



John Denver

December 31, 1943 - October 12, 1997

Monterey, California

John Denver, the singer and songwriter whose clear tenor and songs of mountains, home and open sky made him one of the defining American voices of the 1970s, died when his experimental aircraft crashed into Monterey Bay on October 12, 1997. He was fifty-three.

He was born Henry John Deutschendorf Jr. on December 31, 1943, in Roswell, New Mexico, the son of an Air Force officer, and grew up moving from base to base. A grandmother's gift of a Gibson guitar steered him toward folk music. After singing with the Chad Mitchell Trio he took the stage name Denver, for the city he loved, and struck out alone. "Take Me Home, Country Roads," "Rocky Mountain High," "Sunshine on My Shoulders" and "Annie's Song" turned him into a household name; he sold tens of millions of records and filled arenas without abandoning the acoustic guitar.

He was more than a hit-maker. He served as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, lobbied for wilderness and against nuclear weapons, acted in films including *Oh, God!* with George Burns, and guest-hosted *The Tonight Show*. Colorado adopted "Rocky Mountain High" as a state song. His personal life was stormier than the gentleness of his music suggested—marriages, a drunk-driving arrest, and a long struggle to balance fame with the private man who preferred Aspen to Hollywood.

On October 12, 1997, flying a Long-EZ he had recently purchased, he crashed off Pacific Grove while apparently struggling with a hard-to-reach fuel valve. He was cremated and his ashes scattered over the Rocky Mountains. The songs remain, still sung around campfires by people who never knew the man born Deutschendorf.

Services

Died in Monterey, CA, October 12, 1997, aged 53. Portrait: RCA Records publicity photograph, 1974 (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H264

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