



# Shirley Jean Dickinson

APR 2, 1921 - JUL 2, 2025



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FUNERAL HOME, MEMORIAL PARK & CREMATORY

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# Shirley Jean Dickinson

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**S**hirley Jean Dickinson passed away the morning of July 2, 2025, after a long battle with dementia at the tender age of 104. Shirley was born in Denver to Robert Ralph and Violet Beal, their only child, on April 2, 1921. At age 18, Shirley attended the University of Oregon where she pledged the Alpha Delta Pi sorority and remained a life-long member and Oregon Duck fan. In 1943, she gave birth to her son, Bob Dickinson and later married Walter Dickinson in 1947. Shirley and Walter were married until his death in November 2000, for a total of 53 wonderful years. Shirley's son Bob passed away in June 2018.

From a young age, Shirley loved animals, especially horses and dogs, eventually becoming a staunch supporter of the ASPCA. Shirley will always be known as a wonderful friend, neighbor, and party-host extraordinaire, regularly hosting gatherings at her cherished house for everything from Thanksgiving to the Super Bowl (when her beloved 49ers were playing). In later years, Shirley and Walter loved traveling the world together and maintaining their epic vegetable garden that was featured in Sunset Magazine twice.

Shirley is survived by her daughter-in-law, Cheryl Dickinson and granddaughter, Karen Dickinson





# Events


**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

APR 2, 1921 - JUL 2, 2025

## Funeral

 **Friday**, July 25, 2025

 12:30 PM PT

 **Skylawn Funeral Home**  
Route 35 at Highway 92, San Mateo CA 94402





## Tribute Wall

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

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CD

**Cheryl Dickinson** posted:

I have known Shirl since I was a child. She and Walt used to visit Denver in the summers to visit her cousins and aunts and uncles. She always brought gifts for everyone which were so special to all of us. Of course Bob was with them but he had made friends with neighborhood boys and always went off with them for games of basketball or baseball. My first trip to San Francisco was when I was in high school. I stayed with Shirl and Walt. The first thing we did the next day was go shopping. She had advice on what I should buy but being a teenager I didn't listen. Fortunately my purchases worked out. After Bob and I were married, Shirl and Walt payed for our honeymoon to Hawaii. We stayed at Kona Village on Hawaii in a hut overlooking the ocean. There was a big fan on the ceiling that went 24/7. Sliding doors overlooking the ocean with dolphins swimming by every day and no phone! Unfortunately Kona was swept away in the Japanese Tsunami a few years ago. Shirl and Walt had visited Kona about 20 times! A great wedding present! After Karen was born we hosted Thanksgiving in Sierra Madre, CA (East of LA but still in LA county). Shirl and Walt arrived in the El Camino with Sarah, a beautiful white Labrador Retriever puppy, our first dog. You can imagine the three of them in the front seat together for a 6 hour drive! After that Shasta never minded trips in the car between San Francisco and LA. As the years went on Shirl and Walt were always with us for the holidays. After Walt retired they began their trips organizing retirees from United Airlines. I particularly remember their trip to Russia. Walt had difficulty walking long distances so on one particular occasion he sat on a bench waiting for the group's return. A Russian man about his age came and sat next to him. They ended up talking about their experiences in WWII. I think the Russian man must have known a fair amount of English. So rest in peace dear mother-in-law. I love you, Cheryl

July 30 at 10:11 AM

KD

**Karen Dickinson** shared 19 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Celebration of Life for Shirley Jean Dickinson. Friday, July 25, 2025.

July 17 at 7:36 PM





KD

**Karen Dickinson** posted:

Nana's Eulogy: Our dear Shirley, was born Shirley Jean Ralph on April 2nd, 1921, to Robert Joseph Ralph and Violet Florence Beal in Denver, Colorado. To give you some context, Warren G. Harding was the president and World War 1 had been officially over for 2 and a half years. The day Shirley was born, Albert Einstein arrived in New York City, his first trip to the United States to discuss his theory of relativity. The roaring 20s was just underway boasting a cultural explosion in music and fashion as well as a mass market industrial evolution for consumers in affordable automobiles, radio, telephones and moving pictures (or films). This time when Shirley was born brought "modernity" to a large part of the population, a quality that Shirley embraced as she lived through the decades. The beginning of Shirley's life was harrowing. Diagnosed as a very ill baby, Shirley was left with her mother's sisters in Denver to stay under the care of the trusted family doctor, but not expected to live. After surviving her first year, Shirley's parents returned to collect her and move her to San Francisco where her father worked for The White House Department Store. The next few years were even more difficult for Shirley as she spent months in and out of children's hospital ward with diseases such as Polio and Scarlet Fever. It was these experiences as a young child where Shirley developed her love for animals. She said "being alone in the ward with other very sick children was not a place to make friends. The animals I met and found were my friends because I could love them and they received the love that I gave them." Shirley spent much of her adolescence in and out of the hospital with many doctors telling her she would not live past the age of 21. This would be the first of many misdiagnosis from people that dared to underestimate Shirley. Shirley attended Hamlin All Girls High School in the mid-1930s where she admitted she was a mediocre student and preferred to spend her time outside at the local stables to care for and ride horses. Shirley alleges it was during this period she got to ride Sea Biscuit as he was training at her local stable. We cannot confirm or deny if this actually happened, but it has remained some of our funniest family lore. In 1939, Shirley attended the University of Oregon in Eugene, OR, where she pledged the Alpha Delta Pi sorority and was considered a social butterfly around campus. Decades later, when we were cleaning out her house, we found several of her saved dance cards with all the gentlemen Shirley danced with, a laundry list of suitors my grandmother never forgot. Shirley was a lifelong Oregon Ducks fan, and both my father and myself followed her there for our college experiences. After she graduated college with a degree in education, Shirley married and soon had her only child, my father, Bob. The marriage was short-lived and Shirley made the difficult choice to raise Bob on her own as a divorcee in San Francisco in the mid-40s. In 1947, Shirley married my grandfather, Walter Dickinson, who adopted my father at age 3 and they moved to the Park Merced neighborhood in San Francisco. Walter, a navy airplane mechanic, worked for United Airlines and afforded Shirley the time to volunteer. Shirley especially enjoyed volunteering for the Boy Scouts of America putting together San Francisco day trips for busloads of scouts, effectively becoming a tour guide and educating them about her favorite landmarks in San Francisco. During this time raising my father, Shirley and Walt regularly took water-skiing trips to Lake Shasta, fishing trips to Oregon (where my grandfather was from) and trips to Napa where her father opened his own retail chain of men's suits stores. Shirley also had a series of cocker spaniels, that she trained, the smartest being Corky, who regularly went waterskiing with them. He barked when someone fell off their skis to alert the boat driver and she claims could hop from head-to-head on people treading water in the lake without falling in. She also taught Corky how to trick-or-treat in a cowboy outfit with a mini-guitar he could strum and howl to,



## Tribute Wall

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KD

undoubtedly a delightful trick for everyone who opened the door on Halloween, but regrettably Shirley said, "there was nowhere to put the candy." In 1966, Shirley, Walt and Shirley's father, Bub, moved to 620 Barbara Way in Hillsborough, to be closer to Walt's work at the San Francisco Airport. Shirley continued to care for her father who suffered complications from a stroke, until his death in 1969. Shirley and Walt made 620 Barbara Way truly their own. They put in a swimming pool, tiling it themselves and planted their infamous vegetable garden that was featured in Sunset Magazine, twice. Shirley and Walt made sure the house was a welcome place to swim, gather and enjoy the spectacular view of the San Francisco Bay. It was here Shirley and Walt made lifelong connections with their neighbors, especially the Hacketts (thank you Steve for officiating and being here today) and became beloved family members to the Beals when they moved to the area (thank you Brad and Danielle for being here today). These families were two of many that Shirley touched with her generosity, excitement to host and generally create an atmosphere that was safe, warm and most definitely, fun. In July 1980, Walter retired from United Airlines and the era of how I would know my grandmother officially began. When they retired, they joined the United Airlines Retirees Association, a fertile ground full of lifelong United Airline employees, that had money and nothing to do. Shirley, being the industrious and opportunistic person that she was, figured out that if she partnered with a tour company (in this case, Talbot Tours) she could pitch trips around the world to her retiree friends, and if 30-40 people signed up, Shirley and Walt could go for free as the tour managers. Shirley was good at this. REALLY GOOD. She found her calling as a tour guide that brought together all of her strengths; creating a fun atmosphere, making people feel included, focusing on special details and an excellent planner. We brought the world map with all the pins of where she traveled around the globe in 20 years with my grandfather and the 15 years she traveled without him. For every adventure, Shirley made yarn luggage tags that fit the theme of the trip for everyone coming along. We brought some of those tags today to show her ingenuity and love of a "theme." And when Shirley & Walt came back from a trip, she always had some unique trinket native to the country they had visited, maybe a piece of jewelry, maybe a doll, maybe something to put in their garden, but always something representing where they had been. They also were renown for taking loads of photographs on their adventures that they put into scrap books or slideshows. When I say loads of photographs, I mean LOADS. One time, they came back from Kenya, they treated my mom, dad and I to a slideshow of their fabulous African safari. I was excited. 45 minutes later, I'd seen a handful of elephants, some giraffes, a lion, a dozen zebras and about 10,000 wildebeests. Fun Fact: About 1 million wildebeests migrate through Kenya each year. I'm so happy Shirley got to see 1% of them. Bringing a sense of the world to me was one of the greatest gifts my grandmother gave to me and changed the course of how I approach this life with understanding and curiosity. I spent countless nights in her guest bedroom, staring at that map, wondering, wishing that maybe someday, I too could come home with tales of the beyond. Shirley has always represented fun and adventure to me. Even the night I was born, she and Walt "took a trip" driving 6 hours down I-5 in the middle of the night to Los Angeles to "meet" me. Shirley loved exploring the world and the world loved her right back. Shirley as a grandmother has been one of the most influential people in my life. From the earliest time I can remember, she taught me the art of spoiling your grandchild. Shirley's outward love language was gift giving, and oh did she love to give gifts. I remember every Christmas week, anxiously looking out the kitchen window waiting for Shirley and Walt to pull up in the Oldsmobile loaded to the brim with wrapped presents. I would happily unload the car clocking which gifts were



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KD

labeled for me and which were for my mom & Dad. Then I would place them under the tree accordingly for easy access on Christmas morning. She also took me on trips later in elementary school. But she didn't tell me where we were going- she would mail me typed clues that would slowly reveal the location. Unfortunately, "the Pele clue" was misconstrued by my mom & dad as a famous soccer player in Brazil, not the Sun God of Hawaii, so the subsequent clues had to really pivot towards Hawaii. Although the gift-giving was well received (no pun intended), the best thing about my grandmother is she showed-up for myself and the people she cared about. During my elementary ballet career, Shirley came to every Christmas Carol dance performance and Spring "ode to the history of California" performance. She came to my piano recitals which admittedly weren't that spectacular. She once described one particularly disastrous piano performance as "very musical." In my senior year of high school, she came to Sacramento and Washington D.C. to watch my championship government team compete in front of esteemed judges to discuss the constitution. She and Walter were adopted as the "team grandparents." For my college graduation, she rented out the penthouse at the glamorous Eugene Hilton and hosted a catered reception for me and all of my friends. And when I came back from London, after a year abroad in Europe, my flight was directly to San Francisco where Shirley picked me up and gave me the most marvelous hug. She was the first person to see of my family in a year. Part of showing up for people, was hosting people. Shirley hosted almost every thanksgiving I can remember until she moved out of 620 Barbara Way. Shirley & my grandfather would spend days cooking and every year, the elegant table she set would have a theme albeit "pilgrims and Indians," "grapes," and "fall leaves." And every Thanksgiving, whether it was 5 people or 25 people, everyone was always welcome to join Shirley at her gorgeous table. She hosted super bowl parties for her beloved 49ers, Hawaiian parties for her and Walt's favorite place to visit, Hawaii, and even Boulais Base parties to celebrate a trip to New Orleans (I know because we found a set of a dozen Boulais base fish dishes cleaning out her house). The woman loved to host and loved decorating down to the finest detail. In the later years, when Shirley moved to the Trousdale, the onus of caretaking gradually shifted, but Shirley still enjoyed being social and the company of others. I will always remember getting to celebrate her 100th birthday in person a week after covid restrictions lifted and how good she felt getting her hair cut, wearing her sassy & fabulous at 100 sweatshirt and a tiara. She even ordered an old fashioned of which she had one sip of with a gleam in her eye before coming to her 100th birthday party at the Trousdale, the first party in a year after everyone was locked up for covid. Shirley LOVED that. Taking care of my grandmother these last 7 years have been the honor off my life. It was the least I could do for a woman who taught me about the importance of community and making friends. And when you make those friends, you host them and throw fabulous parties. Shirley will always be my guardian angel. We've learned to love, enjoy and take care of each other throughout our many decades together. Her life and legacy is an incredible gift, to see me into the future with my soon to be husband, Ryan. Thank you Shirley for your marvelous spirit that touched the many many lives of people from all walks of life. Thank you Shirley for your curiosity that led to your world travels and excellent stories. Thank you Shirley for your love of nature and all the creatures you called friends. Thank you Shirley for being my grandmother. Knowing and loving you as your granddaughter has been a privilege. You will forever be in my heart. I love you Nana. Thank you.

July 17 at 7:36 PM



## Tribute Wall

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

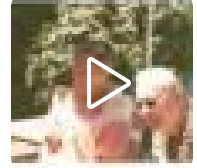
APR 2, 1921 - JUL 2, 2025

KD

**Karen Dickinson** shared a video to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Slideshow of Shirley's incredible life.

July 29 at 1:53 PM



LL

**Lauren Lacy** posted:

I had the privilege of being hosted by Aunt Shrial twice at her fabulous home in Hillsborough, CA. She was known for her incredible generosity, so an invitation wasn't hard to come by, but still, she made me feel incredibly special. One memory stands out vividly: In the summer of 2002, during a road trip between college semesters, a friend and I stayed with her. With her signature big smile and even bigger hug, she welcomed us in and immediately set about making sure we experienced San Francisco the right way. She gently discouraged us from visiting Haight-Ashbury "not a place for young ladies," she said, but insisted we had to see Muir Woods. Then she offered to drive us there herself. At the time, she was in her early 80s, recovering from a recent injury, and her arm was in a sling. Still, undeterred, she loaded us into her car and off we went, her one-armed driving a harrowing and heroic feat. As she expertly navigated the hairpin turns into Muir Woods with one hand on the wheel, I bit my lip more than once, holding my breath as she drove with complete confidence. She never missed a beat, pointing out landmarks, sharing stories, and pausing only to gently clear her throat. She was the best kind of tour guide, passionate, sharp, and full of life. We spent the day walking among the towering redwoods, a breathtaking and unforgettable experience. Before we left, she bought me a magnet from the gift shop. One I still have and cherish. Back at her home, she made sure we knew that everything she had was ours too. From thoughtful meals to the pull-top Budweisers still tucked away in the garage, we left those for the next guest. Aunt Shrial was the embodiment of generosity, adventure, and unshakable spirit. This memory is just one example of how she lived, with love, courage, and a heart always open to others. She will be deeply missed and forever remembered. Lauren

July 17 at 7:36 PM



# Tribute Wall

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

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**Karen Dickinson** posted:

Shirl and Walt were gracious hosts when we visited their homes on DeSoto and later Barbara Way, and they made sure that we saw the best of her favorite city, San Francisco. Growing up in Denver, we were always excited when they came to visit--we knew we would have fun!When our son, Chuck, and his family moved to San Francisco, one time she took us all to Castagnola's at Fisherman's Wharf for dinner and to watch the seals while we ate. Zeus and Aurora loved the clam chowder and claimed the corner table as their table.We were fortunate to celebrate Thanksgiving with Shirl at her home in 2017 with Bob, Cheryl, and Karen. It was a lovely afternoon. Bob died the next year and Shirl moved to the Trousdale. One more Thanksgiving in 2019 was hosted by Chuck and Niki at their home and Cheryl and Karen came to town and picked up Shirl to join the party.Shirl reveled in being the consummate hostess. Her guests' enjoyment was always the focus and she succeeded each time. She set a high bar to which we all aspire.We will miss you, Shirl.Becky and John

July 22 at 7:01 PM



**Anonymous** sent a Be My Love Bouquet with Red Roses to the Dickinson family.

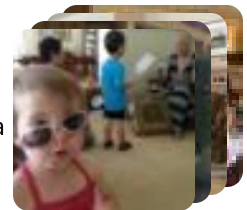


July 20 at 7:26 PM



**Charles Yust** shared 6 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

It is hard to express how kind, gracious and welcoming Shirl was as a host to our family for so many years. She invited my family in as weary travelers while I was a teenager on my first trip to California from the Midwest and then 20+ years later she would never hesitate invite my wife, Natasha, and our kids, Zeus and Aurora, over to swim in her pool and eat watermelon after we moved to San Francisco in 2014. She always had gifts for the kids, and would share stories of living in San Francisco, travelling to every corner of earth, and memories of her beloved family, especially her husband Walt, her son Bob and his wife Cheryl and her Granddaughter Karen.We were grateful to have the chance to host her for Thanksgiving at our house in San Francisco in 2019 when she was 98. With our nephew attending at 3 years old we had a span of 95 years representing the 16 in attendance that day.Her positive energy never wavered. Even in later years, as her memory began to fade she was always in a bright mood, telling jokes and smiling non-stop when visiting her at the Trousdale. I think we all hope to live up to her standard for longevity, but she was also an inspiration for how to bring people together, the importance of family and throwing parties. We will miss her dearly.RIP and Love, Chuck, Natasha, Zeus and Aurora



July 17 at 7:36 PM



Karen Dickinson shared 19 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

July 29 at 1:58 PM

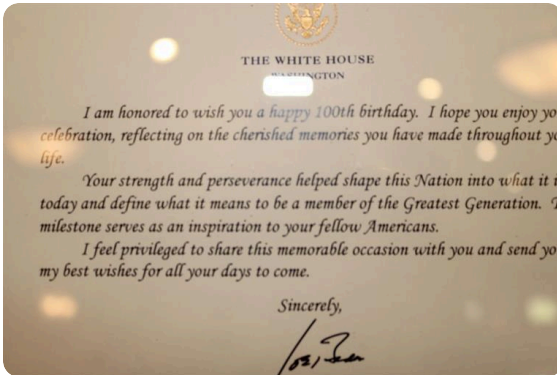




# Media

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

APR 2, 1921 - JUL 2, 2025

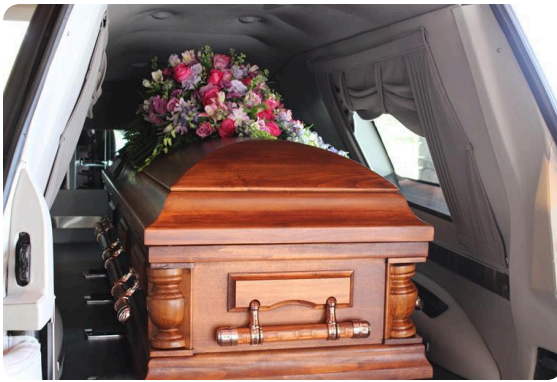




**Media**

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

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# Media

**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

APR 2, 1921 - JUL 2, 2025



**Karen Dickinson** shared a video to the **Tribute Wall** album.

July 29 at 1:53 PM



SCAN TO WATCH



# Media

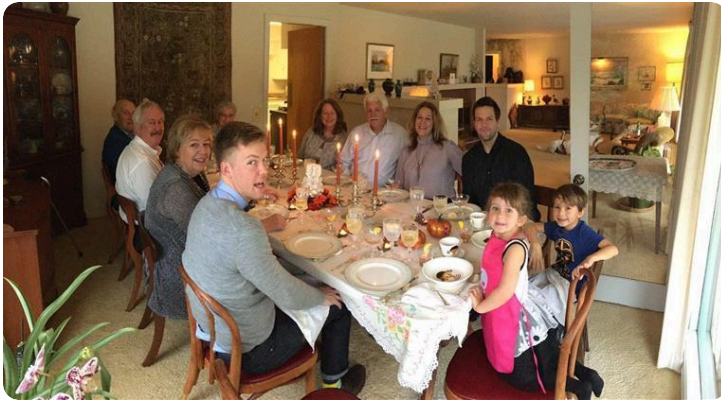
**Shirley Jean Dickinson**

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Charles Yust shared 6 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

July 17 at 7:36 PM





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

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



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