

Remembering Frances

Frances Eileen Cortez Stokes, 83, passed away June 25, 2026. Frances, a devoted mother, grandmother, educator, and friend, was born on September 15, 1942, in Greybull, Wyoming, to Francisco Cortez and Emma Grace Usher. The oldest of three girls, Frances grew up in Greybull, Wyoming, attending all 12 years of school there and graduating in 1960. She was a proud Girl Scout through her senior year and excelled in music, singing and playing clarinet in the marching band.

Frances began her higher education at Northwest Community College in Powell, Wyoming, where she met her first husband, John Bustos. They married in April 1962 and spent three years in Frankfurt, Germany, while John served in the military. During that time, they welcomed two children, John Franklin and Theresa Marie. Upon returning to the United States, Frances continued her education at Black Hills State University and later Chadron State College, where she earned her degree in Elementary Education in 1972.

She taught for one year in Burlington, Wyoming, while her husband served in Vietnam, and then moved to Hot Springs, South Dakota, where she would spend the next 37 years in the classroom. A fourth-generation teacher, Frances was known for her passion, creativity, and dedication. Her excellence was recognized during the 1983–1984 school year when she was named both the South Dakota Outstanding Teacher of the Year and the Outstanding Social Studies Teacher of the Year. Many students fondly remembered her captivating historical stories and the unique skills she shared, including crocheting rag rugs.

Frances touched countless lives during her 37 years in the classroom. Long before hands-on learning became common practice, she brought wonder and discovery to her students through ant farms housed in glass jars, owl pellet dissections, mold gardens, and the annual excitement of hatching baby chicks. Gifted with a deep understanding of how young minds learn, she created a classroom where curiosity flourished and learning became an adventure. Her innovative approach and passion for discovery inspired generations of students and fostered a lifelong love of learning.

In 1977, Frances married James Thomas Stokes, who owned the local Jack and Jill grocery store. Their daughter Jamie Rae was born in 1978 and passed away shortly after birth, and in 1979 they welcomed their daughter Amber Lynn. They also hosted five foreign exchange students over the years.

Driven by her love of learning, Frances earned her Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Chadron State College in 1990. In 1999, she received the prestigious Christa McAuliffe Fellowship, which allowed her to research writing instruction. She was honored again in 2003 with the Chadron State College Outstanding Alumni Award. Frances retired from teaching in 2007, though many former students remained in touch, grateful for the encouragement and storytelling that had shaped their lives.

In 2005, Frances and Jim built their dream home in Eagle Valley, just outside Hot Springs—a warm and welcoming space for friends and family. After Jim's passing in 2016, Frances found companionship again and married James Carton in 2020.

Frances enjoyed singing, writing, canning, and baking homemade treats to share with loved ones. She was an active member of St. Anthony's Catholic Church for many years, offering her time, talents, and steadfast faith to her parish community.

Frances was preceded in death by her parents, Francisco and Emma Cortez; her sister, Eloise Cortez Kaneshiro; and her husband, James Stokes.

She is survived by her children: Theresa (Terry), Amber (Greg), and Frank; and by her seven grandchildren: Jesse, Sierra, Willow, Christina, Nathan, Ryan, and Caleb; her great grandchildren, Leah; Henry; her sister, Anita Cortez as well as her husband, James Carton.

Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home

In Loving Memory



Frances Eileen Stokes

1942-2026

*Frances leaves behind a legacy of kindness, curiosity, hospitality,
and a lifelong dedication to learning. She touched countless lives
through her teaching, her stories, and her generous heart.*

*When I am gone
When I am gone, they will say,
"Why did she save all those tuna cans?
Those old torn books?
That box of crayons?
The sack of feathers,
A box of hugs?"
The tools of her trade,
The foundation, the bucks
of projects made.
And when I am gone
They will laugh as they throw
The old torn books and
Pity me so.
"She was too tired to
Clean out her closets,"
they'll say.
But I will look down
As I watch from above,
A smile on my face
My heart full of love -
Just wish till they've taught
For many a year
Then - the reason for this junk
Will finally be clear.*

F. Stokes

MAY THE SOUL OF THE FAITHFULLY DEPARTED

Frances Eileen Stokes

REST IN PEACE

September 15, 1942—June 25, 2026

Greybull, Wyoming—Hot Springs, South Dakota

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

5:30 p.m., Friday, July 17, 2026

Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home
Hot Springs, South Dakota

CELEBRANTS—Fr. Collins Igwilo & Deacon Craig Pearson

CHRISTIAN FUNERAL MASS

10:00 a.m., Saturday, July 18, 2026

St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church
Hot Springs, South Dakota

HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Jesse Bustos, Sierra Hennelly, Willow Dang,
Christina Peterson, Nathan Bartalo, Ryan Pelster,
Caleb Pelster, Nevetta Sieg & Nancy Mulcahy

CHRISTIAN FUNERAL COMMITTAL

Evergreen Cemetery
Hot Springs, South Dakota

MEMORIALS

In honor of Frances' lifelong dedication to education, memorial contributions will be used to fund a community project, to be determined, that will serve as a lasting tribute to her love of learning and the positive impact she made on generations of students and families. All remaining funds will be used to establish a one-time scholarship for a graduating senior pursuing a degree in elementary education, continuing her legacy of inspiring future teachers. Mail checks (with Frances Stokes in memo) to HSHS Alumni Association at First Interstate Bank, P.O. Box 1110, Hot Springs, SD 57747.

CONDOLENCES

Cards may be sent to Amber Pelster
15986 E 108th Avenue, Commerce City, CO 80022.