



Raye Whitely

September 14, 1931 - September 11, 2022

Camilla Raye Whitely was born in Criner, OK to WS Smith and Mila Kerbo Smith on September 14th, 1931. She attended school in Criner Oklahoma until 8th grade and then on to finish High School in Dibble OK. By age 10 she would accompany her father playing piano for singing conventions and funerals when she was needed. Her parents fostered her natural musical talent by working and saving their hard to come by money in order to pay for her and her sister's music lessons by sending them to the Stamps Quartet Music Company in Dallas Texas. Raye never enjoyed reading music but naturally had a gift for playing by ear. As a young teen she was introduced to Earl and Lillie Fern Weatherford who were impressed by her talent. At age 16 she began touring with their group The Weatherfords that summer and in 1948 that job became full time. Raye soon married the group's lead singer Les Roberson.

Raye traveled and lived in several states touring with the group during the height of the southern gospel music scene playing weekly for a time on WOWO Radio in Ft. Wayne Indiana. Some of Raye's fondest memories were living and working with The Weatherfords as they lived in Los Angeles, and seeing Elvis backstage at an all-night night singing in Tennessee. She also recalled seeing so much racial injustice while touring the deep south states at the time and the deep impressions it made on her that she could not sit with many people of color in restaurants she had earlier shared a stage with. Later

in life she loved seeing old friends and and colleagues on the Gospel Singing Jubilee or on the Gaither Homecoming series and would reminisce about the time they had shared together.

Raye and Les had 3 children before she returned to Norman OK and along with the help of her family, she began attending beauty school as a now single mother. Raye or "Robie" as she was known had a natural talent for hair styling, and hair color as well. She later met and married Raymond Whitely and the two settled in Washington Oklahoma where they were able to find a home with a small hair salon attached. "The Hairport" was a popular weekly destination and gathering place for many of Raye's clients in McClain county.

Raye and Raymond soon had a son and Raye was pleased to be able to work at home while raising her children each day. The words "Wash Your Hands!" were always heard when her kids would come thru the door after school. When hair lengths changed in the 70's many of the young men in Washington would come to her shop because she would cut their hair like they wanted which was not too short. Many people would remark that no one could do a shampoo and set like Raye. Later she and Raymond sold their house and move to New Bern, NC and she started doing hair in the New Bern area and was happy to be doing what she loved but not running the show. They later moved back to Purcell OK and then on to Betsy Lane KY so that Raymond could care for his mother. Later they would move to Hemet, CA allowing them to be closer to their son Randy. After Raymond's death Raye remained in their home and late in her life started playing the piano again for the Valle Vista Baptist Church in Valle Vista CA. She enjoyed working on her own arrangements of gospel favorites often surprising her church family with her skill and talent. Raye spoke often with her children and siblings who were back in Oklahoma and would enjoy many long visits with her son in Los Angeles and then in Palm Springs CA. Having lived in Los Angeles in the 50's she was surprised and please how many things were still there that she

remembered and always loved going out for an evening meal at the places she loved the most. She never missed the Young And The Restless and watched QVC almost religiously to keep up with the latest beauty and fashion trends until her health declined this summer. Raye proudly danced to her own drum and we all know she wouldn't have had it any other way. She will always be remembered for her laugh and her smile which she shared daily with her friends and loved ones.

Raye is preceded in death by her parents WS and Mila Smith, Her husband Raymond Whitely and son Bill Roberson.

Raye is survived by her children Terry Roberson and wife Kathleen of Norman, OK, her daughter Kelly Roberson of rural McClain county and of her son Randall Whitely of Palm Springs, CA. Her sisters Faye Mitchell and Bill of Lindsey, OK, and Kaye Hickson and Ken of Hall Park, OK and her brother Royce Smith and wife Pat of Choctaw, OK. She is survived also by 7 nieces and nephews, Her grandchildren Jarrod, Jon, Matt, Leslie, Sarah and Eric and 5 great grandchildren.

Graveside Services are scheduled for 11:00 A.M. Tuesday, September 20, 2022 at Washington Cemetery.

Family will be available to receive relatives and friends Monday evening from 5-7 P.M.

You may send online condolences to the family @www.wilsonlittle.com.

Tribute Wall

RP

“ Hey, Terry and wife, sorry for the loss of your mother. She and Raymond would come into Jo's Pizza regularly. I always wondered what happened to them because i had not seen them for years. I always waited on them. I didn't know she was a famous singer. Wish i would have known. That is so cool! I'm sorry I never got to hear her. Terry, do you sing? Sincerely, Ruthie Powers

Ruthie Powers - September 27, 2022 at 12:00 AM

DA

“ I only knew Raye (Randy's Mom) for a short time meeting Raye in Palm Springs through her son, Randy! What a wonderful experience. I got to see one beautiful woman who always had her hair done and was well dressed. Raye had an infectious laugh and beautiful smile. Randy was a devoted, caring and loving son that made Raye's life so joyful. Randy, being a good cook, spoiled his Mom by cooking her favorites. Raye and Randy also had their favorite restaurants all over Riverside County and the Palm Springs area. What a joy getting to meet Randy's mom. May she rest in peace. Dan Ary



Dan Ary - September 15, 2022 at 12:00 AM

MR

“*Raye will be missed so much. She was so much fun. She would go to Nancy's parties and her and I would stand in the kitchen and talk and laugh. I took my keyboard to her a few years ago to play, she said she practiced on the table with her fingers. How does someone do that???. She was a beautiful pianist. We had to talk qvc to each other since we loved to shop on TV.
Love and condolences to her family especially to our friend Randy.*



Mike, Linda, Michele Runions - September 15, 2022 at 12:00 AM