



## Robert John Shackelford

May 17, 1959 - July 22, 2020

Robert John Shackelford, affectionately known as “Coach Shack” to his friends and students, passed away on Wednesday, July 22, 2020 at Doctor’s Hospital of Sarasota after a month-long battle with COVID-19. He was 61 years old.

The proud son of a United States Army colonel, he was born on May 17, 1959 in Fort Benning, Georgia. He later went on to graduate from St. Norbert’s College in Green Bay, Wisconsin with a Bachelor’s degree in commercial advertising. While in Wisconsin, he was a free agent for the Green Bay Packers and continued to cheer them on throughout his life as their biggest and undoubtedly, most enthusiastic, fan.

In 1988, he moved to Barbourville, Kentucky, where he received his Master’s Degree in Education and became the head coach of their football team, which had been dormant for 40 years. The youngest head coach in the nation at that time, it only took him two years to produce a winning record. His love of the game eventually led him to Florida where he coached in various capacities for several successful football programs. He participated in numerous Arena Bowl Championships and in the years between 2000 and 2006, he was a driving force in producing one of the best high school defenses in the state at Bradenton Southeast High School.

Although Robert was passionate about all things football, his true passion lied in sharing his extensive knowledge of American History with his students at Sarasota High School, where he taught for the last 27 years. A true patriot, he took immense pride in sharing his profound love of country with the next generation and was looking forward to his retirement next year. In addition to his patriotism, he was known for his quick wit, infectious smile, and kind and compassionate spirit. A man of unquestionable integrity and superior intellect, he will be missed by all who were blessed to know him.

Robert leaves behind one daughter, Kari Shackelford of Pineville, Kentucky; his grandson and namesake, Christian Robert Shackelford, also of Pineville, Kentucky; his parents, William and Clareen Shackelford of Brandon, Florida; brother, Steven Shackelford of

Brandon, Florida; two sisters, Jolyce Lumpkin of Bryant, Arkansas and Elizabeth Baker of Columbus, Georgia; two nieces, Lindley Stone of Edmond, Oklahoma and Lorin Baker of Atlanta, Georgia; girlfriend of 10 years, Catherine Georger of Clermont Florida; and a host of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Due to the current pandemic, funeral arrangements are private; although, a Celebration of Life will be held at a later date. To express your sympathy and in lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Robert's honor to his favorite charity, The Wounded Warrior Project.

# Comments

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“ I went to St. Norbert College and remember Robert Shackelford. He’s not a guy that you could forget. He was in my painting class...yes oil painting. He was good at it too. They say you’ll never forget a face and in this case the saying is true. I saw the memorial on PBS for those we lost to COVID. My heart sank, I knew right away that was SHACK as we called him. I looked in our Alumni Directory and his address was in Florida. I read the postings on Facebook but still wasn’t completely sure. Then I saw the link to Toale Brothers and the mention of St. Norbert. May you rest in peace.

**Cynthia Giese** - August 21, 2020 at 08:12 PM

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“ Brian Vaughn lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Brian Vaughn** - August 11, 2020 at 04:01 PM

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“ Dana Wells lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Dana Wells** - August 08, 2020 at 09:04 AM

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“ Star Conti lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Star Conti** - July 30, 2020 at 09:11 AM



“ I worked with Robert for 22 years. We were colleagues and good friends. His classroom is right down the hall from my office and he stopped in everyday to just say hello or during his planning or lunch we spent time together sharing anything and everything. I will miss those times together.

**Star Conti** - July 30, 2020 at 09:27 AM



“ Dear Shackelfords....

It's hard for me to put into words how deeply sorry I am for your loss. I will forever be grateful to Robert for loving my mother, Cathy. Every time we allow ourselves to love someone we learn so much about ourselves...and if we allow it to, it opens our heart's capacity to love more. I know Robert helped my mom expand her ability to love and to forgive. I will forever be thanking him for that. But, most of all I want to thank him for being the bridge that brought your family into my mom's life. I know she feels so appreciated and loved by all of you. As a daughter who lives so far away, it means the world to me to know she has people/a family like yours. I'm so grateful you all have her at this time too. Love each other. Be gentle with each other. Thank you for giving us all the gift of your son, brother, and father.

All my love,  
Jillian (Cathy's daughter)

**Jillian Szafranski** - July 29, 2020 at 10:46 PM



“ Thank you Jillian. I want you to know that Robert did deeply love your mom. We all love and adore Cathy and my sister and I are so grateful that Cathy was able to be with my parents and Steve until we could get to Florida. She is so loved and we consider her our sister!

**jo lumpkin** - July 30, 2020 at 10:59 AM



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**Jillian** - July 30, 2020 at 01:19 PM



“ I had the immense pleasure of working with Coach Shack at Southeast High School coaching football. His knowledge, professionalism and energy for the game has never been matched. I can still hear his voice at our Sunday coaches meeting. He would walk in and say "We got them". He spent the weekend studying film and drawing up plays to find a weakness that could be exploited. Without fail, he was always right. One of the greatest was his play called "Chicanery". For those that were involved with the team at that time you should be able to see Coach Shack's smile as he was explaining it to the defense.

One of my fondest memories happened while we were in the playoffs in early November. Shack needed me to help him with something in his car. So we went out and he opened his trunk to reveal an authentic looking "Batman" costume. Being that Halloween had just passed a few weeks earlier there was a perfectly good reason for it being in his trunk. But with me not realizing the connection, I asked him why he had a "Batman" costume in his trunk. Without missing a beat he replied, "Well B, you never know when someone might need a superhero!". He followed that up with his unique laugh.

I just want to say that Coach Shack did not need a costume. He has always been a real life superhero to his family, friends, students, colleagues and athletes. We will truly miss you!



**Coach Brian McKnight** - July 29, 2020 at 04:30 PM

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“ Dana Lumpkin lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Dana Lumpkin** - July 29, 2020 at 03:33 PM

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“ As someone who has always been passionate about words, studying them, and writing them whenever I could get the chance, I never imagined being at a loss of words. When it came to Mr. Shack's passing, I was. For days even, I had wanted to express how I felt. I couldn't. The reason was simple. I knew that a life as positive and as impactful as his was impossible to sum up in a singular space. And I did not feel as if my words would be close to adequate.

I graduated from Sarasota High School in 2016. I was a student of his as a sophomore and a junior. I performed well in school, as a means to an end. I was determined to be admitted into an outstanding college and I felt that SAT scores and competitive grades were the means forward. Mr. Shack, though, he had forced me to shift my paradigm entirely. Reminding my classmates as he always did that 'knowledge is power' (amongst other signature phrases of his), genuinely loving his profession and the subject he taught, being there for his students to ensure each and every one of them learned lessons while inside the classroom and lessons for life after high school (he even started an investment club), and by making learning fun in more ways than there is space to describe, he caused me (and students sitting around me) to actually want to come to class.

He also reminded me that I was more than just one more student, but one worth caring about. He dedicated extra time when I needed help understanding key concepts, engaged in very meaningful conversations with me as if my opinion mattered (even though I was only in high school), and he took the time to write an amazing recommendation letter when it came time for me to apply to colleges.

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Below is an email from Mr. Shack to my Mom when I was in my senior year of high school. Until yesterday, I had forgotten about it. I think it really illuminates how kind and considerate of a person he was.

Ms. Wright,

I just wanted to take a moment and tell you how proud I am of your daughter. Please tell her congratulations on her team's cross country runner up State Championship. As a former coach and athlete, this is a tremendous achievement. I understand from some of the other cross country girls that Allison ran her personal best at the meet. Outstanding! Your daughter is a truly remarkable young lady. I am honored to have been her teacher. You have much to be proud of in your daughter's academic and athletic achievements.

Mr. Shackelford  
Honors American History  
Sarasota High School



“ Theresa Le lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Theresa Le** - July 29, 2020 at 11:17 AM

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“ It was such fun on Friday nights at Southeast High School to watch him coach and visit with Mr Shackleford and Steven. Coach Shack was a force on the field and with his family.



**Brenda O'Connor** - July 28, 2020 at 06:46 AM

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“ Terri St John lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



**Terri St John** - July 28, 2020 at 06:42 AM



“ Shack is missed and will forever be remembered as a man of compassion and integrity. I am thankful to have been his colleague and friend.

Terri StJohn

**Terri StJohn** - July 28, 2020 at 06:45 AM

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“ Vicki lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



Vicki - July 28, 2020 at 02:55 AM

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“ Linda Campbell lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



Linda Campbell - July 27, 2020 at 09:48 PM

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“ It was a wonderful bit of luck that found me in Shack's last class of the day. I always loved history and before long I was finishing the days assignment as quickly as possible just to be able to discuss the lesions more in depth with Shack. Before long we were talking well after the school day, while he was gathering his things and would continue our conversations out to the parking lot. I like to think of him as a knowledgeable friend more than just a teacher. All of that of that being said, I admire him even more for the wonderful human he was to everyone who crossed his path. A truly admirable man and life, I will miss him dearly.

Derek Dillon - July 27, 2020 at 09:26 PM

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“ 9 files added to the album Goals Brothers Funeral Home



Liz Baker - July 27, 2020 at 06:12 PM

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“ Liz Baker lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



Liz Baker - July 27, 2020 at 06:00 PM

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“ What can I say about my big brother that hasn't already been said. So, I will share a few memories that I have growing up with Rob. We lived in a house off Steam Mill Rd in Columbus Georgia. Apartments were being built behind our house and when the rain came, the mud came too! I believe Rob was supposed to be babysitting me that day but he and a few friends wanted to go check things out behind our house. I remember him realizing that the mud was going to be too deep for me so he lifted me up on his shoulders and off we went! I knew I would be well taken care of. Another memory that brings a smile to my heart is when Rob asked me how he should hold a girls hand. I thought to my self “ shouldn't you know this already?” But I played along. He held my hand this way and that way. Even back then he thought things out very thoroughly. We finally decided which “ hand holding” would work best for him! I love my big brother more than words can express and the absence of him in my life will be felt forever. I take comfort in knowing that he is truly at peace and in the arms of our Heavenly Father. Rest In Peace Robert John I hope you know how much I love you.

Liz Baker - July 27, 2020 at 05:59 PM

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“ Jo Lumpkin lit a candle in memory of Robert John Shackelford



jo lumpkin - July 27, 2020 at 05:28 PM

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“ My brother was a patriot. He loved this country so very much. He understood how many lives had been lost throughout history for the freedoms we ALL enjoy today. He was a giant of a man not only in physical size but he was a giant in the way he loved. He was such a wonderful brother to Steve and worked with Steve every time he was at my parents home. Robert will surely be missed by his family. We love him and know God has him now and he is at peace. RIP brother

jo lumpkin - July 27, 2020 at 05:27 PM

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“ I'm so sorry for Robert's family and my mother. I know the pain for letting a loved one go and especially as a parent letting a son go must be overwhelming. At least he has no more pain now that he is up in heaven. We will continue to pray for all of you.  
Love, Jake Szafranski and Family

Jacob Szafranski - July 27, 2020 at 05:17 PM

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“ I can't begin to find the words to describe what I'm feeling! I met Robert 37 years ago at Union College in Kentucky when he was coach and I was a graduate student. I had enrolled my daughter Lori in swimming lessons while I was in class. When I went to pick her up, she was almost hysterical and said they had dunked her. So I found out who I should see about my complaint and went straight to his office. Of course, I immediately noticed his good looks, but I pretty much lost it and blasted him. He was polite and let me go on and on and then calmly explained that he was very unhappy about this and that he had told all of the instructors not to dunk the students. When he stood up (I thought "Wow! This man is a mountain! ) he walked me to the Registrar's Office where he made sure my money was refunded. That was the beginning of our relationship.

Family was everything to him. At first I knew more about his family than I did him. We had few conversations where family was not discussed.

Bill...you were his hero! He so regretted not being able to follow in your footsteps. He was so proud of you and loved you so very much! I saw many pictures of you while on tour in Vietnam Nam and other places. He always kept pictures of all of you with him. You and Clareen his anchor!

Clareen...he told me once that you were the sweetest, kindest, strongest woman in the world but that you never hesitated to call him out (or anyone else) if you felt they were wrong. Said he couldn't imagine the strength it took to hold your family together and raise four children when Bill was deployed. He loved you so very much!

Stephen...you were always in his thoughts. I can't remember how many baseball caps he got for you. He was so picky and knew exactly what you would like or dislike! He so looked forward to getting to spend time with you and he loved you so much!

Jolyce ...you were the sibling that he said was most like him! He told me that you two had butted heads more times than he could remember growing up and he suspected it was because the two of you were so much alike. You too were so special to him!

Liz...you were his baby sister and could do no wrong! He loved you and your girls so much! I'm thankful that I was able to meet you, Mark, and Linley!

Kari, my sweet, sweet, girl! What can I say to you that I haven't already said? You know, as do I, that your father thought you hung the moon! He loved you and Christian so very much but, more importantly, he showed you two his love! I'm so thankful that our daughter had such a wonderful father who has touched so many lives! I know that you are going to keep his memory and legacy alive for Christian! Lastly, my little Christian...once when you and your mom got back from a visit with your grandpa, uncle, and great-grandparents, every time you saw an airplane go over you would tell me that it was going to grandpa's house in Florida! You loved your visits to Florida and always came back with so many stories about your adventures there!

I know you won't understand this all right now, but as you get older you will see all the posts and memorials about him.

These are only a few of my memories of Robert but I hope that somehow they would comfort you!

My heart is broken for all of you and I will continue to keep you in my prayers!

With much love,

Vicki



“ My man Shack was the rock of Sarasota HS, always there and would give you the shirt off his back; never waivered in his Hawaiiin upbringing just the same great guy every day. Coach Shack was in Orlando back in the 90s and funny story he told me was he was at a dinner party & Shaquille O’Neal just got to O-Town as a rookie and my man shack got to meet the other Shaq. So Coach Shack, who is 6-4 260ish, told NBA shaq in his booming coach’s voice: “Young man I just want to let you know I am the original Shack in Orlando and I just want to set the record straight.” Then 7-1 300 Shaquille O’ Neal shot back at Coach Shack: “People told me about you Coach Shack, do you think maybe we could share Orlando?” Coach Shack imma miss you everyday; you made an impact on my daughter’s life and my life and will miss having the chance of being in Georgia with you fishing for trout and drinking beer. My daughter Rhiannon Swirles has the best song that fits the moment and this tragic loss. Love you shack this hurts. Going to miss talking with yiu every morning getting pep talks to go teach. GATA

**Scott Swirles** - July 27, 2020 at 04:19 PM

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“ History was my least favorite subject, but Coach Shack just had this amazing charisma and enthusiasm for teaching. I grew an appreciate for it through his dedication to teaching. I had his class in 1998-99 (American History) and to this day, I can remember very vividly that he was one of the very best teachers I ever had. He taught life skills and had such a huge heart for the students. It was obvious even as a troubled teenager. I am absolutely heartbroken for his family and for the community as well. He is absolutely irreplaceable.

**Nicole Gueli** - July 27, 2020 at 04:11 PM

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“ Coach Shack was my defensive line coach at UCF. He was the best coach I ever had, and enabled me to have a successful career as a player and coach. I only wish I could've told him that. My sympathies go out to the Shackelford family. He was a man among men.

**Lee Wisniewski** - July 27, 2020 at 02:55 PM

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“ I remember I used to dislike history until I took Mr. Shack’s class. He told the best stories and was an amazing teacher. He’s one I’ll never forget. I’m so sorry for your loss but the memories I’ll never forget



**Zoey Freed** - July 27, 2020 at 02:06 PM