



Roney Rowland

July 28, 1932 - June 27, 2016

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Roney Rowland July 28, 1932 – June 27, 2016 Roney Rowland was born July 28, 1932 in Durham, NC to the late Roney Rowland and Helen Rowland Valentine; a quick, aggressive cancer claimed his life June 27, 2016 in Saint Augustine Beach, FL. Although he and his wife of 58 years, Bette McKeithen Rowland also maintain a residence in his childhood home of South Hill, VA, he realized his wish to pass looking at palm trees, rather than pine trees. In addition to his wife, he is survived by three children, Skip (Nina) Rowland, Liz (Cliff) Ballard, and Carol (Davis) Deal, and five grandchildren, Lex Rowland, Beau Rowland, Belle Ballard, Maddie Ballard, and Lila Ballard. Roney was preceded by his brother Smith Rowland, but is also survived by Smith's daughters Debbie Clements and Karen Satterwhite, and first cousins Betsie Lytton and Sterling Walker. A Depression-era child, Roney spent his early youth shuffling between grandparent's homes in Durham and South Hill before finally settling in South Hill. His childhood friends were lifelong and their escapades legendary, offering family and friends hours of entertainment in their retelling. His ties to the area brought him to move back three times during his adult life. At the outbreak of WWII, his father did not wait for Roosevelt to enter the war, but instead enlisted in the Royal Canadian Rifles; he saw action in the Pacific Theater before being taken prisoner by the Japanese and ultimately dying in a POW camp. As this made young Roney a

teenage man-of-the-house, he took odd jobs and regular jobs, always working to contribute to the family and learning firsthand the lessons of family commitment, hard work, loyalty, honesty, and integrity. After graduating from South Hill High School, he attended Hampden-Sydney College. He initiated into Kappa Sigma Fraternity, establishing eternal bonds with his brothers. Although he ultimately transferred to the University of South Carolina, his heart remained in Farmville with the Tigers. Nearly every fall he enjoyed making trips to Death Valley for Homecoming or "The Game". Before graduating from USC, Roney enlisted in the US Army and became a Military Policeman, serving nearly two years. Being stationed in Germany gave the 22-year-old a taste for travel and European beer that he never lost. Upon completing his service, he returned to USC to finish his studies. He obtained his bachelor of science degree in psychology in June, 1956 and immediately moved to Jacksonville, FL to start working for The Prudential Life Insurance Company in their group health underwriting department. It was in Jacksonville that he met his one and only wife, Bette. After a brief courtship, the couple married in December, 1958 and moved to Richmond, VA where Roney went to work in the group insurance department of the Life Insurance Company of Virginia (the precursor to GenWorth Financial). Roney spent his entire professional career as a group health insurance executive. He worked at Life of Virginia for 22 years, climbing the corporate ladder to ultimately serve as Vice President of Group Sales. He held that position at a number of other companies, including Durham Life and Chubb Life, before retiring in 1994. The impact he had on those who worked for him was evident by the number of former associates who became lifelong friends when their jobs took them in different directions. In the early 60's, in addition to establishing his career with Life of Virginia, he built his family. His son Skip and daughter Liz were born while he and Bette lived in Richmond; their daughter Carol was born shortly after they moved to Chester, Va. There they lived until 1970 when he was offered an opportunity to build on the family farm in South Hill. Even though this meant commuting nearly two hours each way to the home office in

Richmond, he enjoyed the quiet time and used it to plan and reflect. In his home town, he instilled in his children the same sense of work ethic, commitment, loyalty, and pride in workmanship that he learned as a child. Far from “all work and no play”, Roney had many interests and outlets, including music, wood-working, ACC sports, and landscaping. He experienced a rare misstep when he attempted to make wine, making that a one-time endeavor. A consummate early-adopter, there is hardly a gadget or tool that he did not buy if he felt it would help make something easier. Roney enjoyed a lifelong love for building, and always had a project in the works. Whether a simple remodel or addition, or developing a property for sale, he thoroughly loved the magic of putting together pieces of wood to create something new. No matter where he lived, he managed to have a space for himself, long before someone coined the term “man cave”. Forever a fan of conservative talk-show radio, Roney enthusiastically embraced retirement, filling idle time with Fox News and the Internet. When he retired, he had a dial-up account and proclaimed that it was “fast enough, because he had nothing but time.” That thinking did not last long. Once he had a taste of broadband, he could not get enough of it, having access to Rush, O’Reilly, and numerous other conservative commentators 24/7. He kept the Internet alive, forwarding everyone on his contact list articles that he found profound and relevant. Conservative causes were so much a part of his life that his man-cave at Lake Gaston was known as “The Rush Room”. Roney also enjoyed exercising his 2nd Amendment right to bear arms. A proud member of the NRA, he owned many firearms and spent many hours at the range, practicing. He was never a huntsman, but he was ready to defend himself and his family. One source of pride for Roney was the home he built on Lake Gaston. He built it in the mid-80’s while living in Raleigh, knowing that he would ultimately return to his childhood roots in Southside Virginia. It was here that he and Bette lived the longest, enjoying nearly 20 years overlooking the lake and delighting its relative peace and quiet, undisturbed except for bass boats and the laughter

of visiting grandchildren. He was not satisfied to just sit around. Roney spent as many hours as possible patrolling Lake Gaston in his beloved pontoon boat, appropriately named "The Party Barge". He also briefly took up wind-surfing... Roney was much more than a handyman. He could sniff out a happy hour like a bloodhound. With his knack for knowing who had the coldest beer, the cheapest martinis, and the best oysters, his passing will be mourned by bartenders and waitresses far and wide. While Roney enjoyed all the world's natural beauty, it was the beach that called to him the most. As soon as he could afford it, he bought a modest vacation home on the Outer Banks, in Kill Devil Hills, NC. The "Duckwalk" went through a number of renovations, additions, and enhancements, including Roney's signature widow's walk, before he sold it to his children with the hopes that it would remain a family home. It was this love for the seashore that brought Roney and Bette to Saint Augustine. Barely an hour south from where they met, the area had everything they wanted: beach, bars and restaurants, and a lively mix of people. When they settled on the home at 14 Ocean Dr, they couldn't have asked for anything more. It was a simple, one-story rancher with nothing but a row of houses between them and the beach, leaving them a briefwalk to celebrate happy hour or sunset on the beach. The house was a diamond in the rough for Roney and he went right to work, converting the patio to a closed-in Florida room with a roof-top deck. It wasn't much longer before he added a second-floor to house "Roney's Roost", complete with a wet-bar, toilet, and wrap-around porch. And, of course, a widow's walk towering three stories above the driveway. Hailing back to his work-days, he turned one guest room into the Life of Virginia Room, a small museum of memorabilia and artifacts he collected during this 20+ years with the company. The only drawback to this otherwise perfect home was that it was 8-10 hours away from his children. More than anything else, though, Roney had a deep and abiding love for his family. For nearly 60 years, his days began and ended with his wife by his side and his children and grandchildren in his heart. In his retirement, he made every effort possible to create opportunities for his

growing family to be able to share time together, including taking the entire clan on a number of cruises. They kept this second home in South Hill because, being about an hour and a half from Richmond, Greensboro, and Apex, it was equidistant to all three of his children and their families. This home hosted many, many family gatherings. Most special was the annual Rowland Family Christmas get-together, a weekend-long family marathon that usually involved Bette's famous spaghetti or lasagna, a luncheon at Kahill's, a Saturday evening London broil (there is no doubt that any of his family will ever grill a London broil without thinking of Roney...), followed by an endless Christmas celebration filled with laughter and mirth that typically went past midnight. The closeness of his family is testimony to the strength of his love for them. This gentle man's ashes will rest in both the Smith Family Cemetery in LaCrosse, VA and the McKeithen Family Cemetery in Welborn, FL; appropriate ceremonies will be announced for each in the future. The family asks that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to a local hospice; the care and assistance they received from Community Hospice at the Bailey Center was beyond measure, especially in making it possible for Roney to find peace at home with his family.

Tribute Wall

NR

“ Roney will be greatly missed by his family and friends. He always provided our family with a way to get together whether in Florida, South Hill or on our family cruises. We were so lucky to have him in our lives. Rest in peace. Love, Nina

Nina Rowland - July 05, 2016 at 12:00 AM

JT

“ I have such wonderful memories of our families together in Chester and visiting South Hill. Roney was always so fun and loving. Like a second father to my sister and me and always best friends with mom and dad. He will always inspire me.

Janet Trevvett Trent - July 01, 2016 at 12:00 AM

BH

“ I grew up in South Hill too and his brother Smith lived one street over from me. I remember Roney very well and send my deepest sympathy to his family. May God be with each of you in the months ahead without him.

Barbara Hall Hudson - July 01, 2016 at 12:00 AM

MS

“ We really enjoyed reading the memorial page about Roney. Great husband, father, and man of character! and great story teller!! Our thoughts and prayers are with you all! Love, Mary Hardin and Sterling

Mary Hardin and Sterling - July 01, 2016 at 12:00 AM

KS

“ *Uncle Roney will always be remembered by us. A gentle, quiet man with a powerful statue. He became more of a father to me after the loss of my own. It gives me comfort to know he is once again with my daddy, Grandma Helen, Nana, Aunt Mary, Aunt Priss, Granddaddy Wilbur and many other family members. Rest is peace Uncle Roney. I will miss you very much. Give mom and dad a kiss for me. Your niece, Karen*

Karen, Steve, and Stephanie Satterwhite - June 30, 2016 at 12:00 AM