



Velva Jean Harkrider

January 17, 1942 - August 24, 2026

Fort Smith, Arkansas

Velva Jean Harkrider died in Fort Smith on August 24, 2026. She was eighty-four. Born there on January 17, 1942, she grew up knowing furniture as a rumor that paid and a river as a weekday neighbor. She learned a sander before she learned a highway. A finish, she said, is a kind of honesty: it shows what you hid or it does not.

She spent thirty-one years in a plant that turned oak into dining sets for catalogs she never quite believed. She started sweeping. She ended as the woman who trained new hands that a rejected leaf is not a verdict on a life. She kept a privately updated list of which stains actually satisfied which inspector, because the published list was always a week behind the truth. When the office put in a machine that was supposed to replace a person, she learned the machine and then taught it manners.

She married Doyle Harkrider in 1961. They raised three children in a frame house that needed a new porch every twenty years. Doyle drove a delivery truck. Velva packed lunches and considered a Sunday roast a civic obligation. After he died in 2006 she still sat with neighbors who had to renew something and did not know where to start.

Grandchildren remember a woman who corrected their thank-you notes more than their homework, who kept a biscuit tin of sandpaper scraps, and who could name every auntie in the sanctuary by the hat she no longer wore. She died in Fort Smith, in the brick city she refused to apologize for. The line is someone else's now. The patience she practiced there is harder to replace than a sander.

Services

Visitation in Fort Smith, then a simple service. A gift to a mill-workers' fund or a neighborhood pantry is welcome.

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