



Mary Lou Uresti Vermaas

July 27, 1938 - July 31, 2025

Mary Lou (Uresti) Vermaas was born July 27, 1938, in Mercedes, Texas. She was one of nine children born to Arturo Uresti, a rancher from Hidalgo County, and Maria Vela, mother and talented mandolin player who was born in Cerralvo, Mexico. A precocious child, Mary Lou was the youngest of three sisters. She loved her parents dearly and helped her father on the ranch just so she could spend time with him, even though she had to sneak around to be able to play basketball on the girls' high school team, activity which he thought decidedly unladylike. Luckily, her mother helped her to maintain the secret.

After graduating in 1958, she worked in various places, including the TB hospital in Harlingen, where she met and dated many promising and sometimes interesting men, but none as alluring to her as John Vermaas, the man who would become her husband and the love of her life for the next sixty-four years. In 1961, she went on a blind date with cadet Vermaas at Harlingen Air Force Base. After that auspicious outing, Mary Lou knew he was the one for her. But he was leaving the Valley for a new assignment in California. Mary Lou was always an intrepid person—she always knew what she wanted or her opinion about something and was unapologetic about it. Good fortune intervened when she found out that a friend of hers was moving to Sacramento, the same general area to which John had relocated. The two of them drove to the California capital city together, where Mary Lou courted and within a year landed John.

Life as a military wife filled her days for the next twenty years, taking her to Roswell, NM, upstate New York, Louisiana, north Texas, Florida, and the Pacific Northwest, where she eventually earned a bachelor's in social work. The couple built their family, raising two girls both of whom later graduated from Harlingen High School and earned college degrees.

Raising two daughters was part of Mary Lou's sense of purpose—she always prized her role as a mother, sacrificing the development of her schooling and professional career until the girls had matured enough. She often took her youngest, Lori, to college during the summer term, introducing her to the vibrant energy of a college campus, an environment that likely influenced the child's fascination with working in and comfort with living in an academic community. Indeed, Mary Lou often admitted that her time as a mother raising her kids when they were young were some of the best days of her life. Her memories of her girls as children especially appealed to her in that she often found solace and comfort in those memories.

Mary Lou developed her second career as a teacher after John retired and the family moved to the Valley in 1981. She taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, mostly English, until her retirement in 2001. During her tenure, she discovered two works that became personal favorites, *Call of the Wild* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, both stories about resilient souls who faced painfully difficult challenges. Their themes matched well with her attitude toward life. In fact, one of her credos was to “never give up” or take any guff from anyone. A woman of strong opinions, Mary Lou was unafraid to share, demand, or act on them.

Feisty, frustrating, at times unrelentingly difficult, she also was a deeply soulful person, loving and loyal to the core, someone whom you definitely wanted to have in your corner. Deeply insightful about human behavior, she provided

highly intuitive advice about life situations to her daughters—sometimes unsolicited, but always with loving intent.

In her retirement years, Mary Lou enjoyed living out in the country, where the Arroyo Colorado ran alongside her backyard. Out there, she and John fished, boated, maintained a number of gardens (her “secret” garden was an especial favorite), and indulged in Happy Hours in their Jacuzzi, listening to Van Halen, Frank Sinatra, corridos, and Kenny Rogers. She was a huge fan of the Spurs during their championship runs of the late 2000s and 2010s (cheering Timmy on) and embarked with John on numerous trips to Alaska, the northeastern United States, and Greece. She loved life, enjoyed hers as much as she could, even getting John to attend a rock concert with her at a Valley fair in 2022, despite having lost much of her mobility from neuropathy and the beginnings of dementia. Like the characters from the works she cherished, she wasn’t going to go down without a fight and without loving family all the way.

Lover of Dairy Queen blizzards, which John indulged her every Sunday after church, Mary Lou was someone whom we are so proud of and love deeply. We miss her enthusiasm for life and her undying faith in each one of us. We will never forget her, even when our minds start to fade. She is definitely one of those unforgettable personalities you are lucky to meet in life, whose complexity vexes yet touches you so deeply that ultimately you embrace wholly the loving connection, salty and sweet.

Visitation will begin on Thursday, August 7, 2025, from 1:00 PM until 9:00 PM with the family present from 6:00 PM until 9:00 PM and a rosary to be prayed at 7:00 PM at the Rudy Garza Chapel of Peace. The funeral will be held on Friday, departing the funeral home at 10:20 AM for a Mass of Christian Burial at 11:00 AM at St. Helen’s Catholic Church in Rio Hondo, Texas. Burial will

follow at Ashland Memorial Park Cemtery in Harlingen, Texas.

Arrangements are under the direction of Rudy Garza Funeral Home in Harlingen, Texas.

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

AUG 8. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Helen's Catholic Church
Rio Hondo, TX