



## Richard Gaines Lawrence

June 9, 1932 - June 14, 2021

How do you capture a snapshot of a life well lived? Where do we find the words to explain that which is beyond description. In stories and memories, just as an artist's brush, a picture forms of a man who seemed almost flawless to those who knew him best. Full of life, joy and incessant humor, he would always give more than he'd take. Meekness with strength, confidence with humility, courage with gentleness, he would love deeply, selflessly and sacrificially. Kind to all, a stranger would always be welcomed and left with a sense of security and nobleness. Simple in life, riches and fame were not his reward nor his focus. Genuine love, faithfulness and patience was the language of our home. Titles were worthless to him, traded for something far greater: Husband, Father, Papa, Brother, Son. Love was the language he spoke true and without hesitation. Of all the men I've ever known, he was by far the greatest! God's gift. He was and is...my dad.

Richard Gaines Lawrence was born on June 9th, 1932, in a little Alabama town called Fayette. His dad, Floyd was the postmaster and his mom, Bessie Nell was a homemaker and longtime organist for First Baptist Fayette. The gift of music was expressed through the Lawrence family, with extended family members forming a bluegrass band while my grandmother would anchor that gift for its highest purpose - the praise of God! That musical gift was passed on to Dad, who loved a good southern gospel quartet - from the Blackwood Brothers to the Statesman Quartet and all the way to Gold City. "Your First Day in Heaven" was a staple in our home - its truth ringing ever clear today.

My Dad was a gifted athlete. Playing both football and basketball, he would serve not only as the quarterback but the captain of the undefeated Alabama State Champion Fayette Tigers football team of 1949. As the story goes, while playing football, he spotted the prettiest and most beautiful majorette on the field. He would date and fall in love with that girl, Helen Norris, whom he would dedicate his life. She stole his heart that day, and he would never look back. He married that girl and made her his wife, Helen Lawrence, on September 3rd, 1950. Faithful he would remain to her for 70 years of marriage. Their love story would produce a lifetime of adventures, struggles and triumphs all the while cultivating a home where we felt safe and deeply loved. It's astounding to say I never

heard my Dad raise his voice to my mother - for it would be very rare but all the more true!

Shortly after marriage, Mom and Dad headed to Amarillo Texas where he served in the Air Force as a jet engine instructor. In those days of the Korean War, He would equip American fighter jets & pilots to serve our country & keep her citizens safe. Following his Air Force duty, Dad began his career at Lockheed Martin where, as a part of the Aerospace Industry, he would continue to bring leadership to fighter jet technology, allowing our country to safely target foreign threats and protect American interests. Dad was a patriot who loved his country and served her well.

Without a doubt, family was his priority. He would not seek promotions or accolades if it meant trading precious family time. His daughter, Kim, was his firstborn and the sparkle in his eye. I came along several years later and would, by nature, carry on the mischievous shenanigans inherently built into the Lawrence genes. For Dad, LOVE was spelt TIME, which he never withheld from his family. Camping trips, beach trips, baseball games, football (Roll Tide), boating, coaching, family trips were the investment of dad into the lives of his kids. He never missed a game, a piano recital or event. He always greeted my mom with a kiss. I never feared my dad would not come home. He made our home a place of refuge and gave us the strength to face any foe.

My sister and I were quickly upstaged by the arrival of his grand kids. He adored them and would celebrate every milestone. He held the rights to bestowed nicknames and the stories behind each. They were in order: Corri (Boomer), Josh (Bubba), Lane Marie (Blossom), Jake (Lil' Bud) and finally Kate (Butterfly). To know my dad was to know his deep love for each of his treasures. He selflessly sacrificed for the needs of his family and gave the gift of presence. And it showed. In a culture where homes are crumbling and marriages failing, he was the stalwart keeper of the gate. A spiritual warrior who protected, prayed, and fought for his family. He was the best Papa. That's my dad!

His faith was real and tangible, for it was expressed and lived out in the everyday grind of our home. He was devoted, faithful and gentle. He would show us the goodness of God through his goodness and quietly model authentic faith. Jesus was the guest at our table, the center of conversations, the one we trusted in hard times and the One we worshiped with heartfelt expressions of praise. Yet his humility would always bear the truth that he was a flawed man in need of a great savior. Jesus was a close companion. And it was Jesus, who, on June 14th, sat down at the foot of my dad's bed and gently called his name. His voice was not foreign to Dad - he knew it well. A gentle whisper - "it's time - let's go home"!

A heart that beat so strong, for so long, gave it's last and final thrust of physical life. A

body exhausted and poured out, completed its objective. The eyes that glimmered with life and joyous humor, would slowly fade and the hands that held us all so close would finally lose its grip. The physical body had completed its mission.

But that my friend is not the end of the story! No way! It's only the beginning!

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. In Christ, there is no death. When Jesus rose with a new and resurrected body, we are offered a glimpse of our eternity. Death is defeated. The sting of the grave is removed - forever! Because of the resurrection my dad is whole, alive and now realizes that greatest gift offered to us all - the very presence of Jesus!

My Dad cast a tall shadow. He always did. His presence always sure. His chair is empty and what we would give for one more story, one more smile, and one more laugh. Yet even the deep love for his family would never entice him to return. The weight of eternal glory is his reality and the same for all of us who place our trust in Jesus (2nd Cor 4:16).

I've never been one to embrace the regular. An obituary would not do for he is not dead, misplaced or lost. Jesus never preached a funeral - there was no need. So, we celebrate a great man, a giant, who lived a quiet yet profound life. His legacy sown in family and friends and eternity impacted because of Gaines Lawrence. His name will not appear on plaques or honors or awards. His image will not hang in the halls of leaders, or his memory etched in stone. He will not make the history books and will pass from the memory of this world. But don't be fooled, for you cannot measure his life by the riches of this world. His treasures are stored in another place, another realm of the eternal God (Matt 6:19-21).

He is now part of the grand story of God and His faithful followers. The kingdom of God is forever changed because Gaines Lawrence lived and loved. In God's economy, Dad invested well, and the reward is beyond our imagination. Without question, he is now restored, whole and more alive than those of us left behind. You can take that to the bank.

There once was a man who stood tall and strong, courageous yet gentle. Full of humor, laughter and life. He was one of a kind. A life-giver. My hero. That's my dad! Well done good and faithful servant. I love you more than words can say.

(Note: for those wishing to send flowers or give in his name - please tithe to your local church to advance the Kingdom or give to St. Jude's Children's Hospital to help children & families in need.)

He will be buried in a private ceremony with his family present.

# Cemetery

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## **Cape Canaveral National Cemetery**

5525 US-1

Mims, FL, 32754

# Comments

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“ Candi Covell lit a candle in memory of Richard Gaines Lawrence



Candi Covell - June 17 at 06:20 PM

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“ My thoughts and prayers are with you during this very difficult time. I pray for love and strength to each of you. I love you Helen! Jeff, I have never read such a beautiful message that you gave about your dad. It was beautiful.

Candi Covell - June 17 at 06:06 PM

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“ We were neighbors of Gaines and Helen for 29 years. They are the reason we became members of FBO and the Son Risers Life Group. We sat on the bench and visited, drove around the block and chatted out of the car window. Gaines and Ed would go to Cecil's for barbecue. After I moved out of the neighborhood, anytime I saw Gains, he would smile and say "Hi Neighbor". A gentle God fearing man.

Barbara Turner - June 17 at 01:57 PM