

LaRee Ethel Birch Birrell

September 17, 1932 ~ August 19, 2023

Named after her grandmother, LaRee Ethel Birch was born on September 17, 1932, to Azie Birch and Geneva Mann Birch along with her twin sister, LaRae. Raised in Salt Lake City, LaRee attended Washington School and Madison Jr. High before graduating with her diploma from Granite High School. She experienced many trials during her schooling, including health challenges and being held back. She was often called Tiny, Shorty, or Half Pint, but despite her short stature, those who knew LaRee well admired her for her artistry, compassion, faith, and headstrong personality.

LaRee was a very talented dancer. She began dancing at the age of 12 years old with the Manya Martell Studio of Dance, and she quickly fell in love with the art form. Her focus was on Ballet and Adagio. She stayed with Martell for 7 years, dancing with her younger sister Myrle in revue's twice a year. They were privileged enough to perform at the Utah Theatre. LaRee's talent was considered outstanding by many, and she was even offered a dancing position with a circus; however, she stayed in school and completed her education.

LaRee was a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She served in many church callings throughout her life, and she always gave her all to care for anyone who needed help. She served as a relief society chorister, a care center coordinator, a visiting teaching supervisor, a primary teacher, a counselor in the relief society presidency, a relief society day worker, a Jr. sunday school teacher, a cub scout leader, and a stake missionary. She enjoyed the 9 years she spent as a leader in the cub scout program, helping the scouts earn their badges and progress forward in the program.

While serving as a stake missionary, she met a very handsome young man by the name of Robert LeRoy Birrell, who was also serving as a stake missionary. They first met at a stake meeting. LaRee was sitting alone. Robert walked over, sat down next to her, and said, "I might as well sit here." They didn't say a word to each other throughout the entire meeting. He later asked her on a date, and the rest is history. Robert proposed to LaRee on her birthday in 1954. They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on March 25, 1955. They were blessed with six children: Laura, Janice, Michael, Gary, Rick, and Diane.

LaRee was an amazing wife and mother, always ensuring that her house was orderly and that her children were fed and taken care of. In addition to her household duties, she worked as a seamstress at Mododay/High Country with her daughter Laura, and she later worked as a caterer at
Distinctive Catering with her son, Gary, for many years. Despite her busy schedule, she always made sure she was available to help her family in any way they needed. When her husband, Robert, was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, LaRee stood by his side as his personal caregiver for 25 years, until his death in 2007.

LaRee was an excellent seamstress. She put 100,000,000 miles on her Bernia sewing machine, making clothes for herself, her children, and others. In her free time, LaRee loved making quilts to serve her friends and family. She made each of her children special quilts when they got married. She would make a quilt for each new grandchild born to her family, and one year for Christmas, she made each of her grandchildren a quilt as a gift. She called herself on a “quilting mission,” making quilts to donate to the Church’s Humanitarian Center. She was truly an outstanding example of love and service.

Later in life, LaRee was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease. Despite the difficulties that came with this diagnosis, LaRee fought to maintain her independence. She was always feisty and strong willed, and she never gave up. Even in the last months of her life, she could be seen trying to leave her caregivers to go take care of her mother, who she loved very much. LaRee’s struggle against Alzheimer’s Disease finally came to an end on August 19, 2023, when she returned to her Heavenly home and was finally able to see her mother again. Her children are confident she had an amazing reunion with her parents, siblings, husband, and son, Michael, who died 3 years prior; which, due to this disease, she didn’t know he had passed.

Her example of faith and devotion has forever impacted the lives of those she knew. She will be deeply missed, but her family looks forward to continuing to share her legacy of faith and service before they are reunited with her again in the eternities.

LaRee is preceded in death by her parents, Azie and Geneva Birch; her siblings, Donald Birch, Cecil Birch, Vaughn Birch, LaRae (Birch) Harrison, Calvin Birch, Eulale (Birch) Duncan; her husband, Robert Birrell; and her son, Michael Birrell.

LaRee is survived by her sister, Myrle (Sherran) Pace; and her children, Laura Birrell, Janice (Bill) Grow, Daughter-in-law Barbara (Michael) Birrell, Gary (Joyce) Birrell, Rick (Sheree) Birrell, and Diane (Patrick) Clifford. LaRee and Robert have twenty-three grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren.

A viewing will be held on Thursday, August 24, 2023, at the Kimball Ward, LDS Stake Building, on 2280 S. 300 E, South Salt Lake City, UT, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The funeral will be held the following day, on Friday, August 25, 2023, at 11:00 a.m. at the Kimball Ward, LDS Stake Building, 2280 S. 300 E. A viewing will be held prior to the funeral from 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. Interment will be at Elysian Gardens, 1075 E. 4580 S. Salt Lake City, UT.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to the Alzheimer’s Association.