



Norman Ben Kelley, Jr

APR 30, 1927 - APR 7, 2016



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Norman Ben Kelley, Jr., 88, accountant passed away April 7, 2016 in Claremore, OK. He was born April 30, 1927 in Tulsa, OK to Norman Ben and Effie Mae (Montgomery) Kelley, Sr. Ben Kelley-as told by son, Pat Kelley Ben Kelley was born in Tulsa on April 30, 1927. He would have been eighty-nine years old this month. His life as a child was not filled with great memories and his relationship with his father, a chronic alcoholic, was not good. Dad had to work in his father's automotive garage as a child and was treated poorly at that. His mother was a true gem but had to put up with an abusive marital relationship. He also had a sister named Bonnie. Dad's mother, Effie Mae Kelley managed to get Dad a few guitar lessons by cleaning the teacher's house. Dad truly loved his mother and felt very protective of her. That may have had much to do with his love and devotion to women who he always held in such high esteem. The son of Virginia and Fred Owens sent me a note upon hearing of dad's passing. Fred and Virginia were very close friends with both of my parents, going all the way back to Tulsa's Central High School. Their son told me that his mother always considered my dad to be her best friend. I remember that he never failed to call her on her birthday even though Fred and Virginia had moved to California years ago. They would have the best time laughing and talking. That's the way he was and I guess the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. Dad was married to the love of his life for sixty years before losing her ten years ago. When they married, he was eighteen, still in the Army, and Mary Jean Cloud, his bride to be was only sixteen, although she had already graduated from high school. Mom had a brilliant mind. My dad had the deepest respect for women and I have never seen anyone that was as dedicated as Dad was to Mom. Women were to be treated like queens and he did consider Jean his queen. I wrote a song last year called I'll Make You the Queen Tonight, about a story Dad told more than a few times about a high school dance. Dad was a good jitterbug dancer and he was very popular in that arena. At one



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particular dance, my mom was at the front table selling tickets. My dad, being taken with her beauty told her that he would make her the queen that night, as they would later vote for a king and queen of the dance. He persuaded all of his friends to vote for her and he really did make her the queen on that evening, as he was voted the king. The rest is history and I never had one minute of doubt about their dedication to one another. Dad went into the Army at eighteen, during World War II. He was on a truck to be shipped off to Germany when he was suddenly called to get off the truck because they needed someone that could type. Some high school classes turn out to be pretty valuable. It was near the end of the war and it all ended before he had another scheduled overseas deployment. Before Mom and Dad were married, my dad actually went AWOL one weekend so he could sneak away and travel to meet my mom. Somehow he got back on base without getting caught. I guess true love makes people do some crazy things. He was lucky. God must have touched Ben in some kind of miraculous way because, even though his childhood was not as good as he had wished for, he made a solid choice to create a great life for his own family and he succeeded with flying colors. Mom and Dad had two sons, Pat and David, and his relationship with his sons was 180 degrees opposite of the relationship he experienced with his father. My dad was simply the greatest. He gave me all the things I needed to go forward and make a good life. He supported me always, and encouraged me to do what I loved, which was to play the guitar and create music. Dad started me on my journey by providing me with a ukulele when I was four and a guitar a year later. That first guitar was one that he obtained as a young boy and it can now be viewed in one of the display cases at the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame where it was donated when I was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2003. Dad and I played guitars together often as I grew up and I know he was as proud as he could be that I was able to move to Los Angeles and make a career in music. I was first inspired to play the guitar by hearing Dad and his long time best friend, Fred Daniel, play guitars together when my brother David and I were young enough to fall asleep at Fred's house and wake up in bed at home the next morning. I was playing with them by the time I was seven. They were very gracious. During my seventh year, Dad's employer, Carter Oil Company, which years later morphed into Exxon/Mobil, transferred him



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to the tiny town of Carmi, Illinois. We were thriving in Tulsa but off we went to Carmi. We all loved and missed Tulsa so much that after three months, Dad simply said he would go back to Tulsa, find another job and a place for us to live, then bring us all back to Tulsa. He sacrificed his career to make his family happy. That is the kind of man he was. I know deep down inside that he especially wanted me to be in a town where I could find guitar teachers and continue to nurture my music. Dad was my first guitar teacher. When I moved on to another teacher, he faithfully drove me to lessons every week until I was old enough to drive. He also drove my brother David to weekly drum lessons. Dad worked as an accountant for Bebe Auto Parks for most of his working days but he really considered his family to be his career. One of the great memories of my childhood was our regular family camping and fishing trips on the Illinois River and Baron Fork Creek. I remember my brother and I helping dad load the two-toned green Pontiac station wagon with the tent and all the gear that we would need for the weekend on the river. When we arrived, the first order of business was setting up the tent. I can still close my eyes and imagine wading in the water with my dad and learning how to catch brownies as we cast our lines near some log or other spot that was deemed to be the place where the fish hung out. He knew what he was doing and we always caught some fish. He loved these times when he could relax and be with his wife and sons.... and catch a fish or two! Sometimes we would be joined by my cousin Cheryl and my aunt and uncle Lois and Ernest Clark. Those were some fun and carefree days. Later, my dad managed Pat and the Panthers, my junior high school band, and drove us all over the place in his 1966 red Chevy pickup. He even had Pat and the Panthers painted in huge letters on the side of the camper shell. He loved every minute that he could be with us and help us on our way. My brother, David, played the drums and my mom and dad put up with a lot of noise, although they never heard it as noise. They were remarkable in letting the band set up equipment in the living room and leave it there for days. They loved it and I owe both of my parents a huge debt of gratitude for their unending support and encouragement. My dad was also dedicated to his Masonic lodge and his Masonic brothers. Being a Mason was an integral part of his life. He is a past master of Rock Lodge and was also the Chaplin for many years, only leaving that duty about



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three years ago. When I was growing up, Wednesday night was lodge night. When my brother and I were young, we would wait for him to come home, often with a few goodies to eat that were left over from the Masonic Lodge meeting. We thought that was pretty special. After I left for California in the 70's, Dad and Mom became members of First United Methodist Church and developed close friendships with people in their Sunday School Class. The social environment that developed was very fulfilling to my dad and I know he cherished the friendships that came along in his second half of life. For a few years, Mom and Dad also raised a grandson that my brother named Norman Ben Kelley III, after my dad, who also carried his dad's name. Dad was a relentless walker. He loved to get out and walk, smell the flowers and grass, and feel the earth below his feet. These things were precious gifts from God. If the weather was bad, he went to a mall to walk. Walking was something that we always did together when I visited. We had our most meaningful talks during this time and it also kept us in shape, which was extremely important to him. Dad lost his precious Jean ten years ago and often spoke of the time when he would rejoin her in heaven. For that I am happy. With the passing of his son and my brother David five years ago, Dad and I were left with just the two of us in the immediate family. To the end Dad remained especially close to his niece, Cheryl and her daughter Melissa. He also loved the time he spent with his other nieces and nephews, Amy, Susan, and Steven Graham. My dad was a great, great man with integrity that was beyond question. I will miss him deeply and forever carry him in my heart. Goodbye my hero. Closest surviving family members, Son Pat Kelley; Daughter-in-law Francie Kelley; Granddaughter Katie Kelley; Grandson Ben Kelley III; Nieces, Cheryl Pendelton, Amy Graham, Susan Jones; Nephew Steven Graham; Brother-in-law Voyle Graham; Others: Melissa Gibson, Mika Gibson, Cheyenne Gibson, Jeremy Pendelton, Matt Pendelton Trevor Graham, Dillon Graham. Funeral service will be 10:00 AM, Friday, April 15th, Floral Haven Funeral Home Chapel with committal service to follow at Floral Haven Memorial Gardens.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Norman by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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