

Reta Marie O'Rear (nee Clark)

June 9, 1948 - September 15, 2022



Reta Marie Clark, my mother, was born on June 9, 1948, daughter of Marie and Louis Milton Clark, sister to Larry Floyd Clark, who was three years older than her. Marie, as was typical of the times, was a homemaker; Lou was a photographer for the air force. They spent the first seven years of Reta's life in Kissimmee, Florida, after which they moved to Lancaster, California, due to Lou's

transfer to Edwards Air Force Base. There they settled in a tract house, father and mother, son and daughter, a model of American normalcy.



The Clarks in 1948: Marie, Reta, Lou, and Larry.



Reta around 1952.

Those early years appeared to progress typically: Reta goofed off in the snow with her brother, played with dolls like most young girls, and was entertained and warmed by her dog, Peggy. Myriad photos suggested the family was relatively tight-knit. They hit a rough spot, however, when Reta was about 12 years old: Lou suffered a severe neurologic ailment, likely an aneurysm, that forced his honorable discharge from the air force and subsequent financial troubles. Lou's troubles no doubt deeply saddened Reta since she adored him. They became so destitute that they had to sell their home and move into a trailer home. Nevertheless, Reta persevered, being the first of the nuclear family to graduate high school.



Marie, Reta, and Larry around 1952.



Reta around 1954.



Reta in 1966 - high-school graduate!

Shortly after earning her diploma, she moved into an apartment, though I can't recall if she lived alone or with friends. She'd been working at a Mexican restaurant, but then scored a gig at a supermarket - I think as a cashier. A move up. Those few years just out of high school may have been the happiest ones she ever lived. She'd blossomed into a very attractive young woman, arguably the best-lookin' person of all my relatives...and the fellas noticed. She went with some of her girlfriends to see Elvis in Vegas, and then up

to Monterey; I took her back to Monterey many, many years later during Christmas season in 2012, and a little nostalgic light flashed in her eyes when she saw for a second time those iconic pines glowing gold from the setting sun.



Reta with Linda in Las Vegas, 1967.



Reta as bride's maid in 1968.

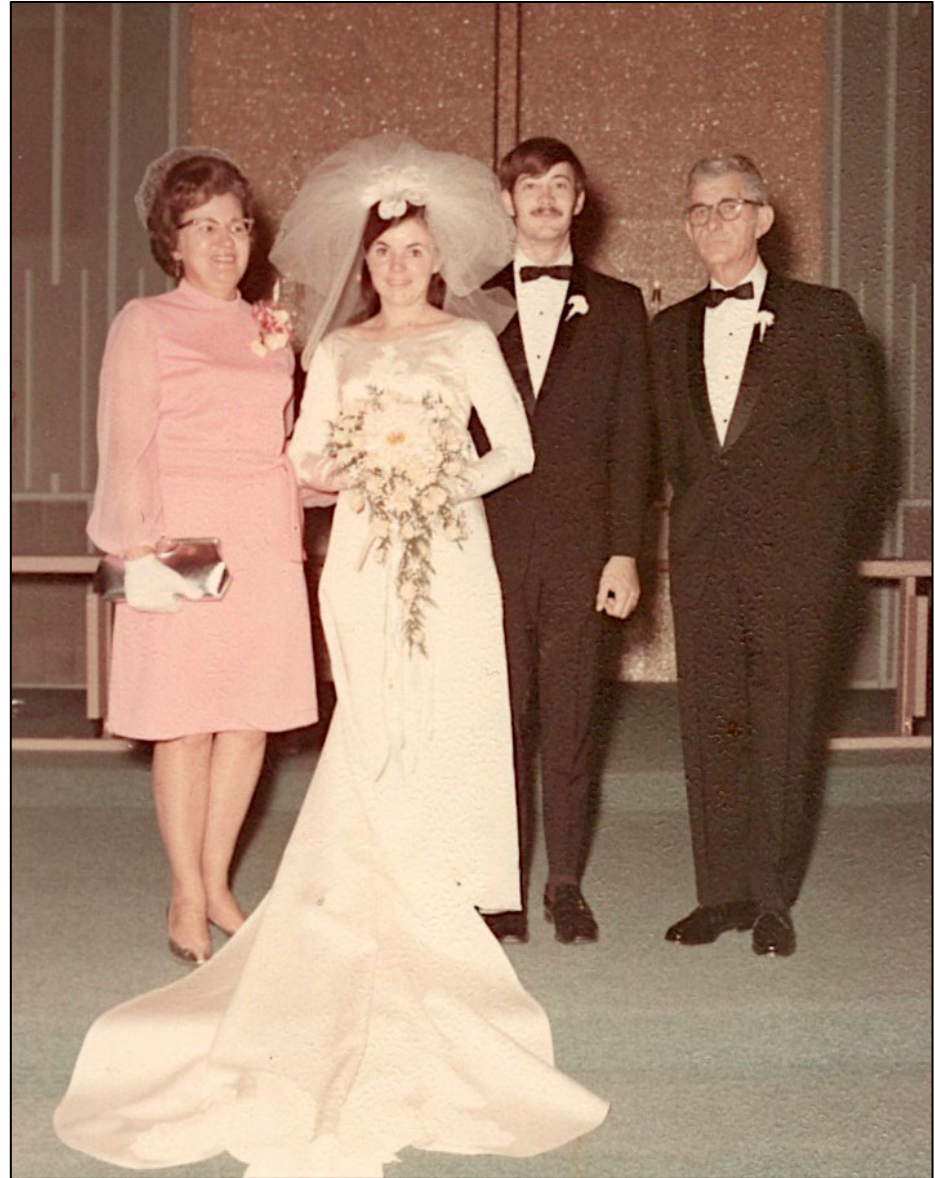
And then she met and fell in love with a man - my father, Chris O'Rear, who also worked at the supermarket. After a courtship of about a year, they married in 1970, and quickly thereafter bought a house, the one I lived in for my first 13 years, a single-story tract house, 823 West Avenue J-10, Lancaster, California. Not too long after, my sister, Melinda Elizabeth, was born on July 29, 1971. Reta



Reta with a frisky fella named Daryl, 1969.

had quit her grocery gig to attend to the full-time job of being a mother. So many big changes so quickly - marriage, house, birth, lifestyle change - and all those shifts seemed successful and welcome. Many photos abound of both Reta and Chris with genuine smiles. They led an active life, even after the birth of Melinda: they camped, visited amusement parks, and vacationed in scenic towns, such as Solvang, California.

On May 20, 1975, I, Teejay, came along, doubling my mother's workload. Regrettably, the relationship between Reta and Chris, like so many others, began to dull. However,



The big day, 10/24/1970.



Reta in front of 823 West Avenue J-10, 1971.



Reta (pregnant) with Chris in Antelope Valley, 1971.

for the sake of my sister and I, they kept together, kept it together, for several years. But by late 1982, they couldn't do it anymore and divorced. Reta was allotted the house, the van, and primary custody of my sister and I, while Chris was to provide child support.

That year was a big turning point, was not easy, and it was compounded by Lou, Reta's father, dying in 1983. Chris was very diligent with his child-support payments, but that wasn't enough to support us: Reta'd have to get a job. And so she did, diligently working one menial job after another, which was really all she could get given just a high-school diploma: flipping burgers at Burger King, shuffling paperwork and answering phones as a secretary/receptionist in a few medical establishments, connecting phone-callers as a switchboard operator. She even cranked wrenches on the B-1 bomber for aerospace company Rockwell, but she quit because, admirably, she didn't like contributing to something that was meant to destroy and kill. Reta somehow, after slogging through eight-

hour shifts, had the energy to cart my sister and I to all the typical activities kids partake in: for Melinda, softball, gymnastics, and dance; for me, football, baseball, BMX, and, later, fishing. I can still see her sitting on the bleachers, by herself, during a nighttime little-league game of mine - my one fan. It really was Herculean of her.

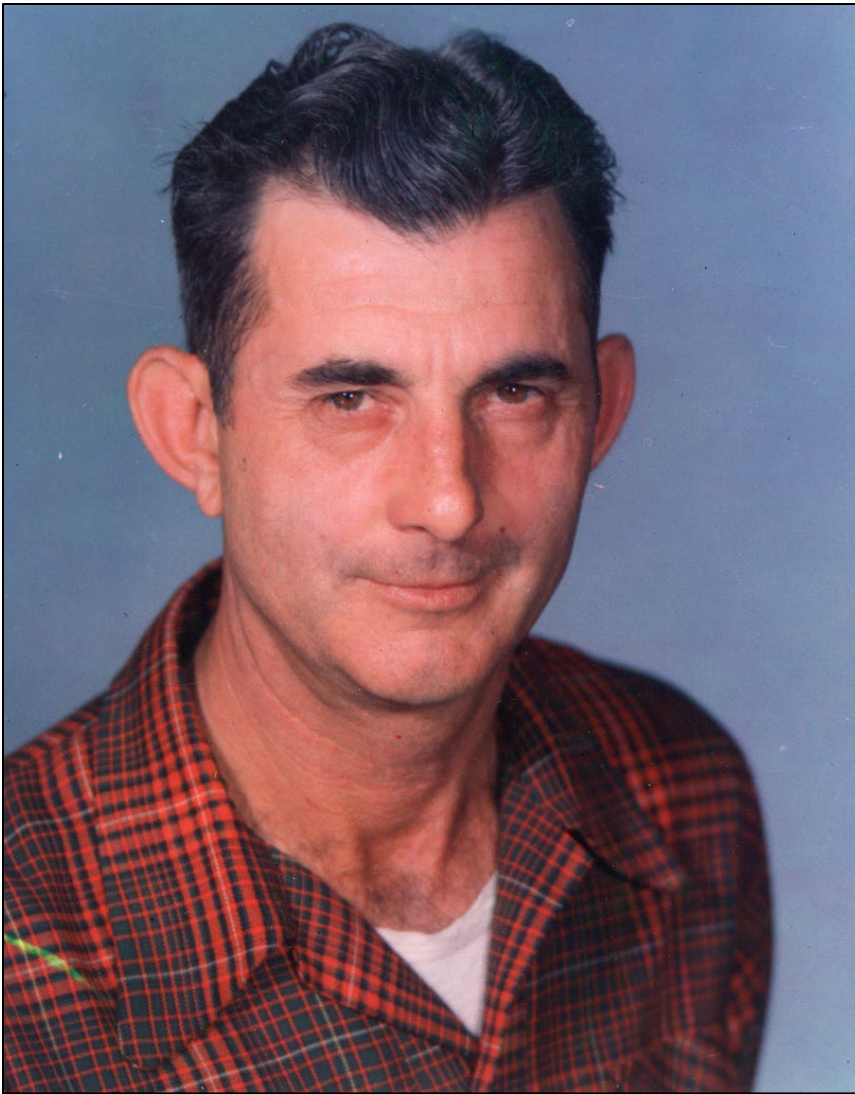


Reta with Teejay, just after birth: May 1975.



Melinda and Teejay in Santa Barbara, ~1977.

And still, even with busting hump at a full-time job and supporting two kids, she had the energy to try to better herself - and she had the potential. She took at least one nighttime community-college class, and it was, fittingly, math. That's where her talent really was - she excelled with numbers. I'm pretty sure she even killed a calculus class, which most people can't. Unfortunately, it was



Louis Milton Clark: 1914 - 1983.

growing into adulthood, Reta added a new "child" to the house, a black-and-white leggy dog named Clancey, from whom she derived great comfort.

only a few classes - she never progressed beyond, even though I could've seen her using her math skills in a more fulfilling role, such as as an engineer.

A new beginning occurred when I was around 10. She fell in love with a very nice man, Craig - big dude, big fluffy brown hair, neatly trimmed beard, and very easy-going. Everyone liked Craig: my sister and I, Uncle Larry, and even my father, the ex-husband. Craig was a good dude - he played catch with me and whisked us away on little excursions (to the Kern River, for example), which was really generous of him since neither my sister nor I were easy-going kids. For many months, they seemed happy, and we all expected that they'd take the big plunge and marry. Instead, they broke up, surprising us all, a sad ending for all.

By the time I was 13, she was working in a hospital, earning a little more money than her previous jobs, although I still had welfare tokens for lunch at junior high, so - not much more. But somehow, the house we'd lived in was nearly paid off, and a big influx of people moving to Lancaster was bumping up property values. With crime escalating in the city, and my sister's desire to attend San Diego State University, moving to the San Diego area allured. So after Melinda finished high school and I finished junior high (1989), Reta sold the house, profited well, and moved us to Poway, where, after renting a house for a few months, Reta bought a two-story townhouse. She landed an administrative gig in the medical field closer to the ocean, and, once settled in, life continued much as before, though her burgeoning wanderlust was sated with two exotic adventures: one to Bali in 1992, and another with Marie to Hawaii in 1999. With both my sister and I



Craig ~1984: they had some good times.



With Melinda in Bali, 1992.



With the new "kid," Clancey.

In 2000, Reta decided to sell her house and move to Denver, Colorado, where my sister lived. And, as luck would have it, housing prices were rising, and Reta sold her house and turned a nice profit, after which I helped her move to Denver. It took a while, but she found and bought a nice little house in Englewood, and then, assisted by my sister's fiance, landed a good secretarial job, probably the highest-paying gig she'd ever had. I was there when she'd gotten spiffed up for the interview, in a very flattering lime-green dress. She looked great. Things were looking bright for her, at the start of 2001.

I think that year and the following two contained some of her happier times. New house, decent job, close to her daughter and her son-in-law and the promise of grandkids, I'd put myself back together after a low period following Portland and had been accepted to University of California, Davis - lots to be optimistic about. She was beaming when I came out for a full week in 2002 for my sister's

wedding. Reta not only was, of course, a big part of the wedding, but she whitewater-rafted a river with me - she'd never done that before. She rode a mountain train - she always had an affection for train and boat tours - and took a deep dive in a mine during a tour, another adventure. She'd always longed to explore the rainforests of Costa Rica, and she finally actualized it in 2003, when she topped the experience off by ziplining through the canopy, a dream realized.



On Clear Creek with Teejay, 2002.



In Costa Rica, 2003.

Things soured after 2003, but Reta showed both love and perseverance. I once again broke down, but I clawed my way out again with her vital support. She'd switched jobs, and then, in 2004, lost the one she had. Nevertheless, she unemployed, me struggling mentally, we escaped life's difficulties with a two-week road trip through the South in 2004 for her to see again - and for me the first time - many relatives. We talked; listened to music; were feasted via the good ol' southern hospitality by her Aunt Jean in Alabama, Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Margie in North Carolina, and Aunt Dot and Uncle Ivey in Virginia; watched some old rockabilly cats tear it up by Sun Studios in Memphis; had to hit Graceland given her lifelong love for Elvis; and, but of course, had to take a cruise on a big boat, this time on ol' Black Water, the mighty Mississippi. Those two weeks were the closest we'd ever been, and both she and I cherished 'em.

The next several years, she hung on, getting back in the work saddle, diligently busting ass at myriad medical administrative



With Uncle Jimmie's family in North Carolina, 2004.



With Teejay in Memphis, 2004.

positions, although the pay was less than when she originally moved to Colorado. She had to supplement with a second gig, mainly as a receptionist at a library, to make ends meet. Reta's financial struggles weren't availed by her being diagnosed with lymphoma in 2008, although the treatment she received was very effective. Nevertheless, those years of Reta's life were still peppered with many bright spots. The birth of my sister's two children gave Reta the grandchildren she'd always desired. Too, Reta added another "child" to her own home, Gracey, another leggy dog, though this one was black and grey. She managed to squeeze in another exotic adventure, flying south to Jamaica in 2006. I was living well, earning my bachelor's degree in fisheries biology (which I might not have achieved without her support), quickly getting a good job in my profession, and then returning to school for a graduate degree in ecology. Also, I'd settled down the most I ever had, moving in with my longest-term girlfriend, Amber, who I was with for five years, and those first few years were pure joy. Reta visited several times during those years, and I know our happiness - it flowed to her a little bit. I don't doubt that her grandkids, her visits to Amber and I here in Davis, and her excursions were as much medicine as the drugs she took for the lymphoma.

In 2010, despite her efforts, her wages could no longer keep up with her mortgage payments, and she was forced to short-sell



With Melinda in Jamaica, 2006.



Grandkids! 2007.

her home: another tough financial break. Luckily, my sister was able to create space in her own home for Reta to live in, and for several years thereafter Reta was able to attend her grandkids intimately. Concomitantly, she continued working in the medical and retail fields. Though her wanderlust had cooled in these later years, it still burned. Most years found her traveling to Davis to spend time with me, and we went on many adventures, to Santa Cruz, Monterey, and Lake Tahoe, for example. She'd always an affection for big trees, so we wandered among towering redwoods on the west side of Napa Valley and then, after a circuitous drive, strolled among a hidden grove of giant sequoias in the western Sierra Nevada. She was awed by all the life of those massive trees and entertained by the little life hidden in the massive trees' nooks and crannies, such as Pacific treefrogs. She traveled elsewhere as well, once again to the Caribbean region, this time to the Dominican Republic.



With Teejay at Golden Gate Park, 2008.



In Monterey, 2012.



With friend in Dominican Republic, 2014.



With Napa redwood, 2015.

In 2014, she had a bad fall at a big-box retailer that required shoulder surgery - ouch. However, the retailer admitted that they had some fault in the injury and offered a settlement to Reta, which Reta accepted and translated into a cute little trailer home in the wonderful Wolhurst Community in Littleton, Colorado, in 2017. She was exhilarated by owning her own home again. She'd overwhelmed the walls with framed photos of the copious adventures she'd been on, as well as some I'd been on and had framed and sent to her. There she lived the last years of her life, often walking her dog around the little pond and then calling me and describing all the peculiar behaviors of the geese and crawdads, which, being a biologist and a naturalist, I thoroughly enjoyed. Sadly, her dog Gracey died in 2018. That no doubt hurt, but her new "child," a fired-up colorful pooch, Angel, abated that pain. Also, I know that seeing her

two grandchildren growing up, seeing 'em at football games or tae kwon do matches or traveling with 'em to Disneyworld in Orlando, Florida, warmed her soul.



With friend in Orlando, FL, 2016.



With Melinda and grandkids, 2016.



New home beginning in 2017.

chance. I can only hope that this, in some way, serves as some consolation.

*With love,
Teejay and Melinda*

Reta was found dead at her home in Wolhurst on the morning of September 15, 2022, though evidence suggests that Reta had died a day or two before. Reta appeared to have died suddenly, lounging in her easy chair - a merciful exit. Neither my sister nor I were surprised by her death: Reta had been riddled with myriad medical problems through her later years. Nevertheless, I hadn't expected it to occur suddenly - I felt I would've been notified that her death was near, and I would've been able to see her alive for a last time, tell her I'd loved her, and say goodbye. We never got that

