

Rita Hall Cloud - Obituary

June 24, 1937 – August 4, 2026

Rita Hall Cloud, a pillar of East County and a true Kansas City trailblazer, passed away peacefully on August 4, 2026, at age 89. Rita lived a life defined by courage, leadership, civic duty, and an unwavering commitment to leaving every place better—and classier—than she found it.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, to Lanny and Harriet Hall, Rita's life was marked by important firsts. As a teenager, she modeled and traveled, developing the confidence and sophistication that helped her open doors previously closed to young Black women. She was the first Black student to attend St. Teresa's Academy, graduating with the Class of 1955. She later became the first Black sales clerk at one of Kansas City's downtown department stores, where the local newspaper noted that she could sell to both white and Black customers alike. Rita believed in showing up, speaking up, and creating opportunities for others.

A summer visit to a family friend's ranch in El Cajon led Rita to Joel Cloud, beginning a lifelong partnership. They married in 1959 and shared 67 years together, raising their family and becoming deeply woven into the El Cajon community.

Rita served for 21 years as a substitute teacher in the Cajon Valley School District and co-founded its Affirmative Action Committee. She was an original founder of Circle Pre-School and the El Cajon Friends of the Library. For more than five decades, she championed literacy, education, and access to knowledge, earning recognition as a San Diego County Library "Library Legend" in 2013.

Her civic involvement extended to Crisis House, East County Friends of the Arts, the East County Performing Arts Development Committee, the El Cajon Sister City Program, the El Cajon Historical Society, the San Diego County Commission on the Status of Women, and other community efforts. Rita gave generously of her time, energy, voice, and talents.

She also had a remarkable love of travel. She explored Africa, China, Russia, Guatemala, and many other destinations, rode the Trans-Siberian Railway, hosted chocolate tours throughout Europe, and was a devoted patron of the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum. An avid reader and lover of art, history, and culture, Rita approached life with curiosity and adventure.

Yet her greatest passion was her garden. She found endless joy tending the gardens surrounding the 40-acre home she and Joel built, riding her golf cart with her dogs and sharing life with her beloved parrot, Fred.

Above all, Rita loved her family. She is survived by her devoted husband, Joel Cloud Sr.; sons Joel Jr., James, and Jon; daughters-in-love Angela Cloud, Leslie Cloud and DeAndria Krueger; and her five beloved grandchildren—the "perfect apples of her eye"—J Brandon, Alexa Rose, Jade, Joshua, and Jack, along with cherished family and extended family in Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Diego, and beyond.

El Cajon has lost a true original. Rita's influence will live on through the institutions she helped build, the causes she championed, the people she encouraged, and the family she loved so fiercely. Most of all, she will be remembered simply as **Rita**—a woman who stood in the gap for so many and made us all better because of her.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the newly established **Rita Hall Cloud Memorial Scholarship** for students demonstrating financial need at St. Teresa's Academy in Kansas City, Missouri.