

Irene Harris

March 24, 1946 ~ January 30, 2022

Salt Lake City, Utah—Irene Harris

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Irene Harris, beloved sister, aunt, and great-aunt, died on January 30, 2022 following a recent cascade of health challenges. Irene was a joyful person with an intellectual disability who lived a long and rich life, thanks to the love and support of family, friends and caregivers.

Irene was the daughter of Richmond Terrell (Dick) Harris and Afton Brainard Harris, and the sister of Terrell Harris Dougan. Irene lived her life in Salt Lake City, surrounded by familiar places and friends, of whom she had many. Irene never met a stranger. She would introduce herself to anyone she encountered and would ask how their day was going. She was delighted to see her Buddies at the restaurants where she was a regular, the grocery store, and the many shops she loved. While she couldn't read or write, Irene had an uncanny sense of direction, and could tell you exactly how to get anywhere you needed go – and particularly how to reach some of her favorite destinations: the Dollar Store, Tracy Aviary, Hogle Zoo, The Other Place Restaurant, The Spaghetti Factory and Target. She could also tell you where you parked your car, in case you forgot!

Irene's life had an impact far beyond her friend and family circles; in fact, Irene inspired a movement. In the early 1950's there were no programs for children with intellectual disabilities except the Utah State Training School in American Fork. Irene's father wrote a letter to the editor of the Salt Lake newspapers inviting other parents of intellectually disabled kids to join him in organizing, instead of agonizing. They began the first day care center in Utah for those of kindergarten age. These parents went on to organize the first association in Utah for children with intellectual disabilities, setting up community programs for group homes and sheltered workshops. In 1969 they lobbied the legislature into passing House Bill 109, to include intellectually disabled students in the law guaranteeing free public education for all Utah's children. They had no paid lobbyists; they spoke to legislators from their hearts. Joining together with parents from all over the country, the national association, now called The ARC of the United States, became known in the 1970's as the most effective voluntary action group in the country.

As an adult, Irene attended Columbus Community Center's sheltered workshop for 18 years and lived in group homes and apartments with TURN Community Services. Thanks to her devoted Uncle Bob Brainard, Irene was able to spend the last 25 years of her life in a home in the Avenues, with caring companions to assist her.

Irene was a gal who knew what she wanted and tried to get it, whether it was packing her suitcase full of unauthorized candy from the hotel mini bar, charging haircuts to her sister, or skating over to the Special Olympics judges and announcing that it was her birthday (it was not). Terrell was encouraged by friends who heard "Irene stories" over the years to write a memoir about caring for Irene, and in 2009 published "That Went Well: Adventures

in Caring for My Sister." Irene attended the book signing at The King's English Bookstore and basked in the spotlight.

Irene loved birthday presents, card games, bingo, phone time, the color orange, cheesecake, dollies, valentines, coloring books, dollar bills, watches, visiting the deer in the cemetery, swimming, bowling, going out to lunch, sitting in her beautiful garden, receiving cards in the mail, bathtub ducks, and giving the prayer before dinner. She fervently believed in Santa.

Irene's friends meant the world to her. Her childhood friend Christine Lund Packman remembered her every Christmas and birthday, and she shared many happy times with dear pals Dorothy and Shannon Mullins, playing Uno and traveling to Sun Valley, Idaho. Geri Clark took Irene on fun adventures on TRAX, just to experience the new train. Irene's Avenues neighbors Heather Davenport, Ann Floor, and Mary and Rose Walton were happily anticipated visitors. The famous Ted Rausch at Smith's on 6th Avenue was beloved. There are so many more friends to list; you know who you are.

Our family is forever grateful to Gretchen Casto, Irene's very best Buddy, for devoting 22 years to Irene and her program, and to the many other caretakers who made Irene's home life possible, including Janelle Guymon, Jeanne Herleth, Genie Mukampamo, Tammie Miller, and Helen Hodgdon.

A fall last May began Irene's rapid descent into insurmountable medical problems, including a fast-growing brain tumor, infections, a fracture, and finally contracting COVID-19—Irene was not one to want to be left out. She spent the last six months of her life at Capitol Hill Memory Care. Irene loved the activities at Capitol Hill, including "spa night," playing bingo, van rides, and attending church on Sundays with the missionaries.

Irene had a loving and close family. She leaves behind Terrell and her husband Paul Dougan, her two nieces Katy (John) Andrews and Marriott (Craig) Bartholomew, and four grandnieces, Emily (Theo) Samore and Mimi Andrews, and Isabel and Anna Bartholomew.

Irene will be interred next to her parents at Salt Lake City Cemetery. The family wants to thank the kind and caring staff at Capitol Hill Memory Care, the amazing medical team and social workers at Salt Lake Regional Hospital Psychiatric Ward and Intensive Care Unit, and Elevation Hospice for easing Irene's end-of-life experience with peace and comfort.

A joyful celebration of Irene's life will be held in May or June, at which we will definitely dance the Hokey-Pokey. Friends, please contact Larkin Mortuary if you would like to be included and let us know your current address and email.

Irene had a magnet on her refrigerator, which she could not read, of course, but it kind of says it all: The only normal people are the ones you don't know very well.

Rest in peace, Irenie Capini.