



# Rena Karras

NOV 29, 1933 - FEB 12, 2011



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## **Rena Karras**

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**R**ena Rae Duff was born on November 19, 1933 to William Ward and Dorothy Isabella Duff. Rena was born at Garfield Medical Center in Monterey Park California and loved with her parents and siblings Robert, Helen, Audrey, and Rosetta in Alhambra.

Rena was born during the middle of the Great Depression and was the baby of a family of seven. The family, like most Americans, struggled to make ends meet and got by during our Country's tough economic times. However, Rena as a small girl was happy and enjoyed life living with her family. She went to Inez Elementary School in Alhambra and later attended Mark Keppel High School which had recently opened to accommodate an increased post-war population in and around the Los Angeles area.

Proud of her sisters, Rena enjoyed a very active teenage childhood spending free time with Rosie and Junie at the beach and the department stores of Los Angeles. Rena graduated from Mark Keppel in June of 1951 and went to work for the Title and Trust Insurance Company in Los Angeles. Rena also worked at Tyler's Restaurant as a waitress in Los Angeles.

In 1954, Rena met Nicholas George Karras who had recently been discharged from the Marines and was looking to settle down in the warm sunny climate of Southern California. Later that year, the two were married and lived in an apartment owned by her parents in Monterey Park. Soon after, they moved to the eastern San Gabriel Valley and eventually settled in Charter Oak. In 1959, George Nicholas -" their first child was born on September 24th. James Nicholas was born two years late on October 23 and on May 29th, 1963, their daughter Katheryn Lynn was born.

Life was prosperous in the early 1960's in Southern California, and Nick was running a successful chain of barbershops while Rena raised her children at home. However, there were troubling times between Nick and Rena and their marriage ended in 1966. Rena moved in with her parents in Azusa and needed to seek a career. She chose nursing as a profession and entered the Mount



San Antonio College Licensed Vocational Nursing Program and after two years graduated as a LVN, while attending nursing school, Rena worked two jobs as a Nurse's aide.

Another significant event in Rena's life followed when her father passed away in 1968. Rena assisted her mother through these difficult times and continued to reside with her mom who helped raise Rena's children while she began her new career working as a nurse. Rena was very close to her mother and enjoyed spending time with her and her children during her free time. Many of her days were spent taking long drives with her mom at her side and the three kids in tow in the back seat. A trip to Thrifty's Drug Store for ice cream, was a popular final destination for the passengers after a day's trip to various points of interest around Southern California.

In 1972, after a series of relocations in and out of rental houses, Rena found a home she felt met the family's needs and settled in Rowland Heights, California. Shortly thereafter, Dorothy soon rejoined the family in Rowland Heights and the kids settled in to their new schools. Rena continued to move from hospital to hospital as she gained more experience and was able to obtain better positions. She worked many prominent healthcare facilities in Southern California including Garfield Medical Center (where she and her three children were all born), Queen of the Valley Hospital, Whittier Hospital and Pacific State Hospital in Pomona.

In 1978 Rena's mother passed away. This was a sad time for Rena who was very close to her mother. This event set a course of events that resulted in Rena making a significant life decision. In 1979, Rena sold her home in Rowland Heights, California and relocated to Washington State near her sister Helen. After exploring the various suburbs of the greater Seattle-Tacoma areas, Rena settled in Lakewood, Washington where she purchased her new home. George and Jim elected to remain in California as they both had graduated from High School and were both entering adulthood out on their own. Kathy relocated with her mother to their new Washington home.

Rena soon landed a job at Western State Hospital in nearby Steilacoom, Washington. George joined his mother and sister in Lakewood in 1981. Rena worked at Western state until she retired in 1996 at the age of 62. Rena spent her newly found extra free time with her daughter Kathy and her grandchildren Craig James, Christopher David and Cierra Nichole, who resided with Rena in the Lakewood home.



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Many trips were taken by Rena with her sister Helen to visit many of Washington State's beautiful locations including La Conner, Snoqualmie falls, Steilacoom, Seattle and Victoria, B.C. the two made many trips to Southern California to visit their brother and sisters and the rest of the Duff family still residing back home. These outings often included Rena's daughter and her children. Rena's son Jim accompanied her and Helen on a couple of the return trips from California back to Washington.

Rena enjoyed her golden years spending time with her five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren whenever she could. During the last couple years of her life, Rena developed significant health issues and her travels became limited. She spent time at home with her family watching old game shows and movies on TV and spending time at her favorite spot in the house which was in front of the kitchen window which overlooked her favorite tree in the yard where she spent many hours watching the birds. When she could, she would sit out in the front yard amongst the birds so she should feel Washington's warm sun on her face whenever there was a sunny day -" which reminded her of her home in warm and sunny Southern California. Rena passed away peacefully in her own bed while sleeping on Saturday morning, February 12, 2011 at the age of 77. She will be deeply missed by her family and friends.



## Tribute Wall

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**James Metcalf** posted:

I miss you grandma

July 27 at 3:35 AM



# Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Rena by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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