



Clayton Rhett Dunbar

July 16, 1952 - August 28, 2026

Grand Junction, Colorado

Clayton Rhett Dunbar died in Grand Junction on August 28, 2026. He was seventy-four. Born there on July 16, 1952, he grew up looking at the Book Cliffs the way other boys looked at a clock. His father read irrigation gates. Clayton learned that water is not a metaphor. It is a set of minutes that do not care how late you are for supper.

He spent thirty-one years riding laterals for a peach district, first as a kid with a shovel, later as the man who would climb a bank when a wet wind had already made the job a rumor. He did not romanticize the work. He said a night breach was a country with its own weather. He taught younger riders that a flashboard is not a suggestion, and that you do not leave a headgate for the next shift to find in the dark. He charged a fair hour and a smaller one when a widow's service ditch needed more mercy than a tariff.

He married Denise Dunbar in 1976. They raised two daughters in a ranch house that needed a new cooler every few summers. Denise kept the books for a cousin's garage. Clayton grilled in the driveway and considered a Palisade peach a civic duty. After he retired he still came out when a neighbor's well pump died, moving slower, carrying the same seriousness.

Friends remember a man who checked the sky before he checked his watch, who could sit through a long offering at church without looking at a phone, and who hummed while he worked as if the ditch were a conversation. He loved the late light on the Colorado, a plate of green chile he did not finish, and the particular quiet after the water came back. He died in Grand Junction, under the cliffs that had always been in the window. The laterals still run. Someone else will ride the next one.

Services

A service in Grand Junction. A gift to an irrigation-district memorial fund or a neighborhood pantry suits him.

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