



Dona Jean Starr

June 10, 1929 - July 19, 2025

Dona Jean Starr (nee Phillips) passed away on Saturday, July 19, 2025, in Fresno, California at the age of 96. She was born in Wasco, California, to Wayne and Minnie Phillips (nee McCubbin) on June 10, 1929.

She married Ivan Starr in 1954. They enjoyed 52 years of marriage. Dona worked for her mother-in-law Ethel Starr, of Starr House of Music, for 17 years. Dona and Ivan had four children, William, Robert, Kim, and Rebecca, who took lessons at Starr House of Music. Dona supported the children in their music lessons as well as their schooling. Academic excellence was expected. Dona and Ivan dreamed of their children attending college, which they had not been able to afford for themselves. The whole family also rode motorcycles together. In their later years, Dona and Ivan traveled the world on cruises together, fulfilling lifelong dreams.

Dona had strong community values and took initiative to bring together people with common interests. In the 1960s she is cited in the local newspaper as a concerned citizen, strong public advocate, ballot initiative signature gatherer (see news photo), and a participant in City Council meetings. She also served on political campaigns.

Beginning in the 1970s Dona was a breeder of AKC-registered basset hounds, under the kennel name STARBID Bassets, and founded the Central

California Basset Hound Club. In the 1980s she developed an interest in floral arranging, and she led the Sogetsu School of Ikebana. Dona made the displays for club members' floral arrangements at the Fresno Fair (where her own arrangements won many first prizes) and in the Metropolitan Museum and the Fresno Art Museum. She joined the Fresno-Clovis Rail Trail Committee, and invited the Fresno and Clovis Irrigation Districts to participate, helping to ensure its successful completion.

Dona's talent for new skills started early. When she was three years old, her father's construction crew taught her to play poker. Her parents were exceptional game hunters and fishers who taught her that women could do anything men could. By the age of five, she was cleaning catfish. As a young woman working for a photo restoration company in Las Vegas, she converted black-and-white photos to color, painting the hues skillfully on the photo negatives.

Dona believed in gender equality. When underestimated, she'd say, "Look, I play cards at the men's table." While working for the photographer, she also picked up part-time work as a shill at the card tables. Dona was a card-counter. Her pinochle and poker skills were formidable. Well into her 60s she could tell you what cards you were holding if you dared bet against her.

Dona also believed in race equality. In the 1960s, she would sometimes manage local campaign headquarters. One day, a local businessman brought racist literature into the office and directed her to distribute it. She angrily threw every copy in the trash. Dona was a true-blue friend and a steadfast partner and mother. Her rock-solid sense of fairness, her wisdom, insight—and cunning—will be missed.

Dona was preceded in death by her spouse, Ivan, her parents, her siblings Dale and Wayne Phillips, and child William.

She is survived by her children, Robert, Rebecca, and Kim Starr-Reid, along with her spouse Tom Reid and Dona's grandchild Birch.

The service will be private at the request of the family.

Remembrances in Dona's honor may be sent to your preferred charity.

Tribute Wall

AG

“ I had many conversations with Mrs. Starr at her kitchen table, sometimes over take-out lunch, other times over memories and experiences. One of the last times I visited Mrs. Starr at her home, Rebecca and I walked up to the front door, but instead of knocking or ringing the Big-Ben doorbell, I sang/moaned out the first bar of the Westminster Quarters, and Mrs. Starr, who stopped on the other side of the screen door, sang out the second bar, which I followed with the third and she with the fourth. We were so tickled with ourselves, that we went back and forth with the Quarters a few more times, each on her side of the screen door, while patient Rebecca waited for us to get the chimes out of our system. I think of that when I hear the Big-Ben chimes, and for that, they hum with a little mischief and California.

Ana Garza - July 24, 2025 at 05:53 PM

AG

“ Mrs. Starr and I had a number of conversations at her kitchen table. At one of my last visits to her home, I sang the first half of the doorbell chime, and she sang the second half. We were so tickled with ourselves that we kept it up a few repeats, much to the bemusement of her most patient daughter Rebecca. I'm going to miss Mrs. Starr, and I'm going to miss our conversations.

Ana Garza - July 23, 2025 at 09:34 PM

RS

“ 1 file added to the album *Dona Starr*



Rebecca I Starr - July 23, 2025 at 06:36 PM

RS

Taken at River Bluffs Memory Care, Fresno, 9/24/2024.

Rebecca I Starr - July 27, 2025 at 10:09 AM

RS

“ 1 file added to the album *Dona Starr*



Rebecca I Starr - July 23, 2025 at 06:35 PM

RS

Taken with Max, in the garden at River Bluffs Memory Care, Fresno, on 3/18/2024.

Rebecca I Starr - July 27, 2025 at 10:10 AM

RS

“ 1 file added to the album *Dona Starr*



Rebecca I Starr - July 23, 2025 at 06:34 PM

RS

12/13/1960. Dona getting her neighbor's signature on a petition to provide community fallout shelters to those neighbors who couldn't afford to construct their own backyard versions.

Rebecca I Starr - July 27, 2025 at 10:14 AM

RS

“ 1 file added to the album *Dona Starr*



Rebecca I Starr - July 23, 2025 at 06:33 PM

RS

Dona with her brothers Wayne and Dale. Early 1950s.

Rebecca I Starr - July 27, 2025 at 10:16 AM

RS

“ 1 file added to the album *Dona Starr*



Rebecca I Starr - July 23, 2025 at 06:32 PM

RS

Dona and her husband Ivan on a Hawaiian cruise. Mid 1990s.

Rebecca I Starr - July 27, 2025 at 10:18 AM