



Ruthie Mae Fontenot

November 8, 1943 - April 18, 2026

Lafayette, Louisiana

Ruthie Mae Fontenot died in Lafayette on April 18, 2026. She was eighty-two. Born there on November 8, 1943, she grew up speaking a house French that the school later tried to iron out of her, and she kept enough of it to season a kitchen and a joke. She learned to sew before she learned to drive. A needle, she said, did not talk back, and it paid when the cane season was thin.

She made dresses, hems, and funeral clothes in a front room that smelled of starch and coffee. People came with a plastic bag of someone else's measurements and left with a garment that fit the living body, not the hanger. She cooked for her church without putting her name on a committee list. Gumbo, rice dressing, a sheet cake that vanished before the blessing was finished - she treated a parish supper as work that had to be done right, not as a performance. When a family could not pay for alterations, she found a reason the job had been easy.

She married Alphonse Fontenot in 1964. They raised three children in a shotgun that grew a porch and then a second porch because the first one filled with cousins. Alphonse drove a truck and died in 1998. Ruthie kept the house, the garden of peppers, and the habit of sending a plate next door when she cooked too much, which was most evenings. She watched the same Saturday dance hall from a chair long after she stopped dancing, and she could tell you who had married whom in 1971 without raising her voice.

Grandchildren remember a woman who corrected their French gently and their manners less gently, who kept a cigar box of buttons as if it were a bank, and who did not waste a scrap of cloth or a kind word. She died in Lafayette, in the heat she had always said she preferred to a clean cold. The church kitchen will be louder without her and less sure of the salt.

Services

A rosary and funeral Mass in Lafayette. The family welcomes a favorite hymn and a dish for the hall afterward.

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