

Stepfather Claims

FACTS

- Diana Nyad was born in New York City on August 22, 1949, to William and Lucy Sneed (nee Curtis).
- Lucy [filed for divorce](#) from William on July 2, 1953, in Palm Beach, Florida.
- She married [Aristotle \(Aris\) Z. Nyad](#) on November 29, 1953, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Aris was [gorgeous, charismatic, and a spectacular dancer](#). He was also a pathological liar, smuggler, and con man.

His stepdaughter doesn't need to lie to tell fascinating stories about him, but she does anyway. One of her fabrications involves when she learned Aris was her stepfather. In a recent interview, she said she didn't find out until she was 48, just after his death circa 1997.

But she knew decades earlier.



Above: Aris Nyad, Lucy Nyad, and Art Roumel. From [Palm Beach Life, March 5, 1954](#), via [archive.org](#).

1953 – 1954

age four



Above, left: Diana's [first press](#). Above, right: From [Palm Beach Life, March 19, 1954](#). By all accounts — mainly her own — Diana was a precocious kid. She likely knew why her name kept changing.

1971, Dec 6

age 22

“Mr. Sneed,’ she calls her father, a man she never knew. Her parents were divorced when she was three, and soon afterward her mother married a wealthy Greek land developer named Aristotle Zason Nyad.”

Sports Illustrated, [“She Takes A Long Swim Off A Short Pier” \(archived\)](#), 6 Dec 1971

1975

age 26

“Diana Nyad was born Diana Sneed, but her parents divorced when she was 3, and she never knew her father. Her mother Lucy’s second marriage, which also ended in divorce, was to a wealthy Greek land developer named Aristotle Zason Nyad.”

New York Times, [“A Swimmer Fails to Circle Manhattan”](#) (penultimate column, sixth paragraph), 25 Sep 1975

1978

age 28, take 1

“She was born Diana Sneed, in New York, then raised in Fort Lauderdale with a younger half-brother and half-sister, whose last name, Nyad (prophetically, the word naiad means water nymph in Greek), became her own.”

New York Times, [“Marathon Woman,”](#) 18 Jun 1978

1978

age 28, take 2

“Because of the similarity of her name to naiad, a Greek water nymph, many people believe she [Diana] invented ‘Nyad’ for herself. She was born Diana Sneed; Nyad was the name of her mother’s second husband.”

Ms. Magazine, [“Diana Nyad: The Obsession of the Long-Distance Swimmer” \(complete issue\)](#), Aug 1978

2012

“Many years after childhood” and “forties”

“Many years after childhood, I learned that Aristotle wasn’t even my dad. I mean, he was my dad, in that he adopted and raised me, from age 2 to 14.¹ But my biological father's last name was Sneed. Diana Sneed. Terrible.”

¹Aris Nyad didn’t adopt Diana. [Aris and Lucy’s divorce decree](#) states that the divorce legally affected one child. That would have been Liza, the only biological child of Lucy and Aris. The judge awarded Lucy custody. The decree doesn’t mention the other two Nyad children because Aris, as Diana and William’s stepfather but not adoptive father, had no legal claim to custody.

. . .

“Diana's birth father — the un-eponymous Sneed, about whom she didn't learn until her forties.”

Elle, [“The Hunger: Swimming from Cuba to Florida,”](#) 25 May 2012

2014

College

“When Nyad was in college, her mother revealed that Aris was her stepfather, and that her real father had left when she was three years old. By the time Aris died, in 1998, Nyad had already made peace with her memories of him.”

The New Yorker, [“Breaking the Waves”](#) ([archived](#)), 10 Feb 2014

2022

“When I was 48,” take 1

“But to tell you the absolute biological truth, I was born Diana Winslow Sneed. My mother got rid of Sneed very quickly. I guess he was a no-good kind of guy, and she had my name changed legally. I grew up with this Greek father, Aristotle Zanith Nyad. I always thought my name was Nyad. I was Greek as far as I’m concerned, just like my sister and brother. And when I was 48 and Nyad died, my mother told me that he was not actually my birth father.”

[No Barriers](#) podcast: [“Chasing Dreams with Diana Nyad”](#) (1:00:58), 3 Jun 2022

2023

“When I was 48,” take 2

“My sister was born from [Aristotle] Nyad and my mother, but my sister and I never considered ourselves stepsisters, stepsiblings. We didn't even know that that was the case. When I was 48 years old, Aris Nyad died, and my mother told me the truth that there was a birth father named William Sneed.”

[“Veteran Feminists of America Pioneer Histories: Diana Nyad,”](#) 2:07, Feb 2023

BONUS ENTRY

2012

Diana erases her biological father

HOST: “Growing up then, are you swimming in the local Y pools? I mean, where are you going to swim?”

NYAD: “It came in there when my mother divorced my father for the second time. So that's a whole other story. We’ll do another show on that.

“She got down to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. So, when I was 10, I was in New York half of the year and Fort Lauderdale half of the year. And the better I got at swimming, I would be more there, more there, more there, until I just wanted to be in Florida and swim.”

Rowan Radio, “[Studio 89.7 - Diana Nyad on The Big Swim from Cuba to Florida](#)” ([clip](#)), fall 2012

NOTE: Little that Nyad says in the Rowan Radio citation is true. Lucy Nyad divorced twice — once from William Sneed and once from Aristotle Nyad. Lucy moved the family from New York to Palm Beach when Diana was about three, met Aris, and they all moved to Fort Lauderdale [when Diana was six or seven](#).

For the bit about spending half the year in New York and half in Florida, we have only Diana’s word, so it probably didn’t happen.



Above: Diana Nyad in first grade at Palm Beach Private School, May 1956. [An item in the Miami Herald](#) the next month says her parents plan to move to Fort Lauderdale. Articles from later that year [confirm that the move](#).

compiled by Daniel Slosberg

daniel@nyadfactcheck.com

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