



Willie E. "Gene" Dillard Jr.

June 18, 1946 - February 22, 2023

Willie E. "Gene" Dillard, Jr. passed away at home on February 22, 2023. Gene was born on June 18, 1946, in Spartanburg. He was the son of the late Elaine Wilson Dillard and Willie E. "Gene" Dillard, Sr. Gene grew up in Wellford, SC, with his sister, Peggy and brother, Wilson.

Gene graduated from James F. Byrnes High School in Duncan, where he was a North/ South All-Star football selection as a senior and Appalachian State University, where he played football for Coaches Jim Duncan and Carl Messere. Gene fondly remembered his time at ASU and the many friends he made there.

Gene was an educator. He was a teacher and an assistant football coach at his alma mater, Byrnes High School, alongside his longtime friend, high school and college teammate, Bo Corne. Gene also coached track at Byrnes. Even as a coach, he loved to teach. Blocking schemes and technique, among other skills, and he was an early believer in tracking and grading offensive and defensive performance. After he stepped away from coaching, he remained a committed teacher at Byrnes until his retirement. Gene took pride in working closely with students who were sometimes overlooked and unappreciated and took great care in their education and especially their high school experience. After his retirement from teaching, Gene began a second career as a part-time musician, leading the Bluegrass Jam at The Handlebar in Greenville, always with his familiar upright bass. He made many lifelong friends in the Greenville music scene and cherished making music with them or just

spending time with them. He also enjoyed playing various private gigs, especially those who tolerated him singing lead on Billy Joe Shaver's "Georgia on Fast Train," or Guy Clark and Rodney Crowell's "Stuff That Works," both personal favorites. Gene loved music, but especially bluegrass, Turner Classic Movies, Abbott and Costello, The Marx Brothers and Monty Python, a well written song and irony. To know him, was to be witness to his wit and the driest sense of humor in the room.

He is survived by his son, John Willie Dillard and his partner, Marci Andino; brother, Wilson and his wife, Jane; nieces, Seely Dillard Floyd and her husband, Trevor; Floreed Turner and Kelly Martin Wilson and her husband, Scott; and beloved great nieces and nephews.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his sister, Peggy Dillard Turner, and her husband, Gene.

The family will receive friends at The Wood Mortuary, Greer, SC on March 2, 2023, from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m.

A celebration of life will follow at a time to be determined.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to: Middle Tyger Community Center, 84 Groce Road, Lyman, SC 29365; or the charity of one's choice.

Online condolences may be made at www.thewoodmortuary.com.

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 2. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

The Wood Mortuary, Inc.
300 West Poinsett Street
Greer, SC 29650
(864) 877-3351
woodmortuary@bellsouth.net

Tribute Wall

JB

“ I met Gene years ago at The Handlebar, when I was a younger up and coming budding singer of song, jammer, trying to find way in this world of bluegrass and acoustic music. He was always super nice and encouraging to me and he opened my eyes and ears to selections of his repertoire, of music I had never heard of. If it wasn't for him, I might would have never known the deep catalog cuts of folks like John Prine, and Guy Clark. I don't know there would have been a bluegrass jam at The Handlebar, I think Geno was the driving force for sure. I have included a pic that I think was taken just maybe like 5 years ago at Gottrocks during a celebration for his birthday. Rest in peace my friend.



jeff barnett - June 10, 2023 at 08:11 AM

FE

“ I met Gene at The Handlebar jam sessions years ago when that was still a thing, and always enjoyed picking music with him. The dry sense of humor mentioned in his obituary had to be experienced first hand. He was a unique, kind human being, a kindred musical soul and I will never forget his grace and humility, and his love for music. Thanks for the all the joyous noise, Gene. Godspeed.

Frank Eastes - March 08, 2023 at 05:30 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Willie E. "Gene" Dillard Jr..*



March 05, 2023 at 09:33 AM



“ *A sympathy card was purchased for the family of Willie E. "Gene" Dillard Jr..*



March 03, 2023 at 04:50 PM



“ *Gene and I went to Appalachian State together in the 1960s. He sure was a "one of a kind" good man. It was always interesting when Gene was around because you never knew what was coming next. He was an excellent creative student. Appalachian had real good football teams during our years there. He was fearless on the football field and made our teams better. My prayers extend to Gene's family. May he rest in peace.*

Gene Gilleland - March 02, 2023 at 03:08 PM

GM

“ *Glenn Masters lit a candle in memory of Willie Dillard*



Glenn Masters - February 25, 2023 at 04:35 PM

WA

“ *I was a football teammate of Gene at Appalachian. My regrets and sorrow goes out to Wilson and all of Gene's family. Hard to think that Gene has passed. Seems like only yesterday that Gene and I were running down on a kickoff to take down an LR return man. We were usually side by side on the left side of coverage. We had a lot of good times as teammates and as neighbors there in Justice hall. I have not really kept up with Gene over the years, but it is no surprise the interest Gene took in coaching and leading young folks. That's what we should all be about. My prayers and thoughts are with all of Gene's family.*

Wiley Ashworth

Wiley Ashworth - February 24, 2023 at 05:41 PM

KM

“ *The Dillard family-*

I am so sorry to hear of Gene's passing. I was a friend and teammate of Gene's his last two years and my first two years at ASU. Being a Yankee from NJ in the South for the first time, Gene took me under his wing and showed me the ropes both on the football field but also all-around campus. We were suite mates in old Newland Hall and the stories I could share are many and hysterical although most not best to share in the presence of a lady. Gene was ahead of his time and had the unique ability to always see the good in people. Once he was your friend, he never wavered always having your back. He made all our lives better and I am a better person for my friendship with him. Rest in peace and God bless you.

Ken McCoppen

ASU 70'

Ken McCoppen - February 24, 2023 at 04:21 PM

SC

“ *Gene was a special friend for many years. From playing music together, or getting together with friends, we enjoyed each other. Gene was one of the smartest, wittiest people I ever knew. I'll miss you Geno.*

Steve Campbell - February 24, 2023 at 02:43 PM