



Paula Ilene Rapuano

August 11, 1945 - March 31, 2026

Paula Ilene Rapuano (née Hayes), of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, passed away peacefully at her home in the early morning hours of Tuesday, March 31, 2026, surrounded by the love of her family. She was 80 years old.

Paula was born on August 11, 1945, in Oklahoma to William and Ora Hayes, the beloved middle child in a lively family of fourteen siblings. At just two months old, her family relocated to the Fresno, California area, where she spent her formative years and developed the warmth, resilience, and strong family values that would define her life.

In her early adulthood, Paula married and welcomed her first two children, Barry Jr. and Stacey. In time, she made her way to Santa Clara, California, where she met the love of her life, Ray Rapuano. They were united in marriage on August 29, 1981, beginning a devoted partnership that would span 45 years. Together they welcomed their son, Jason, and built a life rooted in love and adventure while living throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

In the fall of 1996, Paula and her family embarked on a new chapter, moving cross-country to Cary, North Carolina, where she would remain for the rest of her life, eventually settling in Chapel Hill.

Throughout her life, Paula worked as an executive administrator, a Realtor, and later owned and operated a furniture store. In each role, she brought care, reliability, and a thoughtful attention to detail.

Above all, Paula was devoted to her family. She was the heart of her home—a constant source of strength, care, and unwavering support. Her generosity of spirit and selflessness touched all who knew her. She found great joy in caring for others and took immense pride in the lives and accomplishments of her children and grandchildren.

Paula was also a gifted craftswoman with an extraordinary eye for detail and beauty. She expressed her creativity through jewelry making, knitting, and textile arts, creating pieces that will remain treasured keepsakes for those she loved.

She is survived by her devoted husband of 45 years, Ray Rapuano; her children, Barry Jr. of Durham, North Carolina, Stacey of Wilmington, North Carolina, and Jason Rapuano (Nichole) of Pittsboro, North Carolina; and her eleven cherished grandchildren: Kevin, Kyle, Melissa, Jessica, Clayton, Grace, Jenna, Colton, Christopher, Cora, and Luca, each of whom brought her immeasurable pride and joy.

She is also survived by her loving siblings: sisters Janet, Sandy, Carlene, and Janie, and brothers Mark and Merle, along with many extended family members and dear friends.

Paula's life was a testament to love, resilience, and quiet strength. She leaves behind a legacy of kindness, creativity, and deep devotion to family that will continue to inspire all who knew her.

She will be profoundly missed and forever remembered.

A private funeral service will be held on Friday, April 10, 2026.

Tribute Wall

CK

“ Today, I reflected on memories of Paula. I've enjoyed so many conversations with her. She was such a dedicated mother and I could tell from the way she spoke that she had an unconditional love for all her children and grandchildren. So many times she had said "I wish I could get through to them" or that "I wish they would listen." Then follow with "Oh well, I guess it's something they're going to have to learn on their own." She allowed her children and grandchildren to be free to be themselves and that was who Paula was as a mother.

I know she loved you dearly, Ray. Paula spoke of you so proudly, about your achievements and how much you took care of her and your children.

She so much enjoyed your company, although she enjoyed her alone time too. Paula loved doing her craft work and making jewelry. I remember I had received a beautiful necklace that she had made and when I called her and told her how much I really loved it, I could just see the smile on her face because she said "oh, I'm so glad you like it." One can't say those words without smiling!

As I reflect back on who she was as a young person growing up, and even though we were only two years apart, she was the older, more mature sister. Which I guess, of course, is why our mother trusted her judgment as a teenager and as a young woman.

When you think about what gift Paula would have liked for Mother's Day or anytime during this year, spare your tears and reflect on the memories of the gifts that you did buy for her and how much she appreciated your thoughtfulness and you're kindness and the love that you showed for her in those gifts.

I know we all are going to miss her love and companionship. What a blessing from God for you, Ray, to have had her in your life.

May God comfort and console each and every one of you at this very difficult time. Love to all. Ron and Carlene Kucera

Carlene Kucera - April 10 at 06:00 PM

RH

“ Ray, may a lifetime of beautiful memories with Paula surround you with comfort and gently guide you through this time and the days ahead.

Keeping you and your family in our prayers for peace and comfort.



Ron and Angela Hudson

Ron and Angela Hudson - April 08 at 11:27 PM



“ Ray: We are sending out heartfelt sympathy to you and your family. May your memories of Paula, fill the void in your hearts and bring you all comfort,
Fred and Rosemary

Rose Hughes - April 08 at 10:29 AM

DS

“ I've only known Mrs , Paula for a short time , but she was a timeless beauty, she was breath taking , and the kindest, with the sweetest laugh, Mr, Ray I just hope that when I get old my husband cares for me the way you cared for your beautiful loving Paula,
She's safe and healthy now in heaven.

deirdre smith - April 08 at 10:11 AM

MK

“ *Condolences.*

Matt Krysiniski - April 08 at 09:53 AM

MK

“ *Matt Krysiniski lit a candle in memory of Paula Ilene Rapuano*



Matt Krysiniski - April 08 at 09:52 AM

BA

“ *Paula sounds like a wonderful person. I know she will be missed. May she RIP.*

Barry & Nancy Kitchener

Barry - April 08 at 09:33 AM

SB

Ray, our Beautiful Sister Paula is at home with her Savior. Our Great Physician through His Spirit will comfort her loved ones' hearts 💕 💕
Sandy&Garry

Sandra Beller - April 09 at 03:45 PM

RK

“ *Ray, such a wonderful tribute to Paula. Wishing you peace and comfort.*
Ron and June

Ron Kurtz - April 08 at 08:40 AM

RH

Ray, may a lifetime of beautiful memories with Paula surround you with comfort and gently guide you through this time and the days ahead.

Keeping you and your family in our prayers for peace and comfort. 🙏

Ron and Angela Hudson

Ron and Angela Hudson - April 08 at 11:25 PM