

DonnaRae Labrum Tietjen

March 18, 1928 ~ January 7, 2024

After an exceptional and long life (two months shy of 96) our precious mother passed away on Sunday evening, January 7, 2024 at her home in Salt Lake City, Utah, surrounded by her six children, many of their spouses, grandchildren, and loved ones, who held her, sang to her, told stories, and mourned her passing from a fall followed by sepsis.

DonnaRae Labrum Tietjen was born in Roosevelt, UT to Clarence Henry Labrum and Lela Ray Neilson, on March 18, 1928. Two years later her only sibling, her sister Renee, was born. Her father owned his own leather goods repair shop and her mother was a homemaker.

DonnaRae's birth occurred shortly before the Wall Street financial crash in 1929, which impacted their little family. Their home was a modest one: a clapboard house without a foundation, insulation, heat in the bedrooms, running water, or an indoor toilet until improvements could be made, mostly after WWII. Although their means were meager, it was a home of love and learning to make do. Unlike people in the city, they had a large garden of vegetables and fruit, which they preserved in a very hot kitchen during the summer to supply their food needs during the winter.

The Great Depression and later, World War II, impacted her schooling as qualified male teachers were sent to war. Nonetheless, she was blessed to have some excellent instruction in music. Singing was a great passion of hers throughout her life, and she started singing as a little girl. She had a lovely rich alto voice, and sang in choirs, trios, and duets for church, funerals, society teas, and numerous other functions around town, and did the same later as a young mother in Kanab, UT. Later when the family moved to Bountiful, UT, she sang with the Jay Welch Chorale and The Choral Arts Society until issues from Macular Degeneration stopped her from participating. After that, she sang by memory.

After World War II, she attended Brigham Young University, where she majored in Elementary Education. It was there where she met Darrell Garth Tietjen from Kanab, UT, who was attending the university on the GI Bill. He had played alto and tenor saxophones in the military bands during the war while stationed in Alaska, and his talent allowed him to support himself with playing gigs for dances and other events while he was attending BYU.

Their romance resulted in their being married in the Salt Lake Temple on December 16, 1949. After graduating from BYU, Garth and DonnaRae both got teaching positions in Vernal, UT, but mom had to break her contract because in those days a woman couldn't teach if she was pregnant. After their first child (Renee) was born, mom got a job teaching 4th grade. It was hard for her to be away from her baby that year, so she didn't renew her contract.

Five other children were born to Garth and DonnaRae: Estelle, Roland, Darrell, Toni, and Laura. In addition to caring for her six kids, she also welcomed her widowed father-in-law to live with them after he retired. She was an amazing seamstress; making most of our everyday clothes as well as formals, three-piece suits, and two beautiful wedding dresses. Her pies were to die for, and her bread was divine.

Mom was an amazing individual. She was curious, ever eager to learn new things, adventurous, a pillar of unconditional love, a constant source of wisdom, and exhibited strength beyond comprehension. Until her last few months of life, she made sure she was up on current affairs, political or otherwise, by reading the newspaper daily and listening to public radio. She was slow to judge others, and was always kind and accepting of people who had different values and lifestyles from her own.

She loved to read throughout her life and although she became quite competent in using Books for the Blind, the loss of her sight due to Macular Degeneration was a great trial. Regardless, she continued to travel and was grateful that the airlines provided the support she needed to do so.

She was a devoted member of the LDS Church and her faith was an anchor for her when confronting problems that came her way. Although she never saw her life as exceptional, it was. And her character, focus, and choices remained true to her values of love and acceptance.

Mom never had many riches, but she made the most of what she had. And what she had, she made rich. She enriched her home with love, strength, fortitude, loyalty, wisdom, graciousness, humor, self-reliance, and a sparkle in her brown eyes. Those eyes could no longer see clearly for many years, but those of us who have been blessed to know her, could see a truly good and wonderful woman.

No one believed in us more, and we will miss you desperately, but we know this grief we feel is just the outpouring of the love we have for you.

She is preceded in death by her husband Garth, and survived by her sister Renee Rushton, her children Renee Tietjen (David Eakin), Estelle (Joe) Lance, Roland (Geri Baker), Darrell (Char Miller), Toni Tietjen, Laura Tietjen (Steve Moore), her 12 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren.

Our family would like to give profound appreciation to Neighbors Helping Neighbors from the U of U’s College of Social Work, Dr. Jeffrey Twitchell (her primary care physician), Carrie Rhodes from the Loveland Clinic (master extraordinaire of phlebotomy), Nancy Trant from Salt Lake County Aging Services (who visited her every week for many years), the wonderful members of the Ensign 1st Ward, and the caring staff and doctors at the Moran Eye Center.

Viewing and Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, January 13, 2024 at the Ensign 1st Ward located at 135 A St (between 2nd and 3rd Avenues), Salt Lake City, UT. Viewing is from 9:30am to 10:30am, and Memorial Service will follow at 11am. For those unable to attend, services will be streamed via Zoom. Please click on the watch services link above.