

Rosemary Rae French
Founder and President of Benchmark Institute

1949 – 2023

A dedicated lawyer for social justice, Rosemary was the foremost authority on training in legal services. She was passionate about providing lawyers and other advocates with the skills and tools that they needed to provide caring, compassionate and competent service to low-income clients. A gifted teacher, Rosemary developed innovative, experiential training to accomplish that. She wrote and edited multiple manuals to accompany the trainings and provide ongoing support when people returned to their offices. She touched thousands of lives through her work both in the United States and other countries.

There will be a memorial service for her in San Francisco on Saturday, March 16, 2024. Friends and colleagues are welcome to join the family in honoring her memory. To attend, please contact mcontreras431@gmail.com for details.

Genuinely interested in helping people reach their potential, Rosemary was kind and generous in mentoring others. She always made time for people who wanted help even when it made her own days much longer.

She earned her B.A. from the University of California, Santa Barbara where she formed friendships that lasted for her lifetime. She received her J.D. from Loyola Law School (Los Angeles).

She practiced law with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and taught at Loyola Law School (Los Angeles) before turning to training as a fulltime career. She worked in the Legal Services Corporation, Office of Program Support in the late 1970's and early 1980's designing, developing and delivering training to legal services people across the country. She organized and conducted part of the last Reginald Heber Smith Community Lawyer Fellowship (aka Reggie Fellows) training in the mid-1980's. She was director of the Western Center on Law & Poverty Regional Training Center for three years before founding Benchmark Institute in 1989. She served as Benchmark's President from then until her death.

She did everything to the highest standard possible with the available resources and constantly sought new and better ways to help people learn. Among a host of accomplishments throughout her career she conducted numerous staff retreats for legal aid programs, provided leadership training and mentoring and developed a training for law students interning in legal aid organizations. Under the auspices of the California Association of Food Banks, she created and conducted training for food bank outreach workers throughout the state.

Born in Oakland the eldest of six children she became a leader at an early age. Rosemary had a way of putting people at ease, a sense of humor and a wonderful laugh. She remembered to "Take your work seriously and yourself lightly."

Music was important throughout her life. Not only did she enjoy singing and performing with friends and family she also incorporated it into her trainings as another way to help reinforce learning.

In 1980 she and Marie Contreras began their life together. In 1982 they settled in San Francisco's Noe Valley. They married in a federally recognized ceremony in the rotunda of San Francisco City Hall in

2014. She enjoyed all kinds of animals especially their own providing a home through the years to seven cats and two cocker spaniels.

She is survived by her spouse, Marie Contreras; her siblings John French (Mirabel), R. Thomas French (Janet), Elizabeth French Spencer (Shalom Spencer), Katherine French (Shawn Flood) and Peter French (Lora Vail French); her nieces and nephews: Courtney Ribeiro French, John Jr., Grace, Emma, Jacob, Benjamin and Kevin French. Her parents, Raymond T. and Iris L. French, preceded her in death.