



## Paula Jean Ray

July 27, 1940 - June 14, 2026

Paula Jean Ray, 85, of Kingston; passed away peacefully Sunday, June 14, 2026, at her Burney Mountain home, surrounded by her family.

She was born Saturday, July 27, 1940, in Lima, Ohio to Gene Ballengee Oppy and Mary Louise Altman Oppy.

Both students at Kansas State University, Paula eloped with Loren Frederick Ray on January 4, 1962, in Salina, Kansas. With a shared interest in science, Loren went on to become a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine while Paula graduated with honors with both Bachelor's and Graduate degrees. The couple began their family in Manhattan, Kansas, with two children and went on to add two more children while stationed at South Ruislip Air Station, England. Once back in the States, the family settled in Stoughton, Wisconsin, where Loren established a Veterinary Practice and Paula, having developed an interest in Psychology, enrolled in graduate classes at the University of Madison. The couple eventually divorced in 1977.

During this time, Paula moved with her children to Harker Heights, Texas and embarked on a 25-year career as a Professor of Biology at Central Texas College. She was much admired for her calm positivity and believed strongly, as her parents (both educators) did, that it is important to respect students for the skills they do have rather than malign them for the skills they do not yet

possess. Over the years, many students reached out to thank her for her influence and to let her know that, because of her inspiration, they had gone on to become teachers, nurses, doctors, or simply, the first person in their family to graduate from college. She was awarded Teacher of the Year honors and served on the National Science Foundation for multiple years, helping to award grants.

On Earth Day, one of her favorite days of the year, April 22, 2006, Paula married Dean Howard Bowles in a backyard garden ceremony featuring a riot of flowers curated by her own hand. One of many gatherings, it is remembered in family lore as one of the best parties ever.

With the intention of creating a shared retreat, Paula and Dean bought land in Kingston, Arkansas, close to his siblings, built a log cabin and began developing what the family knows as The Winged Retreat. Paula's backyard garden became much larger as she planted several acres of wildflowers to encourage pollinators while Dean built the workshop of his dreams. Dean passed away in 2016. Paula is also preceded in death by her first husband, Loren, and her beloved parents Gene and Mary.

She is survived by her siblings, James Altman Oppy (Andrea) of Denver, North Carolina, Pam Holman of Midlothian, Texas and Jennifer Burns (Bill) of Dripping Springs, Texas. She was proud of the children who survive her; Carolyn Stradinger (Richard) of Van Buren, Arkansas, Loren Ray (Gail) of Austin, Texas, Richard Ray (Toni) of Cedar Hill, Texas, and Steven Ray (Diana) of Harker Heights, Texas. While she always missed a single grandchild, Sean Christian, who did not survive his birth, she did very much enjoy knowing her nine grandchildren as young adults. She was blessed with two great granddaughters and made a special point during her illness of purchasing a gift to welcome Baby Isabella, who will be born in the coming Fall. Paula also held dear her siblings' children as well as the friendships she

developed over the years, especially those in Kingston where she always admired the neighbor-help-neighbor mentality.

Paula will be remembered as a tenacious and curious individual, a life-long learner and a person who prized thinking for herself, a skill she felt resulted from very devoted teachers at a tiny school in Ohio as well as her parents who valued critical thinking. If she had an interest, it was thoroughly investigated; the sciences, climate concerns, genealogy, the American Revolution, the history of racism, modern democracy - her passions were boundless and well-documented with painstaking notes as evidenced by hundreds of files.

A Burney Mountain goodbye will take place at Paula's cabin on June 27th and, in keeping with her love of nature, interment will take place on July 25th at Remembrance Gardens in Austin, Texas.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that Paula be honored in ways more in keeping with her life choices. Plant a tree in a place where you can watch it grow. Buy yourself a pot of flowers and think of her when you walk past them. Feed some birds. Send a beautiful card and a note to someone who would love hearing from you. Open yourself up to a new news source. Forgive someone. And, above all else, stay positive and remain hopeful in this complicated world.

Cremation is entrusted to Brashears Funeral Home and Crematory, Huntsville.