



# Marjorie Berney Harrigan

APR 28, 2015



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FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATORY

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# Marjorie Berney Harrigan

APR 28, 2015

**M**arjorie Berney Harrigan passed away on the morning of April 28. She was 94. She died at home, in her own bed, beneath a reproduction of Van Gogh's Sunflowers, a rosary on her night table, the walls and every level surface of her bedroom crowded with framed photographs of loved ones.

She was born Marjorie Elizabeth Berney on Nov. 28, 1920 in Horton, Kansas. Her father was Irish, her mother was Czech, both sides steeped in many generations of Catholic lore and values. After graduating as the valedictorian from her high school in 1938, she moved with her parents and five siblings to Oklahoma City, where she studied nursing at St. Anthony's Hospital and enlisted in the Army during World War II. After basic training at Hammer Field in Fresno California, where she learned to assemble and fire a submachine gun, Lt. Berney was transferred to a desert air base in Ephrata, and later to Hamilton Field in San Francisco, just beyond the Golden Gate. There she would stand on the tarmac with the other surgical nurses, waiting to minister to the wounded men being flown in from the horrific battles of the Pacific war. While stationed in Ephrata, she met Capt. James E. McLaughlin, known as Mac to his friends. He was a decorated fighter pilot who had been shot down off the coast of New Guinea and, as a test pilot a few years later, had bailed out of an airplane that had broken in half in mid-air.

When Marjorie met Mac, he was in the hospital recovering from the malaria he had developed in the South Pacific. Theirs was a movie-worthy WW II romance between a cocky pilot and his brown-eyed nurse, a courtship in which he took her on moonlit flights over San Francisco Bay and beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. When he was out of the state one day and learned that another pilot had developed a crush on Marjorie, he preemptively mailed her an engagement ring. She accepted his proposal by return mail.

But it was a romance overtaken by tragedy. After the war was over, and after they were married, Mac was killed in a plane crash in Washington State. By that time, Marjorie had a six-month-old son, Jim, and was pregnant with Steve. Stunned and grieving, she moved home to her parents' house in Oklahoma City, where a few months later she was struck by lightning while still pregnant.



## Obituary

## Marjorie Berney Harrigan

She survived, and with the support of the extensive Berney family she earned a bachelors degree at Oklahoma City University. After a few years she met Tom Harrigan, who as a young man had been a roughneck for Standard Oil in the Argentinean wilderness, and later became an independent oil operator based in Abilene, Texas. He was almost 20 years older, but his confident bearing and his sly Irish humor were irresistible. They eloped to Fort Worth, where Tom knocked on the door of the Bishop's residence and talked him into suspending the rule that they couldn't be married during Lent. He sent Marjorie shopping for a wedding dress at Neiman Marcus, and bought a pair of 1954 Oldsmobiles. They moved to Abilene, where Tom became a father to Marjorie's two young boys who had never known their own.

The family lived in a modest frame house, green with a yellow front door, with a yard bordered by a cinderblock fence and a water fountain Tom installed in the boys' bedroom. They had two more children, Julie and Tommy. In 1959 the Harrigans moved to Corpus Christi. Marjorie was terrified of water but also bewitched by it. Almost every Sunday after Mass—which was always a mandatory event -she and Tom drove the children to Access Road Three on Padre Island and had a picnic on the side of the car. These Padre Island outings bequeathed to her children a lifelong fascination with the ocean and the moody seascape of the Texas coast.

While still in her 40's, she suffered a series of heart attacks that might very well have killed her, but through careful consultation with her doctors and with her formidable nurse's insight, she lived for almost 50 more years without another incident. She raised her children through the tumultuous years of the late 60's and early 70's, providing a constant moral beacon during a time when traditional values were in a confusing state of upheaval. Her love for her children—unquestioned, unqualified, boundless—was the central understanding of their lives.

She was widowed for a second time when Tom died in 1989, but there was much life, and much purpose, still ahead for her. She began working for the Diocese of Corpus Christi and various governmental agencies, organizing and administering the Natural Family Planning program throughout South Texas. She became a leader and nationally recognized expert in the use of a woman's natural menstrual cycle to plan for fertility. This was important work for her, a perfect blending of her nursing skills and her unassailable Catholic values. As an advocate for Natural Family Planning, she traveled to Rome to meet Pope John Paul VI, and to Washington DC to consult with Mother Teresa. She was a fervent—though not strident—believer in the idea that life at all stages is sacred. Well into her 70's, she was driving alone along back roads throughout South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley, instructing young couples in how to avoid pregnancy in a way



that was consistent with their beliefs, and using her knowledge of the ovulation cycle to help others who were desperate to conceive a child.

In 1998, she retired from the Diocese and moved to Nassau Bay, across the street from the Johnson Space Center in Houston. She was enthralled by the wonder of space travel, by the view of Galveston Bay outside her condominium window, and most of all by her children and grandchildren who lived nearby. Her life was struck by tragedy again in 2005, when her beautiful and beloved daughter Julie died of cancer, but throughout that long ordeal, true to her unbreakable character, she remained her family's rallying point.

She grew old, bedridden by arthritis, uncomplaining of her constant pain, carefully monitoring her medications, staying up to speed with medical research, reading constantly until her eyes finally gave out. After that happened she still lay in bed with the New York Times always open in her lap. She never gave up hope that she might one day be able to decipher its blurry words again.

Family members who died before her include her parents, Joseph and Gladys Berney; husbands, James E. McLaughlin and Thomas F. Harrigan; daughter, Julia Ann Sharp; brothers, Joe, Bob, and Paul Berney; sisters, Jeanette and Rosemary Berney.

She is survived by a loving multitude. Her brother, Mike Berney; her sons, James P. Harrigan and wife, Katy; Stephen M. Harrigan and wife, Sue Ellen; Thomas F. Harrigan Jr. and wife, Theresa; son-in-law, Robert Sharp; grandchildren, Laura Peters and husband, Cort, Cynthia Wholley and husband, Brian, James Harrigan and wife, Emily, Marjorie Randolph and husband, Rodney, Dorothy Guerrero and husband, Michael, Charlotte Ernst and husband, Zach. Tom, Claire and Stephen Harrigan, Margaret, Alexandra and Robert Sharp; great grandchildren, Ella, Cort and Quin Peters, Audrey and Katherine Harrigan, Mason and Travis Randolph, Maisie Guerrero and another Guerrero baby who is on the way; and by an abundance of nieces, nephews, and dear friends, all of whom she loved, and upon whose lives she made an indelible impact.

In her last months, even as she knew she was leaving the world, she took nothing but joy in the new life that was entering it. Just before she lost consciousness and fell into the long sleep that preceded her death, she was shown a picture of one of her great grandchildren. Her last words were "gorgeous sweet darling."



## Obituary

**Marjorie Berney Harrigan**

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At her request, her grave marker will be inscribed with only her name and a single word below it: Blessed.

A visitation for Marjorie will be held Monday, May 4, 2015 from 5:00 – 7:00 pm at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 18223 Point Lookout Drive, Nassau Bay, Texas 77058. The funeral mass will take place Tuesday, May 5, 2015 at 10:30 am with Father Wencil Pavlovsky officiating. Interment will follow at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Dickinson, Texas.



## Tribute Wall

**Marjorie Berney Harrigan**

LR

**Lynn Fry Reznicek** posted:

Dear Harrigan Family, I am sorry for the loss of your mom and will keep all of you in my thoughts and prayers. I have wonderful memories of your parents at the beach, in the pool, at your home. One of my favorite memories of your mom came just before I married. She gave me a big hug and said, "you made me so happy by marrying a Czech boy". I still feel that hug – more than 30 years later. With love, Lynn Fry Reznicek

May 5 at 7:00 PM

HF

**Harrigan Family** posted:

Dear Harrigan Family, What a lovely tribute to your Mom, I remember her living in the garage apartment behind the "big house", raising her two little boys. Mary Beth has kept me informed of her adventures through the years, she had such a full and blessed life !Our sincere sympathy, Pat & Sam Kearney

May 3 at 7:00 PM

JF

**Jo Fudge** posted:

Dear Harriagn and Berney Family. So sorry to hear of Marji passing. We all had such great fun in South Padre Island. She was truly a great and gentle lady. She will be in my prays.

May 3 at 7:00 PM

RT

**Rachel Zirkel Berry Trudell** posted:

beautiful lady, lovely tribute, amazing story. Sorrow for your loss , Steve...such a life force... Thank you for sharing her obituary with us..

May 1 at 7:00 PM

DC

**Donald Cherry** posted:

Steve, you have added much information and many insights about Marj to those of us who live in Bayfront Towers where she spent the last few years of her life. We miss her too. Thanks for sharing, Don Cherry

May 1 at 7:00 PM



## Tribute Wall

**Marjorie Berney Harrigan**

CM

**Carlos Ledson Miller** posted:

I am saddened to learn of the passing of the lovely lady who has been my next-door neighbor for the past 15 years. Friendly, intelligent, inquisitive – it has been a pleasure to have known her. My condolences and best wishes to her family.

May 1 at 7:00 PM

AD

**Anne Dingus** posted:

"Blessed." I will always remember that. This is such a beautiful tribute, Steve. Thank you for sharing her life with us.

May 1 at 7:00 PM

AB

**Anne Barnstone** posted:

Harrigan Family, I grieve with you for the fine woman brought to life in this beautiful obituary. It's clear she brought much love into your lives and into the world. My Condolences, Anne Barnstone

April 29 at 7:00 PM

CA

**Cara** posted:

You will never stop missing your Ma, you just learn to live without her. Love to you

April 29 at 7:00 PM

RF

**Robert Flynn** posted:

I am sorry for your loss. I regret that I never knew her or knew of her adventurous life that is reflected in her children. Thank you for the wonderful tribute. I do know a bit about her now and I can honor that as I honor all of you.

April 29 at 7:00 PM



## **Memories only last if you share them**

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



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