

THE OBITUARY OF

Joe Willie Rucker



Joe Willie Rucker affectionately known as “Papa Joe” passed away peacefully on March 12, 2020, with his family and close friends surrounding him. He was born on January 17, 1946, to the late Mr. Cunnisville “Bill” and Ruby Anita Rucker in Tupelo, Mississippi. Joe’s favorite affirmation was “What time is it? It’s Jesus Time.” His favorite scripture was “As For Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15)

At the ripe age of 16 years, old Joe relocated to Miami, Florida where he spent the majority of his adult life. His first job in Miami was a security guard for a boatyard. That job was the beginning of a very successful life as an entrepreneur. He soon became a concert promoter, sharing his love for Christ through the gospel with famous artists such as The Mighty Clouds of Joy, Edwin Hawkins Singers, and Shirley Caesar, in radio and live concerts. As a member of the NAACP, Papa Joe was a civil rights activist and participated in the Million Man March on Washington, working with other activists like Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and Roy Wilkins. He protested discrimination against Haitian refugees arriving in Miami and to Stop the Burning of Black Churches around the nation.

Joe was always very innovative and skilled tradesman. He began a successful career as a commercial building general contractor. As President of the Allied Minority Contractors Association, he was instrumental in securing equitable distributions of government contracts, which led many contractors to become very successful.

After retiring from construction, Joe began expanding his hobby of being a grill master and perfecting his barbeque sauce. This led to his opening of several restaurants in four states known as Papa Joe's BBQ Restaurants. His world-famous award-winning barbeque gained popularity while he ministered to those displaced during Hurricane Katrina. Habitat for Humanity to rebuild homes for the homeless. One of Joe's proudest moments was attending 2008, the inauguration of our 1st African American, President Barack Obama's inauguration.

Joe's humanitarian efforts His volunteerism have been showcased on TV, Radio, Newspapers, and Joe is featured in the book "31 Miles of Destruction" about the aftermath of the April 28, 2014 Tornado that ripped through northern Mississippi.

Joe is adored by his children; Joe Rucker, Jr. (Adrienne), Emanuel Rucker, Shellonda Rucker, Joann Rucker (Michael, Sr), Kristie Rucker-Williams (Rayon), Lamech Rucker (Janie), Steffen Rucker (Careen), and Yolanda Marie Rucker (preceded him in heaven). His wife Gwen's son, Howard Hewlett, called him Papa. He is survived by 17 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

In 2016, Joe married Gwendolyn Baptist-Rucker, CPA, Esq. and they began their exciting journey together in Southaven, Mississippi.

In addition to his wife, Joe leaves here sisters; Rev. Dr. Joan Williams of Jackson, MS, Earnestine Rucker of Grand Rapids, MI, Eddie Marie Rucker of Grand Rapids, MI, and Marquator Rucker Morris of Thomasville GA, and brothers Tommy G. Rucker (Mary) of Beloit, Wisconsin, James Rucker (Sondra) of Knoxville, TN, and Charles Rucker (Beverly) of Grand Rapids, MI. His brother L. C. Rucker (Margaret) preceded him in death. He leaves sisters-in-law; Gail Baptist-Lyons (James), Dr. Bettye Baptist-Wilson (Jesse), Mary Baptist Averyhart, Doris Leake (John) and Johnnie Donald, and brothers-in-law; Willie Fred Baptist (Gladys) and Charles Baptist (Gwendolyn). He also leaves an aunt, Ola White, and many nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

A memorial service to celebrate Papa Joe's life will be held at a later date. Private interment will take place at the Vista Memorial Gardens in Miami Lakes. Arrangements are under the direction of Grace Funeral Home.

Joe is resting in heaven "wonderful well"!