the stars, and taking a break from the Arizona heat.

Upon graduating from high school Pete attended the University of Arizona, following in the footsteps of his older siblings. Despite facing hardships, including professors who viewed his ethnic background as a barrier to opportunity, Pete persevered. He graduated with a degree in Education from the U of A and later earned his Master's Degree in Counseling.

Pete met his wife, Sally Ruiz Celaya, in 1957 as they were paired in a wedding in Florence. Neither of them thought much of each other at that time. Fast forward five years, Pete ran into Sally again at a dance at the American Legion Hall in Phoenix in early 1962. A short six-month courtship followed, and they married on November 17, 1962. They began building their family roots in Florence where Pete was teaching. In October 1963, they welcomed the birth of their son, Pete Jr. Pete and Sally then completed their family lineage with the birth of their three daughters, Trish, Rachel, and Liz.

Pete dedicated his life to education, serving as a math teacher, coach, and mentor to countless nephews, nieces, and students. He began working as an Academic Advisor at Central Arizona College when the school opened and remained there until he retired in 1992. Pete had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge believing that continuing education was the greatest gift and something no one could ever take away from you. As an educator, Pete touched the lives of his students, challenging and inspiring them to approach learning with open minds and to always have a hunger for learning. Many times, Pete would run into a past student and spend time chatting with them and we would ask him "who was that" and he would say "I don't remember, but they said I was impactful in their educational journey." That always made him feel good.

Upon retirement Pete and Sally traveled, making memories and enjoying life's experiences. They cherished visiting friends and often explored new destinations that brought them joy. Pete had a passion for writing, sharing stories of his upbringing and occasionally crafting poems. He loved all sports, spending Saturdays watching games, flipping channels, and "coaching" everyone from the couch. As his grandchildren began playing sports, he enjoyed attending their games and supporting them in their individual pursuits.

Pete is survived by his wife of 62 years, Sally; his son, Pete Celaya Jr.; and his daughters, Trish (Martin) Aguirre, Rachel Celaya and Elizabeth (Frank) Rivera.

He will be deeply missed by his 11 grandchildren, Frankie (Morgan) Rivera, Chris Aguirre, Marcus Celaya, Zack Strand, Raymond (Brianna) Rivera, Mike (Jaimie) Aguirre, Matthew Celaya, Zane Strand, Amanda Aguirre, Abraham Rivera, and Maya Rivera.

Kit, Emmett, Rayna and Frankie Rivera, his favorite little people, will also miss Great Tata tremendously.

A viewing for Pete will take place on Sunday, November 9th, 2025, from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. at Heritage Florence Funeral Home, 360 N. Park St., Florence, Arizona 85132.

A celebration of Pete's life will take place on Monday, November 10th, 2025, at the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, located at 221 E. 8th Street in Florence, Arizona. Recitation of the Holy Rosary will begin at 9:00 a.m., followed by Mass at 9:30 a.m.

May Pete's memory be a blessing, and may we carry forth his legacy of faith, family, and love in all we do. Your light will forever shine brightly in our hearts Dad, Tata, and Great Tata!