



ReNaye Way

January 20, 1926 - February 10, 2026

Obituary

ReNaye Way Brown was born on January 20, 1926, to the late Jessica “Jessie” Finney in Philadelphia. Although she did not meet her father until later in life and was an only child, ReNaye grew up in a home filled with love, structure, and strong values instilled by her mother.

Jessie taught her to be independent, disciplined, resilient, and loving. At a young age, ReNaye

and her mother moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where they were embraced by the Murphy

family. They became her extended family, blessing her with brothers (Oliver, Clarence, and Carlton) and sisters (Bernice and Gertrude) that she longed for as a child.

ReNaye overcame a multitude of challenges and lived through historical events during her lifetime such as the Great Depression. Times were difficult living through this era, but she always had her beloved mother. At the age of 15-years-old, she began working at the Naval

Torpedo Station in Newport. During this time, she witnessed President Franklin D. Roosevelt

deliver his historic “Day of Infamy” speech following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The speech

left a lasting impression on her as she could recite parts of it.

In 1944, at the age of 18-years-old, ReNaye lost her beloved mother to diabetes. The loss deeply

affected her, and coping without her mother was one of the greatest challenges of her life. Her

ability to persevere and choosing love as her guiding principle encouraged her to continue with

her trajectory of life. ReNaye began serving as a hostess and performed as a singer at the newly

established U.S.O in Providence, Rhode Island. In time, she met a navy musician named Wilbert

Brown, fell in love, and married on April 9, 1947.

In 1950, after her husband left the navy, ReNaye and Wilbert moved to Washington, DC with their daughter Jessica, who was named after her late mother. ReNaye and Wilbert built a legacy

of love raising four children (Jessica, Kenneth, Janet, and Mario) and instilled the significance of

faith, self-respect, great citizenship, and determination. By 1955, she found her birth father, Sam

Smith, and became very close with her father's side giving her more family to love and connect

with. As a centenarian, ReNaye witnessed some of the most difficult chapters in American history.

While living in Washington, DC she experienced the painful reality of segregation in stores simply because of the color of her skin. During the Civil Rights Era, Wilbert participated in the

March on Washington with Martin Luther King Jr. A courageous stand for equality that placed

her family in danger, including facing bomb threats at their home. ReNaye witnessed five wars

and lived through the administrations of 15 U.S. presidents, ranging from Calvin Coolidge to the

historic election of the nation's first Black president, Barack Obama. In which she received special wishes from Barack and Michelle Obama on her 90th birthday.

However, ReNaye's century of life is not defined by struggle alone; she was an entrepreneur.

ReNaye invested in herself by starting a private daycare business, allowing her to be a pillar in

her community. Affectionally known as "Aunt ReNaye", she has helped to raise many children

throughout her years. From an only child to having biological and chosen family, ReNaye was

well-loved and cherished. Also, acknowledged by her favorite football player and future Hall of

Famer, Brian Mitchell, on her 100th birthday.

After 67-years of marriage, her husband passed November 12, 2014. Although it was another

significant loss, ReNaye was surrounded by love and support. She continued as the matriarch and

nurtured loved ones and friends. She remained a loving, resilient, comical, fierce, and strong woman until the day of her passing.

ReNaye Way Brown passed the morning of February 10, 2026. Through every joy and hardship,

she held onto her faith and trusted in God's plan. Though she has departed from this earthly life,

we take comfort in knowing that her faith has carried her home. Her legacy of love, resilience,

and devotion to God will continue to shine through the generations she nurtured.

She was preceded in death by her mother Jessie Finney and husband Wilbert Brown. She survived by her four children: Jessica (Alvin Sr.), Kenneth (Gail), Janet, and Mario (Janet).

Eight grandchildren: Alvin Jr, Monica, Michael, Brandon, Candice (Christian), Tara, Travis (Ashley),

and Mercy. Eight great-grandchildren: Terron, Talayah, Aniya, Kailyn, Aiden, Akashi, Radiance,

and Amora. One great-great grandchild: Siah. Along with extended family, special friends, and

Aunt ReNaye's children.

As we were not ready for her to go, she left us with a century worth of love. Her warmth, laughter, and unconditional love will continue to fill our lives with joy. We will love you always and forever!

Cemetery Details

Arlington National Cemetery

Arlington, VA

Previous Events

Visitation

FEB 28. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Hemingway Temple AME Church
501 P. Street, NW
Washington , DC 20001

Service

FEB 28. 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM (ET)

Hemingway Temple AME Church
501 P. Street, NW
Washington , DC 20001

Tribute Wall

MC

“ *Mark Collins lit a candle in memory of ReNaye Way*



Mark Collins - February 28 at 11:23 AM



“ *We the March Family and Marshall-March Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.*

Marshall-March Funeral Homes - February 20 at 04:08 PM