



Arlene Mae Dunker

March 18, 1946 - September 8, 2026

North Platte, Nebraska

Arlene Mae Dunker died in North Platte on September 8, 2026. She was eighty. Born there on March 18, 1946, she grew up knowing the yards as a clock and a weather report. Her father worked a switch. Arlene learned that a waybill is a promise, and that a hot meal at 2 a.m. is another kind of promise.

She spent twenty-six years in a railroad diner that fed crews who treated coffee as a weather report. She started on the grill. She ended as the woman who could tell, from the sound of a ticket wheel, whether the night would hold. She kept a second carton of milk for the brakeman who arrived after the count. She would not let a vendor invent a portion that made the register a liar.

She married Ellis Dunker in 1967. He drove a laundry truck and died in 2006. They raised a daughter and a son in a bungalow with a cottonwood that dropped more work than shade. After Ellis was gone she kept his saucer on the drainboard for a season, then gave it to a granddaughter who liked cereal at odd hours.

People on her block remember a woman who froze extra cinnamon rolls in coffee cans and left them after a funeral. She disliked a speech, loved a clean grill, and could tell you which year the diner switched from square hash browns to the loose kind the crews would actually finish. She died in North Platte, in weather she had always said was honest. The diner still opens. Someone else will count the tickets.

Services

A gathering at a church hall in North Platte. Friends may bring a covered dish. A gift to a rail-crew meal fund is welcome.

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