



Ben Clay Donnell

JUL 17, 1936 - JUL 31, 2012



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nuptials. The media printed the headline: “Beauty Queen Weds Commodore,” recognizing the marriage of the former Miss Congeniality and other titles to the Vanderbilt football star, and this provided Anita Kay’s parents with the insight of what had taken place. The married couple returned home to find Anita Kay’s belongings on her front lawn, but as she recalls: “I wasn’t worried; I was with Ben and I knew everything would be fine.” And it was. The two went on to have a wonderful marriage and were blessed with two beautiful daughters, three grandchildren and a great-grandson. His Pride and Joy Ben’s children, and then later his grandchildren, were his true pride and joy. Ben did all that he could to enjoy the company of his children, to support their endeavors and to demonstrate the value of staying positive. He attended every sports game in which they participated, took them to Vanderbilt football games, treated them to the experience of fishing ventures, and always provided them with a smile. His daughter Dorri, after vain attempts to make the cheerleading squad, recalls how her dad continued to encourage her to keep trying, and instilled a never-give-up attitude in her. His nephew Clay recalls one of their many fishing ventures together, at the age of 9, when Ben cautioned him not to get too close to the water else he might fall in. Clay boastfully claimed that he was “The Sarg,” as in Sergeant, and such a tragedy was not to happen. Of course it did, and Ben continued to label him “Sarg” as a reminder of the event. Likewise, his second granddaughter recalls how she misheard Ben, who would call her beautiful when she ran up to him and sat on his lap, believing one time he had said she looked “pitiful.” This description was followed by tears, but also became one of Ben’s long standing jokes with his family. For the Love of the Game Ben’s love of football, and in particular of Vanderbilt, provided the background for much of his time and passion. He continued with football after Vanderbilt, playing for the Los Angeles Chargers of the A.F.L., and then later moved on to own and operate Donnell Construction Company for over 30 years, but his heart was always with “Vandy.” He and his family would attend every home game and travel to most of the away games. Tailgate parties were a source of fun for family and friends, and a chance to maintain the long-standing relationships he formed with his collegiate friends. Despite being considered “Tennessee turncoats,” Ben’s passion for Vanderbilt provided a source of



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entertainment and discussion. Many, many memories of both family and friends revolve around Vandy. Gentle Ben Points the Way Ben developed a huge physical presence early in life. His stature allowed him to fit in with the older boys, and of course later led to his athletic success, and the pride of his family. His size also offered Ben an opportunity to gain the respect of others. This combination of size and positive attitude gave Ben a natural draw to lead others, and this he did, always guiding others to focus on doing what was best for them. In later years, Ben suffered several strokes, which led to some physical limitations, and removed his ability to communicate effectively in speech. However, as one friend noted, "Even with his health issues Ben still carried that strength. He was the pillar in the family." And in this role, he brought comfort and instilled strength in the people around him. Everyone knew that Ben was a man who could be relied upon. Because of his communication difficulties, Ben relied on pointing as a means of communication and this lent itself to many humorous incidents. One such incident occurred when Ben tried to overcorrect his vehicle to avoid a police car that cut in front of him. As a result, he and his son-in-law Terry ended up in the car on the sidewalk. When the police approached, Ben tried to "point out" an explanation in order to keep his angry passenger from yelling at the police. This, however, backfired as the officer thought he was being toyed with. Ben finally produced a business card from his wallet which indicated that he couldn't speak as a result of a stroke, but to no avail, they were ticketed. Yet, like all recollections of Ben's life, this story too is shared with love, and highlights the fun and joy that Ben brought to those around him. A Positive Legacy Ben Donnell passed away on July 31, 2012. He will be dearly missed by his loving wife, Anita Kay, his daughters, Kristin Kay (Johnny) Locke, Dorri Grace (Terry) Stanfill, and his brother Billy Donnell. His legacy of love, strength and joy lives on with grandchildren, Kristy, Kassie, Lance, and great grandson Trace. His compassion for sport and positive attitude remain with all who have had the pleasure of knowing him. He found great pride in his family. Together, Anita Kay and Ben built a beautiful family and made joyous memories with many friends.



Tribute Wall

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Anonymous posted:

Ben is a remarkable man. Enjoyed the times we spent together and honored to be called "junior" by him. His bride is a awesome, loyal, strong lady that loved Ben through and through. My heart aches for his passing and his incredible family during this diff Wayne Elsey

August 3 at 5:47 AM



Anonymous posted:

Anita Kay and family, Holly and I are holding you in our thoughts and prayers. We love your family although we don't see you as often as we once did. Meg Hudson and Holly Jernigan

August 2 at 10:47 PM



Anonymous posted:

ANITA KAY....WE LOVE YOU SO VERY MUCH...AND ARE SORRY WE HAVENT' KEPT IN TOUCH MORE OVER THE YEARS. BUT, YOU AND BEN HAVE BEEN TALKED ABOUT AFFECTIONATELY OFTEN.WE ARE PLANNING ON COMING TO THE 6PM VIEWING TONITE...BUT OBVIOUSLY WISH WE WERE MEETING FOR RHONDA MCDANIEL

August 2 at 2:07 PM



Anonymous posted:

Ms. Anita Kay - Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family at this difficult time. May Ben rest in peace. Our love to you..Jim & Stephanie Jim & Stephanie Cunningham

August 2 at 1:22 PM



Memories only last if you share them

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



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