



## Marlene Rae Simla

January 1, 1939 - June 17, 2023

Marlene Rae Spencer Simla

January 1, 1939 – June 17, 2023

Marlene Rae Spencer Simla, proud member of the Yakama Nation, was born at home in Toppenish on January 1, 1939 to James J. Spencer Jr. and his wife Catherine Annie Andrews Spencer. The sixth of eleven children, her siblings all predeceased her: Sharon S. Zack, Geraldine “Jeri” S. Olney, Frank A. Spencer, Delores Trujillo, Robert James Spencer, Gloria B. Spencer, Caryl A. Spencer, Louie Vargas, Eugenia “Jeannie” M. Sanchez, and she is survived by her sister Elaine "Allen" M. Andrews.

Marlene passed into the arms of the Creator, taking her rightful place among her people, on June 17, 2023 at Union Gap. She was especially proud of her caring son, Wayne Spencer Simla, who survives her.

A graduate of Toppenish high school, she followed her passion for art to attend the Institution of Indian Arts in Santa Fe. She graduated from Ft. Lewis College in Durango, Colorado with a bachelor’s degree and later earned her master’s degree in education from Heritage University. This was only the start of a lifetime of scholarship that she freely shared with anyone who asked and through her leadership in the Toppenish Historical Society and as a board member of Friends of Toppenish Creek.

She was a director and lead teacher for early childhood programs, a social worker for Nak Nu We Sha, and program director of the Area Agency on Aging. She devoted much of her 44 year career at the Yakama Nation to the well-being of the Nation's children. She helped hundreds of children and young adults build a foundation for life-long learning and to find safe and loving homes.

While at the Head Start program she saw that none of the books for story hour were Yakama Nation stories. She set about to write the legends of her Klickitat people, illustrated with her lush watercolor paintings. She felt this was an investment in our children's future. Among her many books, Marlene brought to life the incredible true story of her own sixth-great grandfather as told by her elders in, "The Young Man's Ascent of Mt. Rainier."

Her book, "The Legacy of Chief Spencer" tells the story of her great great grandfather, the first Chairman of the Yakama Nation back in 1855. She contributed vital research for a 2016 honoring of those who fought in the First Treaty War including her great great grandfather Paul Ashue Weyallup. Weyallup was from Selah but joined his relatives in the successful campaign to return Indian land to Indian ownership west of the mountains.

An accomplished award-winning artist, her 50-year retrospective was hosted by the Yakama Nation Museum and Culture Center. She exhibited her handmade dolls in beaded buckskin regalia at the Central Washington State Fair always taking home a ribbon, was invited each year to submit pieces to the juried art show at the Washington State Historical Museum, as well as contributing to the annual Spilyay-Mi Art Show.

Beyond a life filled with accomplishment and service, her huge circle of relations and friends will all carry memories of her limitless generosity and the

way she made each of us feel special as she called out “Howdy!” before our name. The way every day began, “Great day in the morning!” Marlene made every day great. It was her special gift.

“When I pass into the next world, I hope all will know that I’ve only traveled from one life to another. I love the wilderness and her resources. I love children and the little important things in their lives. I enjoyed working with teens and encouraging them to be strong, be safe, and to learn, learn, learn. It was a joy to eat with the elders at local dinners and feasts. I look forward to seeing my parents, brothers, sisters and loved ones that passed on before me when I enter the next world.”

# Cemetery Details

## Elmwood Cemetery

Elmwood Road  
Toppenish, WA

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

JUN 21. 11:00 AM (PT)

Elmwood Cemetery  
Elmwood Road  
Toppenish, WA

# Tribute Wall



“ *Marlene Rae Simla*

October 05, 2023 at 11:22 AM



“ *Beautiful, brilliant and talented Marlene, I was always so very honored to call you my friend. Terry E. Lockett*

**Terry Lockett** - August 16, 2023 at 02:21 PM



“ *Thank you for your teachings*



**Cialita** - August 01, 2023 at 02:50 PM



“ *Kim Smartlowit lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*

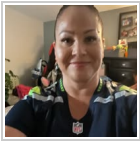


**Kim Smartlowit** - July 11, 2023 at 04:52 PM

LO

“ *My deepest condolences to Marlene's family. She was a dear friend, and will always remember her kindness to me and my family the years we lived in Toppenish*  
*From Lola,*  
*Santee Sioux in Nebraska*

Lola - July 07, 2023 at 02:37 PM



“ *Alison Aranda lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



Alison Aranda - June 27, 2023 at 05:34 PM

SL

“ *So sad to read of Marlene's passing. Such a wonderful caring, loving, smiling lady who always knew you. I remember Wayne when he was just a little guy. Marlene and my mom were very close years ago and now they are reunited again. Love you Marlene and my you Rest In Peace 🙏🙏😭*

Sharra Dixon Luper-Cortes - June 25, 2023 at 11:49 PM

WW

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Winona Wynn - June 25, 2023 at 02:43 PM

CI

*Thank you for sharing, Winona*

**Cialita** - August 01, 2023 at 06:48 PM

LJ

“ *Was fun traveling with you an your amazing stories*



**Leanda Jim** - June 22, 2023 at 02:26 PM

DW

“ *Debra Whitefoot lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



**Debra Whitefoot** - June 22, 2023 at 12:38 PM

DW

*Prayers for her journey. She was a wonderful lady and she will be missed here. Thank you for your service to elders and children. We sometimes do not do enough to recognize others' contributions. You did well.*

**Debra Whitefoot** - June 22, 2023 at 12:40 PM

EL

“ *Emma LaVallie lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



**Emma LaVallie** - June 21, 2023 at 05:27 PM

EL

*Rest in Peace Dear Lady, you and Mom will have some visits, like the great ones you used to have! Condolences to your family!! Fond memories of a beautiful soul full of artistic talent and compassion for our youth!❤️🙏*

**Emma LaVallie** - June 21, 2023 at 05:40 PM

VW

“ *Special lady, always honored veterans in words and deeds.*

**Vic Wood** - June 21, 2023 at 04:56 PM



“ *A very rare energy she carried as she provided services for the Yakama Nation, especially for the children facing challenges of Foster Care. Blessings in eternal peace Marlene as you greet family & friends on the other side....prayers for your friends & family left behind that they be comforted & strengthened by your fine example of a nurturing, talented, & endless energy .....*



**Kianpum Angeline Phillips-Sappallel** - June 21, 2023 at 01:24 PM

MM

*To a very talented lady who has been a long friend since the birth of our sons. We gave birth to them at same time and then when we left the hospital we discovered a few hours later that we were neighbors. She always kept up on Tim's ( Timmy) whereabouts and we always spent many hours reminiscing about the old days as young mothers. She always encouraged me to not give up during those hardtimes. I will greatly miss her and the wonderful friendship we have had. Rest in Peace Marlene. Prayers to her son who she lived for and loved so much. Hugs to all her son, family, and friends . God Bless such a beautiful, wonderful lady.*

**Marilyn Manzano** - June 21, 2023 at 07:52 PM



“ *Laura Colfax-Maldonado lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



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**Laura Colfax-Maldonado** - June 20, 2023 at 06:02 PM



“ *Manuela Spencer lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



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**Manuela Spencer** - June 20, 2023 at 05:15 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Marlene Rae Simla.*



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June 20, 2023 at 03:00 PM



“ *My sincere condolences to the rest of our family, Marlene's many close friends and all of our relations. I will miss you, my cousin, and I pray that you rest in peace..*



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**Abel French** - June 20, 2023 at 03:00 PM

BO

“ *Bernice Owens lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



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**Bernice Owens** - June 20, 2023 at 02:03 PM

SS

“ *Shay-Anne Spencer lit a candle in memory of Marlene Rae Simla*



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**Shay-Anne Spencer** - June 20, 2023 at 12:00 PM

JH

“ *Oh I loved that woman, always busy, always moving, her artwork was original and told history she lived her son, her family history, she enjoyed getting jackpots!  
Thank you Tamunwithla for sharing her life her gifts..*

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**Jennie Honanie** - June 20, 2023 at 10:27 AM

LS

“ *Marlene was a beautiful lady she shared her art work with everyone and the stories of her life history were so beautiful, she will be missed*

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**Lenora Spino** - June 19, 2023 at 09:30 PM

TG

“ *My condolences to the family. She was a great woman. RIP* ”



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**Tamera Gardee** - June 19, 2023 at 05:58 PM