



## Shirley A. Sterk

December 22, 1934 - June 11, 2026

Shirley A. Sterk, (nee Sterna) age 91, of Brownhelm Township, passed away peacefully on June 11, 2026 following a lengthy illness.

She was born December 22, 1934, in Amherst, Ohio and was a longtime resident of Brownhelm Township. There, she spent her life building something greater than a home. She built a family, a business, a community, and a lifetime of memories that will continue to live on through generations.

If you knew Shirley, then you knew she was always busy. In her early years, she worked as a dental assistant before spending time at Miller's Orchards and Aufdenkampe Family Farm, where she picked apples and worked in the barns. She was never afraid of hard work and carried that same work ethic throughout her entire life. Shirley loved her community and wrote articles for the Brownhelm News and for the Amherst News Times. She loved staying connected to the people and stories around her.

More than anything, Shirley was devoted to family.

She married her husband, Raymond "Ray" Sterk, on November 28, 1953. Their home became the gathering place everyone gravitated towards. There was always something happening at her house between the birthdays, cookouts, family reunions, and holidays. And nobody left hungry.

Cooking was the way Shirley showed love. In the early 1960's she began baking wedding cakes and catering from her home. Her passion for food brought her to purchase Papa Joe's Pizza in Vermilion in 1972, Sterks' Restaurant in Wakeman in 1975, and the founding of Sterk's Catering, which became widely known throughout Lorain County. She also shared her wealth of knowledge by substitute teaching at Lorain County JVS. She loved feeding people, especially when she could cook with fresh vegetables from Ray's garden or a local farm stand.

Shirley's grandchildren remember her in a dozen little ways, but most importantly, she showed up to everything. Baseball and basketball games, volleyball matches, gymnastics meets, school events. If one of her grandchildren was involved, she was there, sitting in her very own chair she brought, cheering them on.

There was also her purse. Always by her side, basically a Mary Poppins bag, stuffed with snacks, candy, napkins, and usually a small paring knife. She always seemed to have fresh apples with her and could peel and slice them anywhere. It became a tradition everyone just came to expect from Grandma.

Weekend sleepovers at her house became a tradition for so many of her grandchildren. So did Disney Cruises, which Shirley absolutely loved. She enjoyed traveling and making memories with the people she cared about most.

She loved her 4-H community as if they were family as well. An advisor for more than ten years, she encouraged and supported numerous children and families at the Lorain County Fair. She was known for buying animals to support the hard work the children put in.

Part of what made her so special was she kept showing up for people again and again. Shirley leaves behind a large family and countless memories. The family she built was the center of her world. Even now, it's hard to imagine those holidays without her there somehow making sure everyone was well fed and had one more helping to take home before they left. She leaves behind a legacy and teaching of working hard and feeding people well.

She is survived by her children, Deanna Tansey, Peter Sterk, Johanna (Jeff) Mann, Raymond (Kristine) Sterk, Natalie (Wayne) Baumann, John (Shelly) Sterk; thirteen grandchildren, and twenty-five great-grandchildren; and siblings, Virginia "Sis" Vasci, and Sharon Thompson.

She was preceded in death by her parents, John and Eleanor Sterna (nee Burke); husband, Raymond "Ray" Sterk; siblings, Robert Sterna, Donald Sterna, Maxine Mann and Jack Sterna in infancy..

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Lorain County 4-H Endowment, supporting youth development through The Ohio State University Extension. A private celebration of life will be held at a later date.

# Cemetery Details

## **Brownhelm Cemetery**

North Ridge Rd & Sunnyside Rd  
Vermilion, OH 44089