



# Mr. Michael L. Harris

JUL 25, 1947 - JUL 9, 2025



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## **Mr. Michael L. Harris**

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**M**ichael Lee Harris was born on July 25, 1947, in Montgomery, Alabama and passed away on July 9, 2025 just ahead of his 78th birthday. He was the second of five boys born to Mr. & Mrs. James Douglas Harris, Sr. (Edna Flournoy). Mike was exceptionally charismatic, made friends easily, was frequently “Class Favorite” and always the life of the party. Of his early childhood interests, the love of playing the piano especially stands out. He developed an incredible talent that would inform the rest of his life. His children fondly remember him playing Chopin and Tchaikovsky late into the night or early in the morning throughout their childhood.

When Mike was given a Tennessee Walking Horse named Fox at the age of thirteen, it set in motion a love of animals and the outdoors that would shape the trajectory of his family. His relationship with Fox spanned over 27 years and helped form the values and traditions that would become a part of Mike’s life and legacy. From trail rides in the woods to accompanying him to college, Fox had a lifelong impact on his friend, Mike, and the way his children and grandchildren would see the world.

Mike attended Floyd Elementary, Montgomery Academy, Bellingrath, and Sidney Lanier High School. In high school he met Bonnie Ashley, who would become the love of his life, his future wife and the mother of their two children, Dow and Ashley. Bonnie fell head over heels for Mike after witnessing him dance at a high school party, commanding the attention of the entire crowd. Love of dancing would come to define their relationship over time. Bonnie also had a horse and during this early period of romance, they would stable their horses together and ride frequently, often by moonlight. They first began dating in high school and Bonnie wore the bloodstone heart necklace that Mike gave her on her 16th birthday, for the rest of her life.

Upon graduating from Lanier, in the “Great Class of ‘65,” Mike attended the University of Alabama and graduated in 1969 with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. He was a member of the Sigma Chi Fraternity. After college, he moved to New York City to pursue a career in marketing,



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and more unexpectedly, acting. He attended the renowned Stella Adler Studio of Acting and picked up a variety of roles as a model, advertising anything from bourbon to Pennzoil. On one occasion, Stella herself was so impressed by Mike's presence that she seized him with both hands and said, "You have the face of a young king!"

It was in acting school that Mike learned methods of charismatic salesmanship and the power of personality as a professional tool, through performance in the workplace. "All the world's a stage," as his favorite playwright, William Shakespeare once wrote. Mike was a great storyteller and always had a variety of interesting anecdotes or jokes on hand at any time. He found joy in talking with anyone and everyone, always demonstrating a unique sense of humor, from a daily interaction with a store clerk to sharing stories with the Harris cousins at large family gatherings. He was a true performance artist.

During his adventuresome time in New York, Mike also managed to star in a B horror movie called "Shriek of the Mutilated," released in 1972, in which he played the last survivor in this cult classic, reissued by Quentin Tarantino in a remastered horror series in the early 00's. Mike scored this role inadvertently by simply agreeing to fill in for a friend who could not make the audition, and subsequently he ended up with the lead. But in the end, the Deep South would call Mike back home for a role he could not resist.

While in New York, Mike had reconnected with Bonnie when they saw each other as she passed through on her way to fly overseas to study at the University of Madrid, in Spain for a year, beginning in 1970. This rekindling moment when Mike helped Bonnie with her luggage and boarding a plane, would end up becoming a "star crossing," leading to their joint destiny. When she returned from Spain, stopping again in New York, they began dating more seriously and were married on July 31st, 1971, in Montgomery, Alabama.

After living their first years of marriage in New York, Mike and Bonnie would return to Montgomery. Mike became a licensed real estate broker and attained his law degree at Jones Law School, graduating in 1973. He would also serve in the United States Air Force Reserve Corps, as the rank of 2nd Lieutenant while assigned to a base in Denver, Colorado, immediately prior to his first child, Dow's, birth. Ashley would arrive two years later as Mike & Bonnie returned and fully settled in Montgomery.



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In the early 80's Mike fostered the growth of his family by excelling at companies like Ballard Realty and Bassmasters, Inc. While at Bassmasters, Mike furthered his skills and interests in magazine publishing and advertising. In the mid 80's, he was asked to join the burgeoning Buckmasters magazine team and would later become the President, publishing their first series of magazines, which became a national hit, beginning a legacy of leadership in whitetail deer hunting circles across the country. Mike would also publish his own magazine, Softball Players, in the early 90's, while restoring a historic building in Old Town Montgomery for office space, that would eventually become the center for the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra administration today.

Mike was a man of strong spiritual faith that carried him through the end of his life. Along with the Harris family, he was a member of First Baptist Church as a child. Early into his married life he would join Trinity Presbyterian where Bonnie was raised, and in their final journey he and Bonnie joined St. John's Episcopal Church in Montgomery. Wherever he traveled in life, he would attend a service as he enjoyed doing so to learn about that place, its people and its community. Mike was enchanted by the mystique of old Southern architecture, the genteel romance of a bygone era, where big porches, family gatherings and Sunday dinners were the order of the day. Thus, he led his family through living in or visiting a variety of old homes connected to extended family or under his own proprietorship. Of particular note, was an old plantation home in Tallassee, Alabama known as "Herren Hill," which was then owned by his aunt and uncle, Fannie & Whit Herren. In an odd synchronicity and twist of fate, Bonnie's ancestor, a descendant of Isaac Ross, had actually built the house, prior to the Civil War. Mike held a special interest in family genealogy and endeavored to prioritize an appreciation for the generational connections that a family holds and passes on.

In his later years, Mike worked avidly at stewarding an ancestral family property in Coosa County, Alabama, where he and Bonnie retired in the early 00's, cultivating the space for their horses, dogs, birds and gardens. Love of nature, the rural arts, the culture of the best of the Old South and sportsmanship would continue to inform Mike's life in the period after Bonnie's passing in 2009.

When his grandchildren were born, Charleston became Mike's second home. He relished visiting his daughter, Ashley and her husband, Bill, but it was his three grandchildren, William, Bonnie and Peter, that gave him a new purpose after losing his beloved wife. Affectionately known to them as "Bike," he was a permanent fixture in their daily lives and an integral part of their early milestones. He took great care to pass along not only the values and traditions of his own



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upbringing, but all that mattered to their late grandmother, too. From teaching them dominoes, piano, and cards to instilling a deep understanding of faith, appreciation for manners, and cherishing the genteel aspects of life he treasured so dearly, Mike taught William, Peter and Bonnie well. His stories widened their young eyes and captured their imagination, but it is the high standard he set for himself and for them that will shape their lives indelibly. On the other coast he would live vicariously through his son, Dow, in Santa Barbara, California, where he worked for a horse ranch in the tradition that was first instilled in him as a boy. Mike always promoted the Arts and encouraged his children to make their marks creatively. As a father, he made sure his children knew there were no limits to the magic they could bring to their lives and to those of others. Mike had a daring, bold personality and is fondly remembered for his limitless gusto, his positive outlook no matter the circumstances, his love of Alabama football, and most of all his wildly romantic soul that will live on forever. Mike Harris was a man of purpose.

Mike is predeceased by his wife, Mary Dowdell Ashley Harris “Bonnie,” and his parents Mr. & Mrs. James Douglas Harris, Sr. He is survived by his son, Michael Shapard Dowdell Harris, daughter, Ashley Whitfield Harris Warnock, and her husband William Richard Warnock, Jr., his grandchildren: William Shapard Ashley, Margaret Dowdell “Bonnie,” and Peter Whitfield Harris Warnock; his four brothers: James Douglas Harris, Jr. (Jean), John Robert Harris (Linda), David Patrick Harris, and William Bishop Harris (Kelly); and a wonderful abundance of nieces, nephews, and cousins that he adored.

A private family celebration of life will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to Montgomery Symphony Orchestra, 507 Columbus St, Montgomery, AL 36104 or to the charity of the donor’s choosing.

Radney Funeral Home is honored to serve the family of Michael Lee Harris.



## **Memories only last if you share them**

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



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