



Mary O'Brien

November 8, 2024

Mary O'Brien (née Maria Buonarota) passed quietly at home on November 8th, 2024. She was 96.

The first of three siblings in an extended family of Italian immigrants settling in Hoboken, Mary embraced her parents' American dream with confidence and determination. At 14, she began to chase a handsome older neighborhood boy named Richard, who, 63 years of happy marriage later, confessed "Mary, I was the one chasing you!" Marching as a drum majorette "...in a beautiful white and gold satin uniform, leading a large band, pulling my legs up and waving my baton" ignited a love of the spotlight. "I was a big ham!" After high school, she enrolled at The Barbizon School of Modeling, and was quickly discovered on the catwalk at Bergdorf Goodman. Signing with the Mannequin Agency, she rocketed to the top of her field.

Known on 7th Avenue as the Ice Queen of the runway, Mary spent 30 years as a model, fitting muse, and collaborator with designers including Ben Zuckerman, Hannah Troy, Adele Simpson, Adolfo (whom she joined on "What's My Line?"), Bill Blass, Geoffrey Beene, Kasper, and her dear friend George Samen, who says of one award show at The Met, "I'll never forget her gliding down the runway, pausing at the end and theatrically opening the coat to reveal the dress. She was really selling it! I had tears in my eyes!"

Seen frequently in newspapers, spotted often on The Today Show and The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, and snapped by Bill Cunningham every time he bicycled by, Mary finally bowed out of modeling at age 48 (with one

final full page Adolfo ad in "Women's Wear"). She carried her fashion intelligence into sales, crisscrossing the country with trunk shows and making trips to Paris, London, Milan, and Tokyo (pausing occasionally to judge a pageant). Her career brought her into contact with figures from JFK to Salvador Dali to Groucho Marx, and she fitted outfits for LBJ's daughter Lynda Robb and First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

Though Mary's striking elegance commanded every room, her warm down-to-earth manner won every heart. In the handsome home she and Richard built to raise their children Jeffrey and Jody, they hosted 50 years of Christmas Eve feasts for the entire family, and Mary grew into what had been her mother Nina's role as a beloved matriarch to the expanding clan. A woman of faith, she prayed daily for the protection of those she loved and in gratitude for the life she lived.

Predeceased by her husband Richard, son Jeffrey, brothers Frank and Morris, and best friend and fellow model Roz Ames Warren, she is survived by her daughter Jody, grandchildren Katie, Johann, and Henry, great grandson Dylan, dear friend George, a devoted legion of nieces, nephews, cousins, in-laws, godchildren, friends, and her dogs Wayne and Rita.

Viewing will take place at Barrett Leber Funeral Home in Tenafly from 3-7pm on Friday 11/15. Service at St Cecilia Church in Englewood at 10am on Saturday 11/16.

Previous Events

Visitation

NOV **15**. 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Barrett Leber Funeral Home
148 Dean Dr
Tenafly, NJ 07670
(201) 568-8043
<https://www.barrettleberfuneralhome.com/>

Funeral Mass

NOV **16**. 10:00 AM (ET)

St Cecilia's Church
55 W Demarest Ave
Englewood, NJ 07631

Entombment

NOV **16** (ET)

Flower Hill Cemetery
5433 Kennedy Blvd #1
North Bergen, NJ 07047