



Rosa Maria Quinones

March 4, 1959 - September 3, 2026

Tampa, Florida

Rosa Maria Quinones died in Tampa on September 3, 2026. She was sixty-seven. Born there on March 4, 1959, she grew up east of the river in a house that smelled of coffee and bleach, and she learned a cafeteria line before she learned a campus. A tray, she said, is a kind of sentence: it has to arrive complete.

She spent twenty-six years feeding children in Hillsborough schools, first washing pans, later running a breakfast that had to catch kids who came in late from a pickup that had already been working since dark. She kept extra milk without making a speech about it. When a storm closed the buses 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 child who will not eat is not a problem of character.

She married Rafael Quinones in 1981. They raised a daughter and a son in a bungalow with a mango 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. Rosa packed lunches that could survive humidity. After he died in 2014 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 tamales 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 Tampa, in the heat she had always preferred to a clean cold. The line is still moving. Someone else will count the milk.

Services

A gathering in Tampa in the evening. A gift to a school meal program or a migrant-education fund suits her.

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