



Claire Bernadette Sousa

February 14, 1949 - September 8, 2026

Providence, Rhode Island

Claire Bernadette Sousa died in Providence on September 8, 2026. She was seventy-seven. Born there on February 14, 1949, she grew up in a house that smelled of bread and bleach, and she learned a hospital tray before she learned a campus. A tray, she said, is a kind of sentence: it has to arrive complete.

She spent twenty-six years in hospital dietary, first washing pans, later running a breakfast that had to catch patients who came in late from a night of tests. She kept extra juice without making a speech about it. When a storm closed the bridges she still opened the kitchen, because weather is not an excuse to skip a meal. She taught younger aides that a government commodity can be seasoned, and that a person who will not eat is not a problem of character.

She married Rafael Sousa in 1971. They raised a daughter and a son in a triple-decker with a fig that dropped fruit on the neighbor's car and an apology that always arrived with a bag of the same fruit. Rafael drove a delivery van. Claire packed lunches that could survive humidity. After he died in 2016 she kept his chair for a year and then gave it to a grandson who needed a place to do homework.

Neighbors remember a woman who brought extra bread to a night shift without staying for thanks, who knew which intern needed a second explanation, and who could hear a rice pot without looking. She loved a late-summer tomato, a clean map of the lunch count, and the particular quiet after the last tray. She died in Providence, in the small state she refused to apologize for. The line is still moving. Someone else will count the juice.

Services

A gathering in Providence in the evening. A gift to a hospital meal program suits her.

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