



Iola Mae Steinhauser

April 18, 1947 - August 21, 2026

Kearney, Nebraska

Iola Mae Steinhauser died in Kearney on August 21, 2026. She was seventy-nine. Born there on April 18, 1947, she grew up knowing a college dining hall as a clock that did not sleep, and she learned a steam table before she learned a highway. A tray, she said, is a kind of sentence: it has to arrive complete.

She spent twenty-eight years feeding students who treated gravy as a weather report. She started on the dish line. She ended as the woman who could tell, from the sound of a table, whether the rice would hold through a late exam week. She kept extra milk for the night-shift kid who arrived after the count. She would not let a vendor invent a portion that made the register a liar.

She married Elmer Steinhauser in 1968. They raised a daughter and a son in a bungalow with a pecan that dropped more work than shade. After Elmer died in 2010 she kept his saucer on the drainboard for a season, then gave it to a granddaughter who liked cereal at odd hours. She sang alto in a choir that rehearsed on Tuesdays whether anyone new showed up or not.

People on her block remember a woman who froze extra cornbread in coffee cans and left them after a funeral. She disliked a speech, loved a clean steam table, and could tell you which year the hall switched from square pizza to the round kind the students would actually finish. She died in Kearney, in heat she had always said was honest. The line still opens.

Services

A gathering at her church hall in Kearney. Friends may bring a covered dish. A gift to a campus meal fund is welcome.

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