Shirley Joan Sutton was born on August 28, 1935, and died on February 9, 2017. She was born to William and Mildred Manes, the third of eleven children: Bill, Vera, Mel, Michael, Chuck, Sally, Sandy, Danny, Judy, and Tari.

Shirley and Joe were married in Pocahontas Arkansas when she was but sixteen and he eighteen. They worked together side-by-side for the nearly fifty years they were married, and the carnival was not only their business but their life. She continued the business for more than a decade and a half after Joe’s passing with the strong support of her sons Joe and Paul.

This amazing woman had lots of names: mom, mama, Mommy, and grandma. To her sisters and brothers she was Shirley, but to those who work for and with her in the carnival business, she was Miss Shirley, a combination of royalty, boss, bookkeeper, and a good listener when they needed help and advice. Her husband Joe would proclaim loudly that he was the head of his family but that his wife Shirley was the neck, and whichever way she turned, that is the way he would go.

Shirley was a member of the Eastern Star and wore her ring proudly. In their life’s work they served in many capacities to coordinate the interests of carnivals statewide and were rewarded by those associations for their hard work and good humor. The committees that hired them to come for special events also love them, many of the members developing long and lasting relationships that transcended their annual business dealings.

As sweet as she was, there were times when Shirley could be both spunky and fierce. If the town had a steak and Shake, she wanted one kind of ice cream, one kind of sauce, and it could be put in only one kind of bowl. The ice cream was to be vanilla, the syrup was to be chocolate, and the bowl was not to be the traditional ice cream bowl but a cereal bowl. She made no apology about sending it back if the first time it came out wrong; if it came out wrong the second time, she not only told them to take it back but where to put it. Age did nothing to diminish her desire that on the important things the world better go her way. When a visiting therapist told her he needed to see her around 11 in the morning so he could see other patients in another town, she was quite clear about her need for sleep: “I know lots of old people, and many of them like to get up early. Go visit them, and when you’re through, come and see me in the afternoon.”

Shirley was a woman with intelligence, beauty, tenacity, spunk, and wit. But with all of those positive and outgoing characteristics, she remained both shy and modest, a woman who believed firmly that what God had in mind for her would be what would come to pass. So many characteristics that her children and grandchildren possess are related directly to Shirley either through the advice she gave or the example she set for them. They say their favorite days with Grandma were jump days, when the carnival would move from one location to another. Grandma was always good for a hug and a snack, and those highway times were the best for talking and sharing stories. Grandma Sutton probably logged more miles than anyone in the family business; her sense of direction was never one of her strongpoints.

Grandma Sutton found it hard to say goodbye to her grandchildren when a visit was over, so rather than let that be a time of sadness, she taught them a wave that would make it a special time for laughter and good cheer. The special wave she taught them will be the way we send Shirley on her next journey.

Shirley is survived by her oldest son, Joe and his wife Chris; her only daughter, Debbie and her husband Gary; and her youngest son, Paul and his wife Kate. She is also survived by her grandchildren and great grandchildren: Peter, Kezia, Jennifer, Baron, Jason, Megan, Missy, Abbey, Taylor, Kayla, Cameron, MacKensie, Tyler, Adessa, Everett, Cali Jo, August, Isabella, Ilyana, Ruby, Ethan, Avery, Mariah, Brighton, and Liam.