

## Wilda Lee Karnes

January 16, 1930 - March 5, 2021

Wilda Lee Karnes, 91, of Orlando, was awarded her eternal rest on March 5 after a 91-year battle with life.

She was born to Lavern Karnes and Cora Lee Pope Karnes in Jackson, Michigan, on January 16, 1930. They were young parents and couldn't have known what they unleashed on the world.

Wilda grew into her womanhood as a free-thinker and proud Democrat in Jackson, a city that lays claim to being the birthplace of the Republican Party. Wilda later became a resident and proud voter in Allentown, PA, before retiring to Florida, where she cast her final ballot this past November.

As a mother with six children at home, Wilda put herself through college, receiving a B.A. from Muhlenberg College in Allentown. She became a dedicated social worker, helping first to establish the Food Stamp Program in Lake County, FL, then spending the balance of her career in child protective services in both Florida and Pennsylvania. When not out saving the world, Wilda loved spending time with her family. Her hobbies were reading, travelling, and hugging-up and singing to her grand and great grandchildren, and she always kept an eye out for someone new to meet and was quick with a warm smile and an eager-to-know, "So where are you from?" Before long, the stranger was telling Wilda their life story. And assuring her that they

planned to vote in the next election.

Having struggled hard to achieve a place at the table for herself and her children, Wilda believed in offering a helping hand to anyone in need. If she didn't have a hand of her own to offer, she searched until she found someone who did. She believed in people and showed everyone compassion and love, equally, and respect without judgment or expectations. (Except to vote. She really expected people to be informed voters and could get a little judge-y about that.) Injustice infuriated her and, with her innate all-for-one-and-one-for-all approach to life, whenever she saw abuse or exploitation of others, Wilda took it personally and did whatever she could to remedy things. It was the fuel that kept her organizing and participating in voter drives even as her time, resources, and life energy were waning.

Her door was always open and however much or little she had, she was quick to share it. Often financially broke due to her extreme generosity and underpaid vocations, Wilda had a rich life enjoying an abundance of what she truly valued: family, laughter, love and adventure. An avid reader and deep thinker, Wilda truly believed the way to make the world a better place was to keep exploring, learning, teaching, gathering information to help formulate better ideas, and then exchanging those ideas freely with others. And her ideas fell like gentle rain on everyone she met. Occasionally, they'd hit with hurricane force... but you always understood the point she was making had substance.

She believed life was to be lived on one's own terms. She often repeated the wise lines from Hamlet, "This above all, to thine own self be true." Walking that walk of honesty and self-ownership, she lived her life her way. Wilda felt that basement walls existed so children could paint murals, that she could communicate just fine using only song lyrics, and that her homemade chocolate pudding constituted a hearty breakfast as long as it was still warm.

She, herself, feasted on pop tarts, ice cream, and donuts, and insisted that Milky Ways and hot fudge had medicinal properties. She never exercised physically but lived to a ripe old age because she was always exercising her heart, soul and mind.

Among those surprised they managed to survive Hurricane Wilda are her devoted children, Toni (Steve) Kellison, Deni Doherty, Dan (Fen) Doherty, Lisa (Tony) Ponte, and Chris Doherty. Her beloved daughter, Julie (Martino) Petosa, went ahead of her into the next life to scout out the donut and ice cream situation. Wilda's loving and well-hugged/well-sung-to grandchildren include Patience (Mike) Fleischman, John Heald, Elisabeth (Steve) Kroope, Caitlin (Casey) Backenstoe, Matt (Air) Kellison, Lexi Kellison, and Jillian Doherty. Her high-spirited, and carrying on the tradition, great grandchildren, Olivya, Luke, Genevieve, Jake, Stella, and Maddie brought endless joy to Wilda, as did her extended family and countless friends. She was loved a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck, and all will miss her spirit and guidance until they meet her again at the big voter registration booth in Eternity.

In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to:

Turning Point of Lehigh Valley (A safe place for survivors of domestic abuse)  
<https://www.turningpointlv.org/donate>

and/or

Adult Literacy League  
<https://www.adultliteracyleague.org/donate/>

Also, Wilda, her family, and the world would appreciate your being kind to your

neighbor and being an informed voter in future election cycles.

Burial will be at Riverside Cemetery in Union City, Michigan, at a future date.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAR 17. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

A Community Funeral Home & Sunset Cremations  
910 W. Michigan Street  
Orlando, FL 32805  
(407) 841-4424  
<https://www.acommunityfuneralhome.com/>

## Eulogies

MAR 17. 6:00 PM (ET)

A Community Funeral Home & Sunset Cremations  
910 W. Michigan Street  
Orlando, FL 32805  
(407) 841-4424  
<https://www.acommunityfuneralhome.com/>

## Catholic Funeral Mass

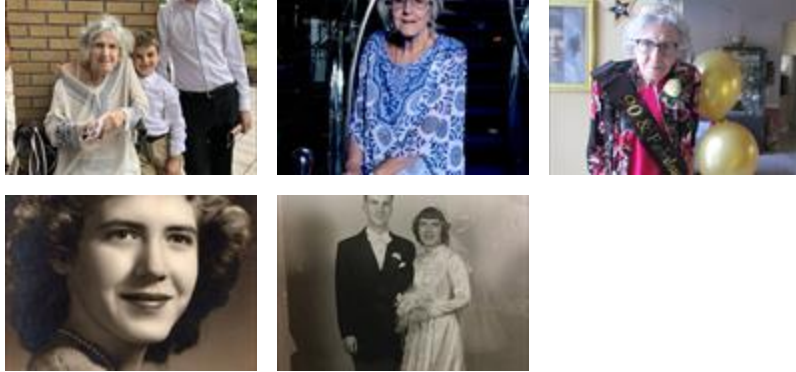
MAR 18. 2:00 PM (ET)

St. John Vianney Catholic Church  
6200 S. Orange Blossom Trail  
Orlando, FL 32809

# Tribute Wall

EP

“ 13 files added to the tribute wall



elyce ponte - March 17, 2021 at 09:11 AM



“ 0 file added to the tribute wall

March 17, 2021 at 09:07 AM



“ 0 file added to the tribute wall

March 17, 2021 at 09:06 AM



“ 0 file added to the tribute wall

March 17, 2021 at 09:05 AM

TB

“ *Tobi Brown lit a candle in memory of Wilda Lee Karnes*



Tobi Brown - March 12, 2021 at 11:34 AM

KS

“ *Kim Sutter lit a candle in memory of Wilda Lee Karnes*



Kim Sutter - March 11, 2021 at 10:43 PM



“ *Rita Samdath lit a candle in memory of Wilda Lee Karnes*



Rita Samdath - March 11, 2021 at 02:27 PM

CM

“ *Carlotta M lit a candle in memory of Wilda Lee Karnes*



Carlotta M - March 11, 2021 at 12:09 PM

IF

*I can speak for my wife Patsy and myself, we were partners with Wilda working for the election of Barack Obama and we were enjoying being in good company. Wonderful lady and wonderful family. Ira and Patsy*

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**Ira Fleckman** - March 11, 2021 at 02:38 PM

LS

“ *Dear Toni & family-*

*On behalf of Turning Point, I appreciated you reaching out to make us aware of your mother's wish to include support of survivors of domestic abuse as part of her tribute. I truly regret that I didn't get to know her in this earthly world; she seems to have been a fabulous, brave, generous soul who loved and embraced life. I wish for a world full of people like Wilda and hope her legacy of kindness brings you all comfort in her absence.*

*In peace-  
Lori Sywensky*

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**Lori Sywensky** - March 11, 2021 at 11:47 AM