



Martha N. Berry

October 21, 1932 - July 12, 2020

Martha Berry, a resident of Torrance, California went to be with her Lord on Sunday, July 12, 2020 at the age of 87. She passed peacefully from Alzheimer's disease with family by her side.

Martha Berry, born Marta Nuri Alvarez, was known for her dedication to education, for her energetic stories and quick wit, for her stubborn and sweet nature, and for her unending desire to use her own blessings to bless others. As a resident of Torrance for almost sixty years, it was common for Martha to be greeted by former students and thanked for the profound impact she had on their lives, and even today her grandchildren say they can barely get through an outing without meeting yet another person with a heartwarming story about her.

She was the daughter of Francisco Alvarez and Mercedes Olavarri, born October 21, 1932 in Havana, Cuba. Martha earned the equivalent of a PhD in Physics and Chemistry at the University of Havana at a time when under 2% of students were women. Martha continued her studies in the U.S., earning both a Master of Arts degree in Education from Pepperdine University and a Master of Science degree in Counseling and Guidance from California Lutheran College. She was later certified as an Alcohol and Drug Counselor. Martha was committed to her education throughout her life, with a long list of subsequent titles and certifications related to teaching and counseling.

With her chemistry training, Martha worked for the Bureau of Quality Standards at Villanueva University in Havana and later worked in cancer research at University of Southern California in the early 1960s. As her family began to grow, Martha decided to get her teaching credential and began work as a middle school science teacher for the Torrance Unified School District, where she worked for over 30 years. As her education progressed, Martha moved from Teacher to School Counselor and eventually to Special Education Program Specialist, serving the four Torrance high schools. With her boundless energy and impeccable work ethic, Martha also was known to teach Adult School Spanish classes, serve as Girl Scout leader, and even spent several summers in the 1980s hosting

small tour groups to Mexico City and Acapulco, teaching the rich history of Mexico in her inimitable way, full of rich tales, wonderful humor, and her characteristic Cuban accent.

As a parent, Martha was devoted to her three daughters, committed to her career and to her home, yet always wishing she could give even more. She was the first to volunteer and chaperone with school activities and extracurricular events. She learned to navigate girl scout camping and badge work. She could just as easily assist with science fair and art fair projects as she could sew homemade matching outfits for her girls, eventually creating prom dresses and even wedding dressings. This dedication continued into the subsequent generations. Her energy to invest herself in the lives of others—family and students alike—was a defining personality trait for Martha.

Martha was preceded in death by the love of her life, Dr. Charles Berry, and her first-born daughter, Patricia Berry. She is survived by her daughters, Eileen Stevens and Dianne Reyes; her grandchildren, Adriana (Reyes) Suyama, Sarah (Stevens) Gomez, Eric Stevens, Christine Reyes, and Jesse Reyes; and her great-grandchildren, Jayden, Eli, IslaLou, and CharlieAnne Suyama, and Olivia and Logan Gomez. All of us were privileged to be loved by her.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be sent to [MercyShips.org](https://www.mercyships.org) or [OperationSmile.org](https://www.operation-smile.org).

Please share any memories you have of this wonderful woman who was a loving and generous mother, aunt, grandmother, great-grandmother, advocate, and friend to so many.

Comments



“ Martha made me laugh. The two of us were always laughing together. In the TUSD we worked on helping special education students succeed. Martha was so caring, and so passionate, and would often get so excited, and talk so rapidly, that others would have difficulty understanding what she said. I'd say: "Martha, slow down, no one knows what you said". She'd laugh. I'd laugh. Then, she would begin again. She was always focused on the student, and she always cared. Her daughters will have wonderful memories of a loving family.

Marsha Dollarhide Davis

Marsha Davis - August 17, 2020 at 01:28 PM



“ Martha's family shared beautiful memories of her life. Once you met her she was a life long friend. I enjoyed working with her at TUSD - whenever you saw her, it gave you a smile. - and she always had a smile to give in return. I shall forever miss her.

Barb Andrews

Barb Andrews - August 16, 2020 at 05:46 PM



“ Mom with Dad (Martha and Charles)



Dianne Reyes - August 13, 2020 at 10:58 PM



“ Back in the day... what a beauty!!



Dianne Reyes - August 13, 2020 at 10:56 PM



“ Our sincere condolences and sympathy to Martha' s family. My husband and I met Martha and her loving daughter Dianne, at our first B.C.H.D meeting. She was the joy of the group! It was obvious she was some one special for many great reasons. May she rest in peace, and may her family and friends find for-ever peace, and happiness knowing many were touched by Martha!

Irene & Peter Settele - August 10, 2020 at 04:57 PM



“ I had the privilege of knowing Martha at Sunrise Assisted Living as her part-time companion and I was continually amazed at her wonderful sense of humor, her generous spirit, her beauty and sense of style, her warm and loving personality and the love of her family which always flowed around her. She is someone that I will never ever forget and I feel grateful to have known her.

Victoria Taylor - August 10, 2020 at 04:01 PM



“ She was fortunate to have you and you brought her much joy. We are forever grateful.

Dianne - August 13, 2020 at 10:29 AM



“ I was so privileged to know Martha through Torrance unified school District as a special ed program specialist. When I went to get my teaching credential and masters degree she was one of my last teachers who taught special ed and the law and she was so delightful and knew absolutely everything there was on the topic, besides that she was just so wonderful to be with, so warm, so generous so lovely, always dressed so beautifully. I will never be another Martha Berry and her life story is such an inspiration. Condolences to her family as I know they will miss her terribly.

Nancy Stanbury - August 15, 2020 at 12:12 PM



“ Thank you Nancy.

Dianne - August 15, 2020 at 03:33 PM



“ Martha and I worked together at Hull Middle School in the 1980s. She as a counselor, me teaching 6th grade. While there I was working on my Masters Degree and PPS Credential. Martha needed a surgical procedure at that same time and was to be out of action for a few weeks. She asked me if I might be able to cover the counseling office in her absence. I agreed and it was a very good experience for me. I greatly appreciated Martha's gift shared with students and staff alike. She had humor, style and grace aplenty. She helped me to become a better counselor. I also took a Spanish class through TUSD Adult Ed. Silly me, I thought it would be fun! Instead Martha, using current thinking in teaching a language, spoke to all of us only in Spanish. My personal learning curve disallowed me to enjoy that option and within a short time I dropped out. Sad for me. She knew what she was doing and had I persevered might have learned a second language. Martha was a great lady. I miss her already.

Sandee Hickman - August 06, 2020 at 01:53 PM



“ 25 files added to the tribute wall



Eileen Stevens - August 02, 2020 at 04:42 PM



“ I had the pleasure of working with Martha (My Queen) that was my name for her because she was definitely a classy lady i miss her beautiful smile the laughter and her stylish ways smelling her Red Dor cologne Martha put a smile on so many people's faces an she loved to dance (exercise) Rest Well my Queen until we meet again you are missed love you

Belinda Jackson - August 09, 2020 at 04:02 PM



“ Thanks for all the love you gave her Belinda!

Dianne - August 28, 2020 at 09:22 AM



“ I so enjoyed working with Martha at TUSD. She was knowledgeable, funny, and a joy to be around. I always looked forward to seeing her at district meetings. I am so sorry for your loss. Martha was a wonderful lady and I will miss her.

Lynn Bedrosian

Lynn Bedrosian - July 31, 2020 at 11:26 AM



“ Patty and I went to school together back in the day; when I returned to TUSD in 1995 as an administrator, I was at a meeting with Martha. She heard my last name (VanderLeest) and immediately exclaimed, "Oh! How are you?!?" It was such a joy to be connected again to her. A lovely, caring, kind, but fiercely determined woman who used charm, intellect, and her genuine love of people to make HUGE differences in people's lives. A true (short) GIANT of a woman. God bless you all; so sorry for your loss.

Christine VanderLeest - July 28, 2020 at 06:44 PM



“ Thank you Christine

Dianne - July 29, 2020 at 03:17 PM



“ Thank you, Christine. I never met you, but I remember mom telling me that she was in that IEP with you. I graduated with your brother, Wayne

Eileen - August 02, 2020 at 03:33 PM



“ I remember this vivacious, stylish, happy, friendly lady especially during the passing of the peace greeting during worship on Sunday mornings. We all left our seats to reach out to others, and she practically danced down the center aisle from the front to the back of the sanctuary greeting everyone along the way. - Nancy Knapp

Nancy Knapp - August 11, 2020 at 09:42 PM



“ I am sorry to hear of Martha's passing Dee worked with her in Special Ed and looked forward to giving her a ride home after church. Martha was always quick to share her most recent endeavors.

I expect the two will continue to share.

Lowell Hardison

Lowell Hardison - August 14, 2020 at 11:15 AM



“ Yes Lowell, she loved Dee and talked about her often!

Dianne - August 15, 2020 at 03:35 PM



“ I am so sorry to hear of the passing of your mother. Martha and I worked together when I was Principal of J. H. Hull Middle school in the 80's. I truly enjoyed working with Martha, her professionalism, warmth, caring, and sense of humor was always very evident. We shared lots of conversations and laughter regarding our work together and her life outside of the school community. Wonderful memories and what a wonderful lady!

Sincerely,
Barry Gross

Barry Gross - July 28, 2020 at 03:27 PM



“ I remember your name well, Barry, as mom always loved to talk about work and those colleagues with whom she had a connection. Thank you for reaching out! Eileen Stevens

Eileen - August 02, 2020 at 03:34 PM



“ Yes I remember your name as well. Those were memorable years for her, in her counselor days, and we heard lots of tales! Thank you for your kind words.

Dianne - August 13, 2020 at 10:35 AM



“ I am so very sorry for your loss. Your mom is truly one of my favorite people that I ever worked with in Torrance. She was my very first program specialist when I starting in Torrance Unified. I was so scared of her at first :) I learned so very much from her. It was a nice reunion years later when she was my professor at CSUDH for my special ed law class. My condolences to your family at this time. She is such a great lady XOXOXO Shannon Gaunt

Shannon Gaunt - July 28, 2020 at 02:06 PM



“ Hi Shannon, thanks for the kind comments...I too took Sped Law from Martha...it was fun being in her class again (I was in the 7th grade also for science. She was my inspiration for becoming a special education teacher, a decision I do not regret to this day.

Eileen - August 02, 2020 at 03:44 PM



“ Cheryl Moore lit a candle in memory of Martha N. Berry



Cheryl Moore - July 28, 2020 at 01:54 PM



“ I worked with Martha at South High School when she was the Program Specialist for Special Ed. She was a wonderful, kind woman. She always had a funny anecdote to share and a ready smile on her face. She seemed to never forget a name. My deepest condolences to her family. She truly was a treasure of a woman. RIP sweet Martha....

Cheryl Moore - July 28, 2020 at 01:53 PM



“ Thank you so much.

Dianne - July 29, 2020 at 03:19 PM



“ thank you Cheryl...she was an amazing program specialist, colleague and advocate for our SPED kids...I'm grateful that she led to become an Ed Specialist...I'm honored to follow in her footsteps, advocating for kids.

Eileen - August 02, 2020 at 03:46 PM



“ Jim and I had fond memories of her requesting to play old hymns for her at church. (Jim lead worship). She got a kick when we dedicated the worship music to her and played the hymns she requested. She said to Jim, “I was scared of you when I first met you, because you were a big guy. Now I like you a lot. You're such a nice man.” Such good memories.

Elaine McStravick - July 22, 2020 at 03:49 PM



“ She really did feel special when you did that! She loved you two!

Dianne - July 24, 2020 at 01:32 PM



“ Mom and me adventures, just a few from the recent past. What a journey we’ve had... a lifetime of memories.



Dianne Reyes - July 17, 2020 at 09:21 PM



“ Martha always brought such life and energy and color to our Memory Club meetings. She was irreplaceable. She will be missed. God speed Martha!

Gillian Renault - July 17, 2020 at 09:16 PM



“ Grandkids, great grandkids, nieces and nephews love



Dianne Reyes - July 17, 2020 at 09:14 PM



“ Mom was invited Last year to participate in a photo shoot for Beach Cities Health District promotional for senior services. They loved her!



Dianne Reyes - July 17, 2020 at 09:03 PM



“ Mom was invited Last year to participate in a photo shoot for Beach Cities Health District promotional for senior services. They loved her!

Dianne - August 05, 2020 at 01:27 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Jesse Reyes - July 16, 2020 at 11:11 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Adriana Suyama - July 16, 2020 at 10:01 PM



“ Inaugural flight from LAX to Havana in 2015. Martha, granddaughter Chrissy and daughter Dianne with airline-issued chocolate cigars!

Dianne - August 05, 2020 at 01:22 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Dianne Reyes - July 16, 2020 at 08:40 PM



“ For those that don't know, that is in Havana, Cuba at the University

Eileen - August 02, 2020 at 03:48 PM



“ This is the column where she first saw my dad standing as a new student to the university in 1952. All the young female students were fascinated, but Martha was smitten!

Dianne - August 05, 2020 at 01:20 PM



“ Martha was one of our beloved saints here at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church of Lomita. She brought an infectious smile every Sunday and was the embodiment of unconditional welcome and made every visitor feel like family. She was a blessing to this congregation.

Rev. Billy Song

St. Mark's Presbyterian Church of Lomita

Billy Song - August 11, 2020 at 03:18 PM



“ Every once in a while someone very special comes into your life and that person for me was Martha. I was a Special Education Teacher at South High and she was the Program Specialist for high schools. Special Education can have its moments of joy and also of frustration, however, when Martha was there we overcame the frustrations and just laughed. It's a real gift to make people laugh and that's what she did. I will forever be grateful to her for making my life happier. My sincere blessings to you all.

Laurie Lehmer

Laurie Lehmer - August 18, 2020 at 04:42 PM