

In Memory of Ralph Lee Sparks

May 25, 1941 - October 24, 2024



Ralph Lee Sparks, born on May 25, 1941, in Waco, TX, to Wallace Herschel Sparks and Francis Lillian, passed away on October 24, 2024. A passionate musician and devoted family man, Ralph has now found peace with his Lord and Savior, free from pain and suffering.

Ralph was diagnosed with myelofibrosis in 2021 and valiantly fought the good fight until his passing.

His early years were marked by his passion for music, fostered through many years of piano lessons from his mother, and his love of baseball, fueled by attending or watching games with his father.

Ralph graduated from Waco High School in 1959, where he stood out as a cheerleader and a senior class favorite nominee. He went on to attend Baylor School of Music and later pursued studies in Accounting.

After being drafted he honorably served in the United States Army from January 1964 to January 1966 in Vietnam as a Communication Specialist, earning the Vietnam Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Expert Riflery, and a Letter of Appreciation.

His professional career included roles at Central Texas Freight Lines, Double LL Apparel, Big J Apparel, Econoline, and T&G Chemicals. However, music and entertainment remained his true sources of fulfillment. Ralph began performing with The Originals at age 16, later becoming Charlie Pack and The Originals, and continued performing with the group for over 40 years. During college, he showcased his talent at Six Flags Over Texas at Campus Review, the Southern Palace and the Crazy Horse Saloon. Over the years, Ralph played with the Jackie Fletcher Band, the Ralph Sparks Band, and many other groups. He was a prolific composer and writer, crafting lyrics for a variety of Nashville-based artists.

Since 2010, Ralph was a partner of The Stars Over Texas Jamboree with Terry Roller, Johnnie Bradshaw, and Jim Guest, featuring monthly concert themes including gospel, golden oldies, country, and more. He was a member of the Church House Singers and the Baylor Singing Seniors. In 2017, he organized the Classic Voice, a small group of the Baylor Singing Seniors to perform gospel and holiday music at hospitals and retirement centers.

His love of music and his journey of faith intertwined beautifully over the years. One of his proudest accomplishments includes his seven self-published albums of original gospel music through Sparkle Music.

After retiring, Ralph focused full time on his ministry, serving as the minister of music at various churches, including First Baptist Church Robinson, First Baptist Church Hewitt, First Baptist Whitney and most recently at Crossroads Baptist Church of Lorena.

Ralph was also a gifted bowler, inducted into the Greater Waco United States Bowling Congress Association Hall of Fame in 2011. In 2005, he and his teammates, Rick Butler, David Light, James Sowders, and Charlie Vestal, became the Texas State Bowling Association Tournament Champions. He was a devoted Baylor sports fan, an avid golfer, and a dedicated follower of the Texas Rangers. Additionally, Ralph was a skilled ventriloquist and spoke Pig Latin fluently.

Ralph married Brenda Lancaster McCutchen in 1972, with whom he raised five children, adopting Brenda's two daughters and having three sons together.

In 1980 Ralph married his high school sweetheart Kay M. Phillips Frierson. Combined, Ralph and Kay had seven children. They joined the First Woodway Baptist Church in 1980, finding a faith home and decades of friendship and support.

Ralph is survived by his wife, Kay, of 44 years, and seven children including Lauri Ann Luedeker (and spouse William "Buddy") of Waco, Teri Lynn McGuill (and spouse David) of Fort Worth, Kevin Christopher Sparks (and spouse Melodi) of Lorena, Jamie Lee Sparks (and spouse Missy) of Robinson, Timothy Howard Sparks, Stephen Hall Frierson (and spouse Tara) of Ruidoso, NM, and Shelly Rustanne Frierson of Waco. Together they have fourteen grandchildren: Jeremy Luedeker, Aaron Luedeker, Brendan Luedeker, Charles McGuill, Madison Sparks, Zoe Sparks, Justin Hall, Casey Hall, Tyler Sparks, Jeremy Archibeque, Luke Archibeque, Jordan Frierson Reynolds, Kayle Frierson, and Hayden Frierson; and eighteen great-grandchildren, and one on the way.

Ralph is preceded in death by his parents Wallace and Lillian Sparks, brother Don Sparks and grandson Brendan Luedeker.

Ralph's sense of humor and quick, witty sarcasm made him effortlessly lovable. As an amazing vocalist and gifted pianist, he honed his craft for over 75 years. Ralph was renowned for adding his personal flair and pizzazz to his music through his magic fingers on the 88 black and white keys. As a lifelong Waco resident, he seldom went anywhere without running into an old friend, classmate, music colleague, or making a new friend.

The family would like to extend a special thank you to the many friends and musicians who supported and encouraged Ralph's passion for music and faith. And a big thank you to Ralph and Kay's friends and family who provided so much love and support through meals, cards, visits and calls throughout their time of need.

Visitation will be held on Thursday, November 14th, from 3-7 p.m. at Grace Gardens Funeral Home. Services will take place on Friday, November 15th, at 1 p.m. at First Woodway Baptist Church, followed by interment at 3:30 p.m. at Waco Memorial Park. Pallbearers and honorary pallbearers will include his sons, grandsons, and friends.

Memorial contributions can be mailed to the music ministry of the Baylor Singing Seniors at 3627 Fieldstone Circle, Waco TX 76708 or to the charity of your choice in Ralph's memory. Ralph Lee Sparks will be dearly missed by all who know him. His life was a testament to his devotion to music, his unwavering commitment to his Christian faith, and his love for his family and friends.