



## Martha Marlene Donesky

May 6, 1936 - January 8, 2025

Martha Marlene Donesky was born to Gottfried and Anna Christina Radke Kerbs on May 6, 1936 in Westerham, Saskatchewan, Canada. She passed away at her daughter's home in Vallejo, California on January 8, 2025 after living with progressive dementia for over 10 years. Although she was heartbroken to learn of her diagnosis, she lived her final years with grace and humor and love for all. Her Seventh-day Adventist faith and her family were values which guided her entire life.

Martha grew up on the Saskatchewan (Canadian) prairies. Her father was a subsistence farmer who never made the switch from horses to tractors; they had no indoor plumbing, minimal insulation, no electricity, and no central heat—and winter temperatures were often 40 degrees below zero. She was 12 years younger than her older siblings, all of whom preceded her in death with the exception of her sister-in-law, Frieda Kerbs. She was raised as an only child with lots of extra parenting from her siblings, an experience which influenced her desire to have four children as close together as possible.

The family spoke German so Martha learned English in school. Although no one in her family attended school after 8th grade, Martha was fascinated by the idea of “college” when it was mentioned to her in her preteen years. She eventually went to Canadian Union College in Lacombe, Alberta, where she worked long hours in the cafeteria to pay for the cost of her schooling. At

CUC, she graduated from high school, started college, and met Robert C. Donesky whom she married on September 1, 1957, at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vernon, BC.

Her four children were indeed born very close together. Conroy was born 17 months after the wedding, followed by Robert Douglas 18 months after that. Orville showed up 2 years later. About this time a well-meaning church friend tried to help Martha understand where these kids were coming from. Her reply was that one more child would be coming in just over a year. Sure enough, DorAnne was born 5 years and 10 days after Conroy, and the family was complete. Family reading was a favorite pastime as they did not own a TV. The kids would beg their Dad to keep the foot rub going, because Martha would keep reading stories as long as her feet were being massaged.

The family moved to Michigan in 1965 so Bob could continue his education at Andrews University. Martha took the opportunity to finish her college education, and graduated from Andrews University with a baccalaureate degree in Business Administration in 1971, the same year that her youngest child completed first grade. With all the kids in school, Martha began working part-time at the Michigan unemployment office, a career that she enjoyed until she finally retired two states, six offices, and three decades later. She was good at what she did and could smell fraud from a mile away.

Martha was always a detailed person. She was good at budgeting, but money was often tight. If her personal bookkeeping did not balance to the penny she would spend hours looking for the lost coin. The family rented homes until Martha and Bob were in their early 40s. The dream of home-ownership took shape in 1976 when they were able to purchase an acre of redwoods in Humboldt County. They built a house with the sweat equity of their teenage sons and mentorship of some local builders from the church. Martha proved to have a knack for real estate, paying down the principle as quickly as possible

and renting out the home rather than selling it every time they moved, which was frequently. By the end of her life, she owned four homes and no mortgages. Martha and Bob believed that God was a partner in all of their business dealings and they generously supported their church and mission projects. They also prioritized private church school, music lessons, and Pathfinders for the children. Working with God was high on their priority list.

Bob was legally blind since birth, so Martha became the family chauffeur; their first family car was a VW Bug with four children in the back seat. Martha drove the family thousands of miles on road trips to visit in-laws in California or siblings in Canada with a tent, sleeping bags, and a cooler chest in the trunk. In the summer of 1975, a family vacation to California ended up with an invitation for Bob to teach at the SDA school in Fortuna. California remained their home for the rest of their lives, with moves to Watsonville, Simi Valley, Sacramento, and their retirement home in Nevada City where Bob passed away in 2021.

Martha had a way of keeping everyone fed. Food was not fancy but there was always plenty to go around. She baked bread often, and her pots of homemade soup were large. She could feed 15 or 20 people without making it look hard. When the children were in high school, the church youth group met in the Donesky home on Wednesday and Friday nights followed by Saturday evening game nights. Martha would buy popcorn by the 50-pound bag so snacks were always available. Everyone was welcome.

The biggest heartache of Martha's life was when their oldest son Conroy lost his life at the age of 31 because of a plane crash while serving the Huichol people as a missionary pilot in 1991. Her commitment to family is demonstrated by her ongoing close relationship with Conroy's wife Susan and her husband Jonathan and family.

Martha is Survived by her sons Doug (Heather), Orville (Odil); daughter DorAnne (Charles Wolfkill); daughter-in-law Susan (Jonathan Erich); 8 grandchildren; and 3 great-grandchildren. Donations in Martha's memory can be sent to Amistad International, 2205 Shirland Tract Road, Auburn, CA 95603 to support their work with the Huichol community in Mexico. A recording of her funeral service can be viewed on Facebook, uploaded January 16, 2025 by Vallejo Central Seventh-day Adventist Church.