



Ana Sofia Torres Howard

JUN 12, 1935 - DEC 11, 2022



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MEMORIAL PARK
Funeral Home & Cemetery

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Anna Sophia Howard... the toughest flower ever picked.

Ana Sophia Howard was a flower. As her eldest son would say, a “beautiful island flower”. To which her youngest would reply, “Yes, but with roots of steel!”

Sophie, as she was known by those closest to her, was born on either June 10th, 12th or 14th of 1935 in the mountain town of Barranquitas in Puerto Rico. The reason for the ambiguous dates is an homage to a half century joke of musical chairs she played with her two children. One in which she made her sons try to guess which day to celebrate the date of her birth every year.

The 10th of June was real date, the 12th the anniversary of her marriage and the 14th the birth of her first child (AG). Every year the celebration of her “birthday” was changed, keeping her kids bewildered as to which day was the real one. Sophie, may have been tough, but she had a sense of humour.

Sophie was born in the town of Barranquitas on the island of Puerto Rico. A small rural community nestled amid tree covered hills, valleys and canyons in the centre of the island. Her father, Nicanor, and mother, Juana Diaz Torres, were respected members of the community. He being a renowned cigar maker and she a dutiful housewife. The fact that Juana could snap the head of a chicken with flick of wrist, pluck it and make it into a meal faster than one can imagine, gives you an idea where Sophie’s resolute nature was derived.

Sophie came from a large family and was the oldest of four children with Jose Luis (Pepe), Carmen Zorida (Zory) and Roberto Torres her siblings. She grew up with an active and vigorous life typical of island life at the time. Sometimes it was a bit too vigorous, she recounted once the time she was being swung around by the arms in a bit of play, ultimately dislocating both her shoulders, leaving her in traction for over half a year, only to recover fully... no physio... no extended rehab... jus resolute toughness.



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Sophie grew into womanhood and became what can only be described as a mix of Sophia Loren, Rita Moreno and Maria from Westside story. (The good “Natalie Wood” version... not the awful Stephen Spielberg remake). And, much like aforementioned Maria, from Westside Story, in the early 1960s she immigrated to New York City to complete her nursing degree.

It is not known if Sophie did any choreographed dance routines, sang Leonard Bernstein songs or joined a street gang named the “Sharks”, but it is known that she loved America. So much so that, after completing nursing school, to show her devotion and sense of duty to the country, she joined the United States Air Force as an officer candidate.

Even though it was the aforementioned 1960s, Sophie’s entry into the military was more of a “Private Benjamin” experience than a “Full Metal Jacket”. When pressed, she would recount stories of the basic officer training all nursing candidates were required to complete. It involved tales of a group of giddy young women struggling over obstacle courses, qualifying with revolvers and ending their induction with what was meant to be a day long map and compass orientation course.

Clad in their green field fatigues, these young military nurses were meant to complete their training by navigating their way through a Mississippi swamp by map and compass. It was a mass exercise conducted by her entire class, with hundreds of nursing candidates divided into small 8 woman squads, with each being sent to into the swamps of southern Mississippi. The goal was to identify their objective, plot a course on the map and traverse it by compass and, upon successful arrival, complete their training and earn their officer commission in the United States Air Force.

This final task was meant to be a single day event, but her squad became so hopelessly lost that they ended up spending the entire night in that Mississippi swamp. After wandering in the dark for several hours, they finally slept where they were... in the mud of the swamp. The only sounds being the buzz of the thousands of mosquitos about them and the distant whirl of the blades of helicopters, which they were sure were sent to look for them.

Eventually daylight came and they finally emerged from the swamp, soaking wet, drenched in mud, covered in bug bites and exhausted, but they emerged. Not only to complete the course, but proceed to graduation. This was another testament to her resolute nature... but also a window to her sense of humour.



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As Sophie would recount with a gleeful laugh years later, much to her chagrin, they were to discover they were never truly “lost”, the helicopters were not looking for them and they were literally only a hundred yards from their final goal the entire night. They were simply walking in circles and watched by their instructors the whole time, who were so amused by the sight of eight women fighting over how to read a map and compass that they decided to let them continue, finish the course and graduate.

Thus, Sophie completed her officer training and received her officer commission as a second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force.

Sophie was a strong woman, valued strength, but she loved humour too. This was demonstrated by a chance encounter on an elevator that would forever change her life. Riding in a lift with a fellow group of nurses, the white uniformed women were soon joined by a boisterous group of young male Air Force officers, who were more than happy to take the chance of getting the attention of the ladies in the enclosed environment. One in particular, even doubled over and feigned sickness until Sophie relented into attending him... and eventually giving him her phone number.

That was when Sophie went from favouring the strong silent type to the outrageously funny and humorous... finding the love of her life, Jack. Not only did she find a wildly entertaining man, she also found a man who could read a map and compass. The course for the rest of her life had been set.

After a brief courtship, the two were married. Both retaining their officer commissions, they worked together at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. It was here, that like the aforementioned Sophia Loren, she too had a screen career. Sophie was featured in several USAAF nursing training films.

A gracious and obviously attractive woman, Sophie did have a competitive side, revealing her steel roots. When pressed about the nursing films, she would only comment about role she didn't land. Stating tersely that it was given to the “blonde with the big bottom”.

As said before, island flower... steel roots!

Soon after their marriage, came her first born, Aubrey Gaylon. As was the custom of the time, she was given an honourable discharge to care for family and became a military wife. Living in base housing, moving from base to base, while her husband was deployed elsewhere and eventually overseas, raising one son while later pregnant with another. These were all tributes to her spirit.



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Eventually, Sophie was able to join her beloved Jack on the island of Okinawa in Japan. Her experience there was a humorous one, telling stories of a young Aubrey counting the gecko lizards on the walls, timing her day so that every afternoon at 3:00 pm he could watch the Flintstones, as it was the only English speaking cartoon available and because of her exotic beauty, being mistaken as an Okinawan by the locals, who would constantly approach her and start talking Japanese, to which she could only laugh.

After the birth of her second child, Nicanor, Jack was transferred, to Colorado. Here the whole family moved and set up roots. This is where Sophie's reputation as the family "medic" came to fruition, as she loved and cared for all those around.

Getting sick in her household was event, one that her sons sometimes looked forward to, as it meant pampered bed rest, electric blankets, nasal rubs, breakfast in bed, steaming hot chicken soup, mint scented dehumidifiers, alone time with a wheeled black and white TV and, what was a rarity in the Howard household, soft drinks!

When Sophie's men were sick, they were not just treated. They were catered!

As time moved on, Sophie's family grew with the addition of an equally strong and wonderful daughter-in-law Angela and two extraordinary grandchildren, Adam and Alexandra. Later followed by another daughter-in-law Christine and grandchildren Jack and Nic.

Her final years were spent with a heartfelt devotion to her family, faith, poetry and watching Gunsmoke on the Western Channel. Of the four, one would be hard pressed to identify which was her favourite. That Western Channel sure was on a lot... .

For many years, Sophie's health deteriorated. The family medic became the family patient, with her hiding the true state of her condition from everyone, aside her beloved Jack. True to her nature, this beautiful island flower, with roots of steel, never complained, never felt sorry for herself and carried herself with a sense dignity and pride befitting a Sophia Loren and former officer of the United States Air Force.

It cannot be said how many times, she was called upon, in person and by phone, in periods of doubt by her children. It was through her strength that they were enabled to continue on. Whether it was in a bedside conversation, or via a phone call from the other side of the world, the message would always be the same. It is the same message she would want to share with her children, their spouses, her grandchildren and their spouses as her legacy.



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Don't you dare quit... don't you dare stop... don't you dare even give in... and become Catholic. Ana Sophia Howard was the toughest flower ever picked.

Funeral Services for Mrs. Howard will be conducted on Friday, December 23, 2022 at 11:00am at Memorial Park Funeral Home in the Fireside Chapel. The Howard Family will receive friends on Friday, December 23, 2022 from 10:00am until the service hour. Burial will follow in Memorial Park Cemetery.

To view Mrs. Howard's service online, please click on the link below:

<http://webcast.funeralvue.com/events/viewer/82614>



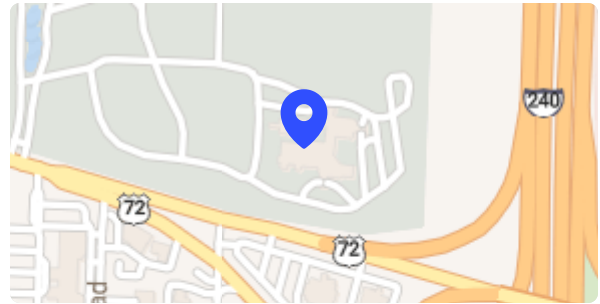
Events

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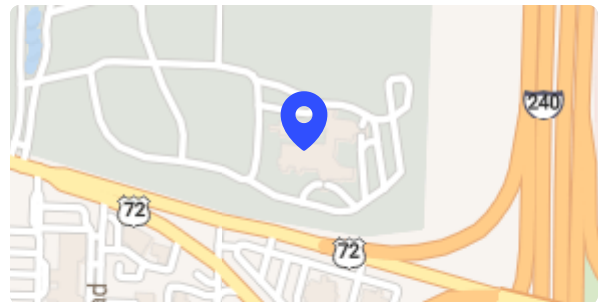
Visitation

- Friday, December 23, 2022**
- 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM CT
- Memorial Park Fireside Chapel**
5668 Poplar Avenue, Memphis TN 38119



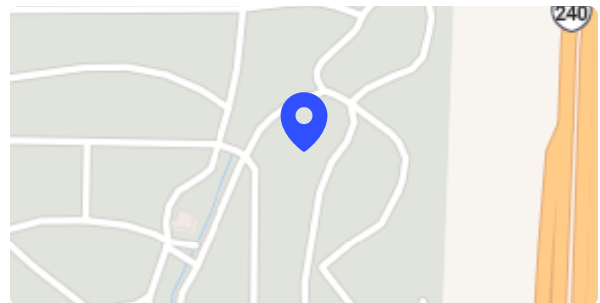
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Cemetery Details

- Memorial Park Cemetery**
5668 Poplar Ave, Memphis TN 38119
- (901) 445-8475**





Tribute Wall

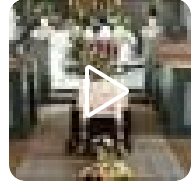
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Memorial Park Funeral Home And Cemetery shared a **To view services online, please click on the link.**

December 22 at 9:40 AM





Media

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Memories only last if you share them

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