

Carolyn Jean Randall O'Callaghan

At a glance:

Born: December 15, 1935, in Twin Falls, Idaho

Died: August 7, 2004, in Las Vegas, Nev.

Maiden Name: Carolyn J. Randall

Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background: Caucasian

Married: Donal "Mike" O'Callaghan on August 25, 1954

Children: Michael, Brian, Colleen, Teresa, Timothy

Primary City and County of Residence and Work: Carson City and Henderson, Nev.

Major Fields of Work: First Lady, Newspaper Publisher, United Way, Christmas Seal Foundation and Democratic Women's Clubs



Carolyn O'Callaghan

Photo courtesy of the
Nevada State Library and Archives

Practical First Lady adapted to new situations in her life

On January 4, 1971, Carolyn Randall O'Callaghan became the 23rd woman since statehood to serve as First Lady of Nevada. She joined a cadre of women, who while not elected to the position, served as Nevada's official hostess due to their husband's (and in one case a son's) position. Some of the women were reluctant hostesses while others accepted the position with enthusiasm.

Carolyn Randall O'Callaghan accepted the position as a continued partnership with husband Mike. She supported his endeavors by always being her own person. "He doesn't dictate or tell me what to say or wear or how to act. He gives me strength to do what I do best - communicate with women as a woman or with voters as a voter - not just as Mike's wife."

During her tenure in the Governor's Mansion, she possessed an ability to cope with a large family, political and societal demands in addition to working for the betterment of all Nevadans' lives throughout her eight years in the Governor's Mansion. When her time there was done, she moved on to life's next challenge with Mike as newspaper editors.

Carolyn Jean Randall was born December 15, 1935, to Claude S. and Marjorie Peabody Randall in Twin Falls, Idaho. She was one of three children including brother Richard and sister Barbara. Her father passed away suddenly in 1941 when Carolyn was just 6 years old. Her mother subsequently remarried and a sister, Harriet, joined the family. Carolyn attended school in Twin Falls and graduated from Twin Falls High School. She then attended the University of Idaho where she met Donal "Michael" O'Callaghan. Their July 1954 engagement led to an August 25 wedding at St. Edward's Catholic Church in Twin Falls, Idaho. After Donal, better known as "Mike" completed his studies, the family headed to Henderson, Nev. where Mike had been offered a job as a teacher at Basic High School. The city of Henderson remained their home until Mike O'Callaghan was elected governor in 1974.

During Carolyn's Henderson years, she had been busy raising five children, Michael, Brian, Colleen, Teresa and Timothy, and was credited with building an addition onto their home when husband Mike was busy with work and didn't have the time. She was an avid golfer, bowler, and hunter and was described as an individual who could do anything she set her mind to.

In 1964, President Lyndon B Johnson, appointed Mike to the position of Regional Director the Office of Emergency Preparedness and the O'Callaghans moved to Carson City, Nev. In 1970, Mike O'Callaghan, was elected Governor and the O'Callaghans moved into the Governor's Mansion in January 1971.

She arrived at the Governor's Mansion with her five children, husband Governor Mike and the family dogs. Her tenure as First Lady of Nevada was that of inclusion. She had a "custom of rising early each morning to serve coffee at the kitchen table and discuss the issues of the day with the mailman, milkman and whomever else might be passing by." In 2004, U.S. Senator Harry Reid, a former student of Mike's at Basic High School, remembered Carolyn as setting an "example for neighborliness. She extended her helping hand to homeless people, hospitals and whatever else was needed. Whether it was Carolyn's husband, her children, her parents or the broader Nevada family, there was no one in this state more consumed with doing good for other people than Carolyn O'Callaghan."



**Carolyn and Mike O'Callaghan
at the Governor's Mansion**

Photo from [HeadsUpNevada.org/legacy](https://headsupnevada.org/legacy)

At Halloween, Carolyn spooked up the mansion and made hundreds of bags of popcorn to give to the trick-or-treaters, according to son Tim O'Callaghan. The tradition grew and grew from around 500 children during the O'Callaghan years, to the 2019 Halloween at the Governor's Mansion before COVID when the children and adults numbered in the thousands. Trick-or-treaters come from the surrounding towns of Reno, Minden and Gardnerville to participate in what has

become quite a festivity. She also actively participated in the many fund-raising events that First Ladies traditionally engage in: Christmas Seals, United Way, March of Dimes, the Easter Seal Society's numerous blood drives, and events for the Carson Tahoe Auxiliary and her children's school activities. Sandwiched in between were amateur golfing tournaments and occasionally a night out bowling.

In a 1981 interview with Lenita Powers of the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, Carolyn reflected back on her First Lady duties in the Governor's Mansion, "I recall lots of problems and stresses at various times but not specific incidents because I never dwelled on it or let it affect my life past that specific moment. I have a basic fondness for people. I guess there were a lot of pressures, but I guess I'm a bit of a romanticist, a bit of a dreamer. If you give me a few minutes, I can take a situation that seems absolutely terrible and turn it around to be not so bad. Not that's not being realistic, but maybe that's been my key to survival over the years."

Her husband, Mike, described one of his favorite memories of his wife while serving as governor. During a cold winter in 1971, he was advised about 20 people were protesting his support of the motorcycle helmet law outside his office. "I used to go home at noon, change into my swim trunks, then go swimming in the Carson Hot Springs. When I left at noon, though, the picketers were gone, but when I got home there were picket signs all over the porch. And I walked into the kitchen and there were all the picketers having cake and coffee with my wife. She looked at me. And I looked at her, and she said, 'Well, it's cold outside.'" Carolyn O'Callaghan was certainly a pragmatist, ready for whatever came her way.

Their return to Henderson was reported in December 1978 by Rollan Melton, a *Reno Gazette-Journal* columnist. "It was Wednesday and along U.S. Highway 95, the big yellow U-Haul zipped past Nevada's frosty interior, south-bound, slowing only for stray cows, slowed only through the small towns along the way. The rented craft was loaded to the gills with the family's household goods, the family's dog, and it was steered by the vehicle's lone occupant. The driver was tall, handsome and red-haired. It was Nevada's First Lady, Carolyn O'Callaghan, barreling' south to 'Vegas where she and Mike are to make a new home after he leaves office Dec. 31."

After leaving the Governor's Mansion, the O'Callaghans returned to Henderson where they purchased the *Henderson Home News* and the *Boulder City News*, two local newspapers that they published together for over 20 years until 2004.

On March 5, 2004, Mike O'Callaghan died suddenly, at age 74, while at early morning Mass. Carolyn O'Callaghan survived him by just five months. On August 7, 2004, she passed away, at age 68, from surgical complications.

Daughter Teresa Duke described their lifelong dedication to each other, "My dad and mom had a true love story. Before he died, he'd come up to her in the kitchen and hug her. Love was always showed in our house."

They are buried in the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Boulder City, Nev.

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Find a Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 05 April 2021), memorial page for *Carolyn Randall O’Callaghan* (15 Dec 1935–7 Aug 2004), Find a Grave Memorial no. 38686300, citing Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Boulder City, Clark County, Nevada, USA ; Maintained by Loose Moose (contributor 46961450) .

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Year: 1940; Census Place: Twin Falls, Twin Falls, Idaho; Roll: m=1-10627-00754;Page:3B; Enumeration District: 42-43.