



Clara Rafaelita Briggs "Bear"

December 4, 1947 - January 21, 2026

Clara Rafaelita "Bear" Briggs, 78, of Rochester, passed away peacefully on January 21, 2026. Born on December 4, 1947, Clara was the beloved daughter of Evangelina Garcia and Felix Salazar, both of whom preceded her in death. She was lovingly raised by Eliza and Tomas Maes, who also preceded her in death and helped shape the strong, caring woman so many came to know and love.

In 1968, Clara married the love of her life, Duane Francis Briggs. Together, they shared 57 devoted years of marriage, building a life centered on family, commitment, and unwavering support for one another.

Clara dedicated much of her professional life to serving her community. She worked as a bus driver for the Gates-Chili School District for 33 years, and later for Monroe Transportation for 7 years. She took great pride in safely transporting generations of children and was known for her reliability, warmth, and steady presence.

Family was the heart of Clara's world. She is survived by her loving children, Melanie (Richard) and Charlene; her cherished grandchildren, Brian (Ashley), Danny (Amber), Tabitha, Justin, Cheyanne, Gavin, and Michael; and her beloved great-grandchildren, Ava, Bayleigh, Elijah, Lilah, and Raeven. Her legacy lives on through each of them.

Clara is also survived by her brother, Pat (Norma) Maes, and her sisters, Rose Mary Chaves and Toni (Arturo) Sisneros. She was preceded in death by her son, Tommy Briggs, and her sisters, Beatrice Apodaca and Delila Romero.

Known affectionately as “Bear,” Clara will be remembered for her strength, her deep love for her family, and the warmth she brought into every room. Her presence was a steady comfort, her love unconditional, and her memory will remain a blessing to all who knew her. She now rests peacefully in heaven, reunited with her beloved husband, Duane.

Tribute Wall

AC

“ Auntie Clara/Ralphalita! Even though I never visited you in New York but you always visited us here in New Mexico. I sure am missing you! Who am I gonna call when I want to know some family history or some mitote. Give my parents and Jesse big hugs for me. You were a great auntie to me and uncle Duane was an awesome uncle. I love you and I will see you on the other side mi Tia querida!!!! 💔☐

Angela Cordova - April 05 at 11:01 PM

MR

“ Mom....words can not describe how much I miss you. Life seems so empty without you and dad. Knowing you are both together should make it easier but it doesn't. I was blessed to have parents like you. My heart is forever broken. I hope you both can hear me when I talk to you. I love you both and thank you for the wonderful life you gave me. We all miss you so so so much!
Love Always & forever, your Squirrel (Melanie)

Melanie A Ralston - March 30 at 10:35 PM

TH

“ The Maez, Montoyas, Fabozzis, Hearn's purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Clara Rafaelita Briggs "Bear".



The Maez, Montoyas, Fabozzis, Hearn's - March 24 at 06:39 PM

LM

“ Auntie Clara,
I'll never forget the memories we shared, you and uncle Duane.
Your a Beautiful Auntie, and an even more Beautiful Mom. We will
never forget you; and uncle. Peace be with you!!. Love you.

Linda Montoya - March 24 at 11:11 AM

RA

Clara was a long time friend to me.. I could always count on her to be
there for me when I needed a shoulder to lean on. I will love and miss
her very much.
Enjoy your time with your husband, son and all your family who were
there to welcome you. RIP my friend. 🙏❤️🌹

Rita Azer - March 24 at 03:46 PM

RG

Clara was my childhood friend I definitely will miss her, Clara was a
sister in Christ, you'll always be remembered by all the people who
Love you Dearly, Sis rest in Peace with Tommy & Duane,,I will always
have you in My Heart, Thank you for being My Dearest Best Friend in
life,, Enjoy you're love one's, Miss you so much Sis Lots of Love

Reida Gonzales - March 24 at 04:11 PM

NM

Clara..my beautiful sister in Christ..from the moment we met,to the last
time we saw each other,you were close in my heart..we understood
what the other was thinking,and I will forever hold you close. You were
strong,caring,thoughtful and so kind..you are deeply missed...my
Claree

Norma Maez - March 25 at 10:22 AM

CM

Carol Maffett, Clara my sweet friend. I was honored to know you Claire.
I looked forward to hopping on your bus for years in between bus runs
to chat.and getting together for lunches with many bus friends. I have a
birth stone bracelet you gave me for my birthday which I will cherish
forever. Miss you my dear friend. With LOVE Carol. ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

carol maffett - March 26 at 04:32 PM