



Verl Joseph Solana Sr.

September 5, 1931 - December 21, 2023

Verl Joseph Solana Sr., age 92, passed away peacefully on Thursday, December 21st, 2023, with his family by his side.

Verl was born September 5th, 1931, to Philip and Edith Solana. He was a native and lifelong resident of St. Augustine, Florida. Verl was proud of his Spanish heritage. The Solana family is one of Florida's First European Families to leave Spain in 1565 and come to America to settle in St. Augustine, Florida and is one of the oldest-documented families in the history of the United States.

As a child, Verl attended local Catholic schools in St. Augustine, and began quarter horse racing at the age of 14. While racing, he met a man named Harry Westberry, from Palatka, Florida, who was co-owner of the Rainbow Ranch, now known as the Rodeheaver Boys Ranch. Mr. Westberry offered Verl a place to stay at the ranch, where he could learn ranching and race quarter horses. The Rainbow Ranch provided young boys a home to learn ranching and other educational and life skills, all in a wholesome, Christian environment. His brother Duke later joined him at the ranch, where they both worked on the ranch and raced horses together. They won many races all over Florida, Texas, Louisiana, and New Mexico. His Jockey name was "Tiki". He later earned and received his horse training license. Verl always said that he was very grateful for Mr. Westberry being a strong role model in his life,

and that he was instrumental in molding him into the man he became. After Mr. Westberry's passing, his wife, Mickey, stayed in contact with him. Verl and his family continued to attend the annual Rodeheaver Boys Ranch Open-Houses to support and celebrate the ranch. Verl always enjoyed escorting Mickey at these events. The Rodeheaver Boys Ranch continues to support and guide young men to this day.

In 1949, when he was old enough to enlist in the military, he joined the Marines, served his country, and was honorably discharged.

In 1953, one night at the drive-in theater, Verl's brother, Gerald, met two sisters, Margie and Dolly Wilson. Gerald went home that night to tell his brother, Verl, about two sisters he had met. The next day, Gerald and Verl showed up to visit Margie and Dolly at their family home. Verl and Dolly married within a few months and started a family. Margie and Gerald married shortly after them. Two Solana brothers married two Wilson sisters.

After Verl and Dolly got married, he started working at a local bakery, and then moved on to a better opportunity working for Ringhaver's shrimp boat building. He later began working for the Florida East Coast Railroad, where he worked for several years. After his time at the railroad, he was then hired at Fairchild Hiller Aircraft Facility, where Northrop Grumman is currently located. He worked as a painter and attended night school where he learned how to read blueprints to advance himself as an aircraft mechanic. He worked his way up to a supervisory position, which was hard to do without a formal education. Verl said he had to work twice as hard, with a lot of determination. After 20 years of employment, Fairchild Hiller closed, so he began a career at the Naval Air Station (NAS) in Jacksonville. He retired from NAS at the age of 62. His retirement gift to himself was a brand new 1988, red, Jeep Cherokee, that he loved and continued to drive until the age of 90.

In his earlier years, he enjoyed mullet fishing on the beach, oystering, clamming, gophering (legal then), turtle egging (legal then), and shrimping on the St. Johns River with friends and family. Verl said they “lived on the land” and “what they caught, they ate.” From oyster roasts to fish fries, gopher stews, varieties of pilau’s (pronounced perlo’s), boiled and fried shrimp, with datil pepper always being a main ingredient, and homemade, turtle egg pound cakes, he said “they never went hungry”. Verl and his siblings always stayed close and had weekly gatherings and cookouts with the food that they caught. Every year, the siblings, with their families, would have their annual Easter cookout at Favor Dykes State Park, on Pellicer Creek. Verl always said, “they didn’t have a whole lot of money, but never lacked for nothing.” He loved talking about the “good ole days,” “when bread was just a nickel, and you didn’t have to pay to drive on the beach.”

Verl was a devout catholic and an active member of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. He began as a volunteer usher for the 7:00am Sunday morning mass, and then later became head usher. He took great pride in this position and served the church over a span of 30 years, until he retired at the age of 80. As he got older, he attended weekly mass at San Sebastian Catholic Church, which was closer to home. He was a lifetime member of the American Legion Post #137 in St. Augustine. He enjoyed his time as a member and had many great memories there over the years with family and friends. Verl was also a member of the local Moose lodge, where he enjoyed fellowship among his local friends.

In his later years, Verl continued to enjoy doing things with his wife, children, and grandchildren – traveling around Florida, going out to eat, driving in his red, Jeep Cherokee, cutting the grass on his riding lawn mower, celebrating birthdays, holidays and other special family events, and spending time with his pride and joy, “Joy”, his chihuahua, who he loved taking on daily walks around

the neighborhood. Verl enjoyed the simple things in life, and it did not take much to make him happy – family, good food, an old country tune, sitting on the porch in the sun with Joy, or a ride in the car to get an ice cream cone. He found joy in every moment, big or small. When asked, he said that his biggest accomplishment in his life was that he took great pride in his work and work ethic. He worked hard with a positive attitude and never gave up. He put his family first, and always provided for them. He taught us not to give up when life got hard and lived his life by the motto “always keep moving.”

Verl was preceded in death by his parents Edith and Philip Solana, son Gary, brothers Gerald, Duke, Philip, Alton, his sisters Betty Solana O’Steen and Barbara Solana Braddock. He is survived by his loving wife of 68 years, Regina (Dolly) Solana, sons VJ and Wayne (Veronica), and daughters Debra (Ron) and Paulette (Larry), his grandchildren Ashley (Joe), Austin, Krystie, Summer, Cody and David, and great-grandchildren Braedyn, Kyle, Joshua, Kaylee, and Lakelyn, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Verl’s family would like to thank everyone for the love and support during this difficult time and would like to especially thank his cardiologist, Dr. Ali Tutar, who went above and beyond to take care of Verl over the years.

Visitation will be held 11:00 AM Saturday, December 30th, 2023, at St. Johns Family Funeral Home, 385 State Rd 207, St. Augustine, FL 32084. Funeral service will follow at 12:00 PM, with Reverend Tim Lindenfelser officiating. A graveside ceremony, with military honors, will be held immediately following the funeral service at San Lorenzo Catholic Cemetery, 1635 US-1, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

Flowers are gratefully accepted. Memorial donations can also be made to the Rodeheaver Boys Ranch, in Verl’s honor. To make donations online please visit www.rbr.org/donations or send donations by mail to Rodeheaver Boys

Ranch Attn: Online Donations, 380 Boys Ranch Road, Palatka, FL 32177.

Cemetery Details

San Lorenzo Cemetery

1635 US Highway 1 South
St. Augustine, FL

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 30. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

St. Johns Family Funeral Home
385 SR 207
St. Augustine, FL 32084
(904) 824-1625
<https://www.stjohnsfamilyfuneralhome.com>

Funeral Service

DEC 30. 12:00 PM (ET)

St. Johns Family Funeral Home
385 SR 207
St. Augustine, FL 32084
(904) 824-1625
<https://www.stjohnsfamilyfuneralhome.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet was purchased for the family of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*



December 29, 2023 at 09:20 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*



December 29, 2023 at 09:14 AM



“ *Love's Journey was purchased for the family of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*



December 28, 2023 at 10:02 PM



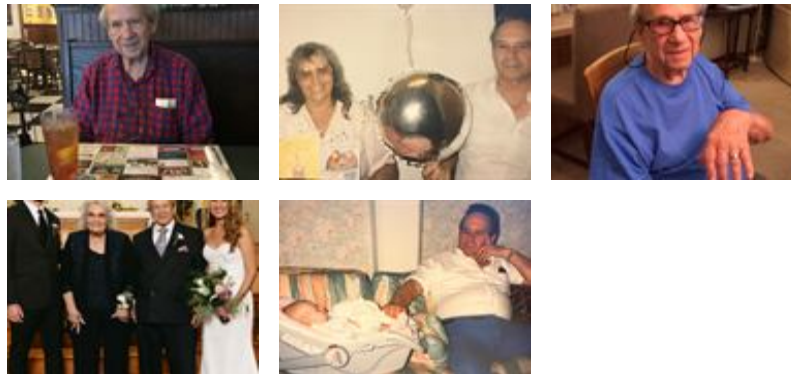
“ *2 files added to the album Life Tributes*



St. Johns Family Funeral Home - December 28, 2023 at 04:48 PM



“ 138 files added to the album *LifeTributes*



St. Johns Family Funeral Home - December 28, 2023 at 02:58 PM



“ *Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*



December 26, 2023 at 01:19 PM



“ *Your Accredo Reporting Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*

Your Accredo Reporting Family - December 26, 2023 at 01:19 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Verl Joseph Solana Sr..*



December 26, 2023 at 12:53 PM



“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



St. Johns Family Funeral Home - December 26, 2023 at 10:37 AM