



Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis

October 1, 1963 - January 16, 2021

Robert Michael "Mike" Willis

b. 10/1/63 Tampa, FL

d. 1/16/21 Tampa, FL

On the evening of January 16, 2021, Mike passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones at Lifepath Hospice in Tampa. Mike was 57 years old.

Mike was born in Tampa, Florida on October 1, 1963. He was the oldest and only son of Robert Dolton Willis and Beverly Nesmith.

Mike was a fun loving, hard working family man who was friendly and generous and will be missed by many friends and all family members. He will be remembered for his love of working on old cars and anything mechanical. He was so proud of his years working on cranes and heavy equipment all over the United States, Puerto Rico and Bermuda. He loved knives, fishing, air boating, yard sales, hog hunting and gator catching. He was an avid collector and believed one man's trash is another's treasure before that was popular. He loved John's Pass, John Prine, his daughters, his grandma, his '55 pickup, collecting rocks and finding arrowheads. Mike lost his battle with ALS after being diagnosed in 2020. Mike was preceded in death by his father, Robert Willis, his grandmother, Lucille Merlino, his grandmother, Gladys Gilley, and his infant son, Jeremiah Steven.

Mike is survived by his daughters, Jessica (DJ) Rumore, Samantha (Craig) Baxter, Tyler Grace Willis, Danielle (Jeffrey) Murray and Miranda Willis, his six grandsons and granddaughter, his mother Beverly Taylor, sisters, Edwina Willis, Becky (David) Jones, and Faye (Shawn) Rachels, brother, Billy Wayne (Nicole) Kinchen, aunts, uncle, nieces, nephew and numerous cousins and lifelong friends.

A memorial service will be held Friday, January 29 at 3:00 P.M. at Hopewell Funeral Home, 6005 South County Road 39, Plant City. For those unable to attend the service, it will be livestreamed at facebook.com/HopewellFuneral. The family gives special thanks to everyone who helped take care of Mike while he battled his illness including the nurses at Lifepath Hospice.

To honor Mike's memory, let someone who is struggling know they are loved and not alone.

Mike Willis went to King HS in Tampa then went to Louisiana to work on the oil barges. When he came home, he started his family, got married, had more kids, got remarried and had 2 more. Mike loved his 5 daughters and named them all with boy nicknames. All the girls are four years apart. He used to say grandma cursed him with all girls since he gave her such a fit growing up. Mike's favorite job was Sunbelt Cranes. He used to say they worked hard but played harder. He was a prankster and used to tell stories of tying plastic rats to chairs and scaring co-workers or putting glue on the toilet seat for the next guy.

They travelled all over the US building bridges, moving huge piping or construction materials, setting up tower cranes. Mike was proud of being a crane mechanic and one job had him leaving Cape Canaveral on the last day of school and moving a piece of the NASA launch pad to Lompoc CA and returning on the first day of the next year of school. He was stuck in several states waiting on permits. The load was so big they had to go the long way around most places, avoiding bridges and little town roads. He was in charge of the hydraulics and had to make things work. After Sunbelt there were other crane companies and Mike always had a great relationship with his coworkers and friends. He enjoyed working and got the chance to work in Bermuda and Puerto Rico, CA, Texas and GA. He fell in love with New Mexico and wanted to go back there again. He loved the big rocks and the landscape. Mike collected rocks everywhere he went. He also loved to find arrowheads and he was good at it too. He was an expert carver and self-taught knife collector and Case Expert. He loved dogs and all animals and fishing and hog hunting (not shooting, catching hogs). When he was younger, he like to catch gators swimming in the water. His favorite trip was to Minnesota where he visited with his lifelong friend John Fagre and went ice fishing and sledding in the freezing cold. He used to say he was a FL Cracker, 7th generation and proud of it. He'd say his kids were 8th generation crackers. Mike didn't meet strangers, he'd walk right up to someone and start talking to them. After a concert he walked around back of the venue and caught up to John Anderson and walked out with him chatting about fishing. Mike loved concerts, yard sales, flea markets, antique shops, gardens, boating in the Weeki Wachi, fishing in the Gulf. He had many vehicles over the years, but his '55 pickup was his favorite. But – if he saw a cheap station wagon he almost couldn't resist the urge to want to fix it up. Going to the races

was a big part of his life, he loved drag racing but would take the family to the roundy rounds and he enjoyed the demolition derby at the end of the night. Mike loved westerns and he could watch Marshal Dillon in Gunsmoke 24/7 if you didn't mind. He also loved all types of music from rock – AC/DC, ZZ Top, Led Zeppelin which he'd play so loud. He also loved Rod Stewart, John Prine, Dwight Yoakum and John Anderson and the oldies, Hank Sr, George Jones, Tom T Hall and Johnny Cash. We will remember Mike when we hear the whistle from Andy Griffith, the blues from Amy Winehouse and the pluck of Prine's guitar. Mike took his last breath while Seminole Wind played in his ear. He is now at peace and surrounded by angels.

Events

JAN **Memorial Service** 03:00PM - 04:00PM

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Hopewell Funeral Home

6005 County Road 39 South, Plant City, FL, US, 33567

Comments



“ A tribute video has been added.



Hopewell Funeral Home - January 28 at 07:14 PM



“ I just heard of Mikes passing. Mike was a family friend for as long as I can remember. My brothers knew him and I later found out that my mama/friend Mikki was kin to him. He was a great guy and loved his girls fiercely. Peace be upon his soul

Vickie-Davis Herrington - April 14 at 12:37 PM



“ 52 files added to the album LifeTributes



Hopewell Funeral Home - January 28 at 07:10 PM



“ Lovely One Spathiphyllum Plant was purchased for the family of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis.



January 26 at 05:07 PM



“ Medium Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis.



January 25 at 06:46 PM



“ Skip Fleming lit a candle in memory of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis



Skip Fleming - January 23 at 08:05 PM



“ RIP Mike

Joseph Lingerfelt - January 22 at 04:25 PM



“ Beverly, Becky, and Edwina,

Beverly, I didn't know Mike but I can't even imagine what you're going through. Sending you a big hug.

Girls, I lost my own older brother a year and a half ago. Whole different dynamic.

From one of my favorite songs, I offer these words :

"One thing you need, and nothing more,
to hear the Whisper of our Lord.
Be still and know that I am God.
Rest in the arms of My embrace."

Laura Halford Derryberry - January 22 at 08:23 AM



“ Mike was my first crush when I was 14..I was best friends with his sister Becky and would go to her house almost every weekend because Mike would be there..The summer before I turned 15 I went to my dad's for the summer and we would write letters back and forth and speaking of arrowheads,I still have the 2 that he sent me that summer in his letters..that's been 40yrs ago and I still have them...RIP Mike

Lisa Sikes Miller - January 22 at 03:04 AM



“ I didn't know you knew them. Mike's mom was my mom's best friend.I didn't know him but I knew Becky and Edwina and the Inmans.

Laura L Derryberry - January 22 at 08:08 AM



“ Mike and I met at SunBelt Cranes we hit it off from the start he loved to go dog hunting for hogs with me we use to airboat at my lake place he was a good man and friend

mike johnson - January 22 at 08:55 AM



“ Cherryl and Dave purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis.



Cherryl and Dave - January 21 at 07:48 PM



“ My prayers for strength and comfort are with all of you.
Love Cherryl



Cherryl - January 21 at 07:32 PM



“ I am so very sorry this has happened. You know we all loved Mike and this doesn't even seem real. I am praying for you guys and wish so much I could wipe out all the pain of this. Thank the Lord we'll have no loss, no sickness or pain in Glory. I love you guys much.



Kimberley - January 21 at 05:16 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis.



January 21 at 01:35 PM



“ My heart is sad for this entire family but lean on your wonderful memories of him I'm praying for all of you —Stay Strong

Shirley Jones - January 21 at 12:59 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mr. Robert Michael "Mike" Willis.



January 21 at 11:29 AM