



Helen Grace Pettigrew

June 30, 1942 - September 7, 2026

Portland, Maine

Helen Grace Pettigrew died in Portland on September 7, 2026. She was eighty-four. Born there on June 30, 1942, she grew up knowing the harbor as a workplace, not a backdrop. Her father worked a ferry. Helen learned a ticket window the way other girls learned a parlor: you stand, you count correctly, and you do not make a traveler's lateness into a story about yourself.

For thirty-one years she sold passages and answered the same question about fog as if it were the first time. She knew which commuter needed the earlier boat without being asked twice. She treated a long line as weather. When the company put in a machine that was supposed to replace a person, she learned the machine and then taught it manners. She retired with a pin and a cake she tried to leave early.

She married Walter Pettigrew in 1964. He fished until the body said otherwise, then mended gear in a shed that never quite closed. They raised a son and a daughter in a flat that smelled of wool and chowder. Walter died in 2013. Helen kept the walk to the waterfront and the habit of bringing extra mittens to the terminal in January. She read the local paper with a pencil and voted in every storm.

Neighbors remember a woman who remembered your return trip, who brought whoopie pies at Christmas without announcing a tradition, and who could sit through a nor'easter warning without making it a personality. She loved a library sale, a good cup of coffee that was never quite hot enough, and the late light on the islands. She died in Portland, in the salt air she had always said you could live with if you buttoned your coat. The window is someone else's now. The patience she practiced there is harder to replace than a schedule.

Services

A service in Portland, then coffee on the water if the weather allows. A gift to a ferry-workers' fund or the public library is welcome.

NN-OBIT-2026-C020

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