



Willie E. Starnes

July 24, 1929 - May 28, 2019

Willie Estel Starnes entered the kingdom of heaven in the early morning hours of Tuesday, May 28 in Durant, Oklahoma. Born on July 24, 1929, in Bennington, he was a few weeks shy of his 90th birthday. Had it not been for a stroke suffered last year, he surely would have lived forever.

As one of four children born to Henry and Etta May Starnes Johnson, Willie and his siblings grew up in Durant. Their young family lived through the Great Depression, overcoming many obstacles. There was an abundance of love and direction, but life was not easy. Willie often told stories of cutting butcher paper to fit in the bottom of shoes that had long since lost their soles.

Determined to succeed in life after graduating from Durant High School in 1947, he joined the Marines and later the Army. He fought in the Korean War before returning to Durant where he enrolled in and graduated from Southeastern State College.

On Christmas Day in 1953 Willie and Florene (Flo) Kelley began their lives together. The couple was soon blessed with a daughter and a son, both of whom made them proud. The family lived for 10 years on Evergreen Street before moving to a newer area east of town with room for horses and cows in the backyard.

He was born with an entrepreneurial spirit and thought outside the box before it became a concept. He knew that success could be achieved by searching out opportunities and working hard. He had a talent for both.

Willie sold insurance with his brother-in-law before creating Combined Oil and Gas, a distribution company based in Durant. He also owned and operated C&H Auto Supply, bought and sold land and real estate, owned Combined Real Estate, and bought a jewelry store in Atoka that he re-located to Durant as Ron's Jewelry.

When Flo expressed her desire to open a Merle Norman cosmetics store in Durant, Willie was all in. They invested in the business and had stores in downtown Durant next to one another where he sold real estate and she made Durant more beautiful. Her shop moved to larger spaces over time, and Flo operated Merle Norman for 40 years. Her success with and love for the business made him especially proud.

Golfing was Willie's sport and he could often be found at the Durant Country Club where he won many tournaments and spent countless happy hours with friends who shared his love of the game. He was also a member of the Kiwanis Club. His passion was traveling, and he spent many hours on the road with family and friends. There was a special place in his heart for Holly Lake, Texas, a spot he and Flo visited often. He loved adventure and the open road, which translated into many new cars and multiple trips across the country.

A member of Calvary Baptist for more than 30 years and of Durant's First Baptist for even longer, he was a Christian who talked the talk and walked the walk. He taught Sunday school, sponsored the Royal Ambassadors youth group at Calvary, and was responsible for helping many learn about the Bible and find their own paths within the church. His faith was very important and he

was most surely met by our lord and savior Jesus Christ at the end of his mortal journey.

Willie was preceded in death by parents Henry and Etta May Starnes Johnson, his wife of 56 years Flo and sister Opal Weger.

He is survived by daughter Beverly Hill and husband Bruce of Durant, son Ronald Starnes (Cheryl Phelps) of Durant, grandchildren Melissa Hill, Michelle Hill, Jeff Hill and wife Erica, Krystle Harbert and husband Jeff and Kayleigh Rambo and husband Sam; grandchildren Bailey Brown, Kinlee Hill, Kevin Terrell, Cecilee Hill, Penelope Hill, Piper Hill, Coby Harbert, Cruz Harbert, and Chloe Rambo; brother Odis of Sherman, Texas and sister Wanda of Tishomingo, Okla., along with nieces, nephews and beloved friends, including Sandy Baker, Bernadine and Don Glenn, Joyce and Arlen Clark, Tom Lackey, Alfred Wheeler and many others from the Durant community, Calvary Baptist and First Baptist Churches.

The family would like to recognize kind doctors and caregivers who worked with Willie at home, in the hospital and within the Featherstone community. To those at Guardian Hospice who made him comfortable and helped us cope with this great loss, we thank you.

With his sense of humor and beautiful head of silver hair shining through till the end, Willie shared one final salute with son-in-law Bruce that we will remember always. The gesture, perfected over many years when family gatherings ended, was part military salute with the other part indicating "it's time for you to leave." This was his signature, it was his style, and we salute him for being a strong role model, loving husband and father, dedicated business owner, great grandpa, and Christian who enjoyed sharing his faith.

We followed his lead because he lead us by example. He will be missed.

Arrangements are under the direction of Brown's Funeral Service, with family night scheduled for Thursday, May 30 from 6-8 p.m. Services will be at 2 p.m. on Friday, May 31 at Durant's First Baptist Church with Brother James Robinson officiating. Family pallbearers are: Bobby Heffington, Seigel Paul Heffington, Steve Starnes, Stan Starnes, Larry Starnes and Eddie Beal.

Burial will take place at Durant's Highland Cemetery in the family plot.

All are invited to graveside rites which will follow the 2 p.m. church service on Friday, May 31.

Cemetery Details

Highland Cemetery

1620 Cemetery Rd
Durant, OK

Previous Events

Family Visitation

MAY 30. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Brown's Funeral Service - Durant
4900 West US Hwy 70
Durant, OK 74701
(580) 920-0393
info@brownsfuneralservice.com
<https://www.brownsfuneralservice.com/>

Funeral Service

MAY 31. 2:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church
124 W. Evergreen
Durant, OK

Tribute Wall



“ *Willie E. Starnes*

January 08, 2023 at 11:32 PM



“ *Beverly and Ron prayers a thoughts go out to you guys during this time. Your dad was always kind and friendly to me.*
Al Wheeler

Al Wheeler - June 01, 2019 at 11:06 AM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Willie E. Starnes.*



May 31, 2019 at 10:13 AM



“ *To Beverly and Ron, I'm sorry for the loss of your father. I remember him from hanging with Ron back in the high school days. He was a fine man and always friendly and polite to me. Also condolences to all family and friends affected by this loss. May Mr. Starnes RiP*

Sammy Morales - May 30, 2019 at 08:29 PM



“ *I am so sorry for you loss. I got to know Willie when I was a little girl and he had the auto parts store*

Kenya Inman - May 28, 2019 at 09:35 PM