



James DeForrest Gonia Sr.

September 6, 2016

James DeForrest Gonia, Sr., passed away at home on Tuesday morning, September 6, 2016, surrounded by his family. He was 90 years old. He died peacefully in his sleep after enduring a 9 week battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Mary Elizabeth Duncan, formerly of Clarkesville, GA, with whom he celebrated his 70th wedding anniversary on June 4. His other surviving family members include his son, James D. Gonia, Jr., of Atlanta, GA; his daughter, Gwen Osgood of San Diego, CA; his grandson, Joshua L. Gonia, of Atlanta, GA; and his sister-in-law, Bess Hodkinson of Clarkesville, GA. Born in Chattanooga, TN, in 1926, Jim lost his mother when he was only 2 years old and grew up in an orphanage in Dyersburg, TN. After re-uniting with his father and stepmother in Palmyra, AL, in later years, he made his way to Toccoa Falls College in North GA, where he met the love of his life, Mary Duncan, in 1941. Ever the hard working young man, Jim put himself through school by working 7 jobs. He was a clerk at Green's Department Store, worked at the local dry cleaners, wrote for the school newspaper, and was the night watchman at the college, where he was frequently found outside my mother's dorm window.

At age 17, Jim left school to join the Army in 1942. He landed on Omaha Beach after a stormy ride across the English Channel. He made his way through France, Germany & Belgium, surviving the Battle of the Bulge with frost bitten toes and a visit from General George Patton.

Jim returned to Clarkesville, GA, at the end of the war and married his sweetheart, Mary. They moved to Birmingham, AL, where he was a copy boy for the Birmingham News, before being hired by Life Magazine in Atlanta. He and Mary began a family in 1949 and moved to the suburbs of Sandy Springs. Jim's advertising career included representing Sunset Magazine, House Beautiful and numerous publications for Hearst Magazines. He was Assistant to the Publisher for Hearst in New York in the early 1960's before returning to his beloved Atlanta, where he worked for many years at the top ad agency, Liller, Neal, Battle & Lindsey. It's Chairman, Howard Axelberg, became Dad's lifelong best friend. They spent many happy weekends trout fishing on the Chestatee River while Mom and Betty talked. The Gonia's and Axelberg's enjoyed countless trips to The Greenbriar in White Sulphur Springs, W. VA, where they danced to Ella Fitzgerald, Louie Armstrong, Duke

Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, and Benny Goodman.

After retirement, Jim worked for both Oxford Bookstore and Chapter 11 Bookstore in Sandy Springs where he captured the heart of the community by riding his red Schwinn bicycle to work every day, wearing his favorite wool sweater vest regardless of how hot it was.

In later years, well into his eighties, Jim volunteered in the library at the Fulton County Senior Center in Sandy Springs where his WWII pictures were proudly hung on display. Jim's children, Gwen and Jim, Jr., inherited their father's lifelong work ethic. He was a wonderful provider for his family and we were fortunate that he insisted that his children grow up at home with their mother who quit working after we were born.

Dad served as a Deacon and Elder at Peachtree Presbyterian Church and earlier at Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church.

Aside from being a marketing and advertising genius, Dad was a natural comedian. He kept us in stitches his whole life and was constantly cracking jokes. I truly believe his humor is what kept he and Mom alive so long, as they survived long after all their friends. Dad and his son, Jim, shared a life long love of golf. They started early when Jim, Jr. was only 5 years old at Cherokee Town & Country Club where Dad was a charter member. In Dad's last few months, Jim, Jr. kept The Golf Channel turned on 24/7 in Dad's room so he could hear his favorite sport even while sleeping. In fact, The Golf Channel is still on. We're never going to turn it off.

Dad was also a fun father - a bit of a daredevil. He used to take us weekends when we were little to fly in his single engine Aeronca 15 Sedan, followed by his Piper Cub and later his Cessna 150. Those were adventurous times along with flying in my Uncle Pete's hot air balloon.

Dad was also a loyal fan of the GA Bulldogs where Gwen and Jim, Jr. went to school. In fact, just a week ago, he had Gwen read him all about some new recruit that was 6'4" and weighed over 300 lbs. As Dad would say, GO DAWGS!

Our father also shared a lifelong love of books and reading -- especially WWII history, biography and, in later years, his all time favorite -- spy books and espionage. Up until recently, he remained an avid reader and was immersed in books all his life.

Our father, grandfather and husband will be greatly missed by his family and all who were lucky enough to know him throughout his colorful life.

Deepest gratitude goes to the outstanding, loving and wonderful caregivers at Agape Hospice -- Janice Matzkin, Vanessa Harrison, Tawanda Curtis, and Chaplain Eric Calhoun, as well as to caregivers Veronica Smith, Danielle Atkins and Jean Sullivan. Our family's deepest gratitude also goes to neighbors and close friends, Becky Shelly, Lisa and Steve Axelburg, Clay and Millie Threeton, Lisa Linehan and our wonderful cousin, Joey Duncan, and beloved aunt, Bess Hodkinson.

A full military honors funeral will be held at the Georgia National Cemetery in Cherokee

County, GA, with interment on the beautiful rolling hills looking out at the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Etowah Indian Mounds. The family welcomes flowers at their residence in Sandy Springs to soften our mother's grief.

Services are being provided by Mayes Ward-Dobbins Funeral Home in historic Marietta, GA.

Cemetery

Georgia National Cemetery
1080 Veterans Cemetery Rd.
Canton, GA,

Events

SEP 12 **Graveside Service** 11:00AM

Georgia National Cemetery
1080 Veterans Cemetery Rd., Canton, GA, US

Comments



“ Mary, Jimmy, Gwen and Josh,
I just discovered this information today. A bit late but my condolences to all of you for your loss. I always enjoyed being around your father.
Holly Harkey

holly harkey - October 23, 2017 at 12:26 PM



“ my prayers go out to you. every time he saw me walking to school he would stop and give me a ride "jump in " just a fine man. kind. my thoughts are with all of his family RHN.....Rich God bless you all.

Richard Hauck Neurohr - May 15, 2017 at 02:54 AM



“ My heart goes out to James D Gonia and the family of Jim, Gwen and their mom. Although I know you suffered a great loss I did also. For all of you, you made me a part of your family and I felt at home as if I were taking care of my own dad. I love you all and together we will all pull threw this. Love Your Friend, Baby Sister and caregiver, Jean S. P. S. I will miss hearing your dads stories!

Jean Sullivan - September 14, 2016 at 06:38 PM



“ Deborah Galloway
September 09, 2016 | Atlanta, GA | Coworker
“

I feel I owe a lot of my career to Jim. He took a chance on me and taught me that whatever your business, it's all about people. He touched a lot of people in the advertising community - he was such a bigger than life character. My heart goes out to the family. But "pop-pop" is finally at peace.

Deborah Galloway - September 12, 2016 at 06:27 AM



“ Gewn & Jimmy, sorry to hear of your Dads passing. I have fond memories with J D and your Mother and all the Duncan Clan in Clarksville. He also made me laugh when I was a boy and after I was grown! The Duncan. reunions and the trips we made to Clarksville every year were always special. May God Bless you and give you the peace that He has promised. Your cousin, William Duncan Shaw.
shaw6264@gmail.com



“ Sweet Liberty was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 11, 2016 at 02:26 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 11, 2016 at 09:35 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 11, 2016 at 09:02 AM



“ Tranquil Seas was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 10, 2016 at 11:23 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 10, 2016 at 11:15 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 10, 2016 at 11:12 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 10, 2016 at 11:09 PM



“ Ocean Breeze Spray was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 10, 2016 at 10:54 PM



“ You are absolutely on target in regard to Jim's obsession with camera's! When I was in Public relations at Hyatt I drove down Peachtree Street most times. Jim's office must have been somewhere along that route because on countless occasions I would become aware of someone honking a horn to get my attention when I was at a stop light that had turned red, and there was Jim motioning me to roll the window down and when I did so he was clicking pictures of me until the light turned green. And with a big wave "good-bye" off he went. He certainly was 'ONE-OF-A-KIND" In many aspects of his life! Prayerfully he will now REST IN PEACE.

May God be with him on his journey Love, Dotti {aka Gandy)

Dotti Nacci - September 10, 2016 at 06:20 PM



“ Losing a parent is very difficult and the pain and sadness is beyond comprehension. My Dad was my best friend for all 67 years of my life. He was the "perfect" father. He made our lives fun! He kneeled to pray with me by the side of my bed every night when I was a child, he built treehouses for me, he bought us beagle puppies, he cheered for my football team, he photographed every single moment of our lives, he motivated me to excel, he encouraged me to lead an adventurous life, and he never, ever let me down. He always told me how much he loved me -- even as he lay dying these last 9 weeks. As Victor Hugo said in Les Miserables, "To love another person is to see the face of God." I certainly saw that in my Dad.



Gwen G. Osgood - September 09, 2016 at 10:19 PM



“ Gwen, I am so sorry for your loss. Always loved you dad and mom too, and you and jimmy also. He was a fun and wonderful man and will be missed by all of us who knew him. My love and prayers are with all of you. Ed Osgood

Ed Osgood - September 10, 2016 at 12:04 AM



“ Ocean Breeze Spray was purchased for the family of James DeForrest Gonia Sr..



September 09, 2016 at 09:40 PM



“ Thanks for the golf, the flying, the fishing, the football, the baseball, the date money, the cars, the vacations....thanks for being a great Dad. I love you Pop!

James Gonia, Jr. - September 09, 2016 at 07:43 PM



“ Jimmy, I am saddened by the loss of you dad. I know how much he meant to all of you. He was such a fun and outgoing man. My love and prayers are with you, Gwen and your mom.
Ed Osgood

Ed Osgood - September 10, 2016 at 12:07 AM



“ Chad Pendley lit a candle in memory of James DeForrest Gonia Sr.



Chad Pendley - September 07, 2016 at 10:20 PM