



## Ella Mae Cunneen

October 31, 1919 - November 3, 2022

After 103 years of good clean living under the Big Sky, Ella Mae Cunneen has gone home to be with the Lord. She was the firstborn child of Raymond and Mabel (Fetterhoff) Dorn. Ella Mae's journey started on October 31, 1919 on the Montana prairie. Ray's horse and buggy were not swift enough to rush Mabel to the doctor's house in Harlowton, so Ella Mae was born at the neighbor's farm. She immediately became the apple of her father's eye and ultimately his loyal sidekick.

Ella Mae loved being a big siter and doted on her little sister Belva and her little brothers Gale and Donnie, while still managing to tag along with Ray as he worked the family farm northeast of Harlow. Sometimes she would sneak off to church with her Aunt Hattie. Eventually drought drove the family off the farm and into town where Ray owned and operated a garage and filling station. LMA often worked at the station pumping gas by crank. Ella Mae shined in the classroom and graduated as valedictorian of the Harlowton Class of 1938. She earned a full ride scholarship to Eastern Montana College. During her summer between high school and college, Ella Mae's life changed in an instant when the handsome John Cunneen walked into the ice cream parlor where she was working. A labor dispute on Butte Hill caused the blue-eyed Irish lad with jet black to pack up his '37 Chevy convertible and drive into Harlow where he found work as a carpenter building the high school. He asked her if "it took much brains?" to do her job and by the end of the conversation he had pronounced that he planned to marry her. A whirlwind

romance ensued and resulted in a plan to elope in February 1939. John drove from Butte to Helena in that convertible to meet Ella Mae at the train station. Ella Mae was scribbling a note to her parents and missed the train. She sent a telegram to John who was waiting for her on the platform. The rendezvous was successful the next day, February 18, 1939, and Ella Mae and John were married at the Parish house of the Helena Cathedral. They enjoyed 62 years of marriage and helped put the “boom” in the Baby Boom.

The newlyweds established their residence in Corktown on the Butte Hill. Eventually they moved to Harvard Avenue on The Flats. There they raised their 11 children. During her tenure as chief financial officer of that enterprise, Ella Mae changed more diapers, packed more lunches, washed more clothes and said more prayers than could be counted. Her fiscal policy was sound: cash or check, no loans or credit card. She pinched a penny so hard you could hear Abe cry. Her children might have been skinny (once), but they never went hungry. There was always an extra relative or neighbor at her “table of plenty.” She often said she “received her education at Harvard.” Ella Mae never smoked. She never had a second drink, even though she deserved to. She never swore, except for the time she stubbed and broke her toe on a loaded tonka truck carelessly parked on her kitchen floor. She never spanked her children, even though they had it coming. She never drove a car since she could walk 3 blocks to catch the Englewood bus to go Uptown. She was quick to pay for your gas if you ran an errand for her. Ella Mae was proud of her heritage, she had enough Irish that the Corktown clan thought she just got off the boat, and almost enough Dutch to keep the peace amongst the Irish. After raising 11 Irish Catholic brats, she herself was baptized—if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em she’d say. Or perhaps her motive was to go to mass where she could use her beautiful singing voice.

Ella Mae liked to read cookbooks and clip recipes from magazines, although her meat and potatoes crew rarely afforded her the latitude to take them on a culinary adventure. She saved up and bought an organ and a few manuals and learned to play. Each summer she enjoyed a get away to “Woman’s

Week” at Montana State University.

Ella Mae loved a full, noisy house. She was a gracious hostess with a servant’s heart—the minute you walked through her door she waited on you like you were a paying customer. “Sit down, what can I get you?” were the first words out of her mouth. If you weren’t home by the time she went to bed, she would say a prayer for you and leave the “Jesus light” on for you. Then she would give you that good night kiss first thing the next morning or afternoon. When John died in 2001, Ella Mae could not bear to live in their house without him, so she bought the little house at the end of the block. For 21 years she ran the place that came to be known as “Gram Central Station.” With numerous people coming and going through her back door at all hours, some neighbors thought she was running a meth house. When she hit 95 or so, she stopped cooking and coined the phrase “You fly, I’ll buy.” If you did any work for Mae, you were always rewarded with a gold dollar. She remembered your birthday and always gave you a card with gold coins taped inside. She knew your phone number by heart. She read The Montana Standard every morning and watched the MTN news every evening. Ever independent, she lived by herself until a few months before her 103rd birthday. Ella Mae was surrounded by loved ones when she died nestled in bed next to her fireplace on November 3, 2022.

Ella Mae was preceded in death by her husband John D. Cunneen, her son John Dorn Cunneen, her parents Ray and Mabel Dorn, her sister Belva Welch, her brothers Gale Dorn and Donnie Dorn, numerous sisters and brothers in law and her great grandson Will Levis. She leaves behind 7 daughters and their husbands: Rosalie and Gary (deceased) Watt of Helena, Connie and Joe Pierce (Butte), Carol and Bob Nelson (Butte), Elaine and Bob Hill (Billings), Debbi and Andy Kuchty (Butte), Nancy and Mark Lienemann (Wenatchee, WA), Rita and Don Clark (Missoula); and three sons and their wives: Mick and Jenny Cunneen (Billings), Bill and Shelly Cunneen (Butte), and Paddy and Christine Cunneen (Butte). Ella Mae leaves behind 38

grandchildren, 61 great grandchildren and 5 great-great grandchildren. She leaves numerous nephews and nieces, including the beautiful Diana Dorn with whom she shared a special bond. Ella Mae was among the greatest and the last of the Greatest Generation. We will miss her dearly.

Special thanks to Lorraine Hodges, Nancy, Kristen and crew at Senior Solutions who cared for LMA during her final days.

Ella Mae's remains are in Wayrynen-Richards Funeral Home where friends may call beginning this (Tuesday) evening at 5 o'clock. Vigil services will be conducted at 6 o'clock in the funeral home. Funeral mass will be celebrated Wednesday morning at 11 o'clock in the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and interment will follow in Holy Cross Cemetery.

# Cemetery Details

## Holy Cross Cemetery

4700 Harrison Avenue  
Butte, MT 59701

# Previous Events

## Vigil Service

NOV 8. 6:00 PM (MT)

Wayrynen-Richards Funeral Home  
1800 Florence Ave  
Butte, MT 59701  
(406) 723-3221  
<https://wayrynen-richards.com/>

## Funeral Mass

NOV 9. 11:00 AM (MT)

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church  
Corner of Caldonia and Western Street  
Butte, MT 59701  
[bccn@diocesehelena.org](mailto:bccn@diocesehelena.org)

# Tribute Wall



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.* ”



November 14, 2022 at 02:16 PM



“ *Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.* ”



November 08, 2022 at 07:24 PM



“ *15 files added to the album Ella Mae Cunneen - Memories* ”



**Mike Pierce** - November 07, 2022 at 09:28 PM



“ *Crystal Cross Bouquet was purchased for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.*



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November 07, 2022 at 08:48 PM



“ *The Larry Berg family purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.*



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**The Larry Berg family** - November 07, 2022 at 08:24 PM



“ *We are so sorry for the loss of your beautiful Ella. She was loved through her life. And you are all a shining example of that love. God Bless you all. And now she sings with the Angels. Thinking of you at this time. Mike and Connie Dotson*

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**Connie Dotdon** - November 07, 2022 at 06:32 PM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.*



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November 07, 2022 at 01:29 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Ella Mae Cunneen.* ”



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November 07, 2022 at 12:44 PM