



Robert Holland Willis, Jr.

August 9, 1933 - January 30, 2020

Robert Holland Willis, Jr – Dr. Willis to some, Bobby to his folks & childhood friends, Dad to a lucky few, and Bob to the rest – died peacefully at 86 years of age after a long decline. He often said that he had lived a “great life” beyond his wildest dreams; his humility was warming. And his jokes were usually funny, even if you’d already heard them. Several times.

Bob Willis leaves behind Mary Ellen Midkiff - his wife of 64 years and love of his life; his three sons – Dean, Jeffrey and Bruce; grandkids Zachary, Alexa, Andrew and Luke; and a host of friends.

Bob was a Florida boy, born in 1933 in Fort Lauderdale to Robert Holland Willis, Sr. and Vera Mae Wall. His childhood was filled with outdoor play – swimming and lifeguarding, fishing and every kind of sport.

Bob was a Sarasota pioneer, moving to the then-small town with his family in 1960. The Willises first lived in Kensington Park, then moved to Phillipi Gardens and finally near Roberts Bay in South Sarasota. He remained an outdoorsman who loved Florida’s warm weather & vast waterways. He was a skilled fisherman, originally devoted to live bait & lure fishing in the bays, keys and passes; then mastering fly fishing in both salt and fresh waters. He was also adept at teasing stone crabs out of their holes.

Bob was a solid tennis player, hitting first at the old Sarasota City Courts, then moving on to the old Forest Lakes, Bath & Racquet and the Field Club. He biked to work before it was cool and jogged to stay fit. Bob also played a good game of golf, snow skied, fished around the world and climbed Pikes Peak – one of the tallest mountains in the Rockies. He and the family frequently summered in the North Carolina mountains, where the couple had honeymooned.

Bob graduated from Emory University in Georgia at the top of his class with a degree in dentistry. He then served in the United States Army at Fort Benning, GA before moving to Sarasota. He practiced as a Dentist, with an office on Osprey Avenue for most of his career. He was active in the Sarasota Kiwanis Club and Save-our-Bay environmental group.

Services will be held in the Chapel at Church Of The Palms Presbyterian on Saturday, 8 February at 11:30am, followed by a casual celebration of his life at The Field Club at 12:30pm.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the Alzheimer's Association, 225 N. Michigan Avenue, Floor 17, Chicago, IL 60601.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

FEB 8. 11:30 AM (ET)

Church of the Palms
3224 Bee Ridge Road
Sarasota, FL 34239

Tribute Wall

LJ

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Linda Jackson - February 09, 2021 at 08:24 PM

LJ

“ Dr. Willis was our family dentist in Sarasota in the 1960s and my first job as a sixteen-year-old was babysitting his three young boys, Dean, Jeffrey, and Bruce. They were adorable little boys. The whole family came to my wedding on November 20, 1964, at Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church to Don Holland. I've attached a picture of the family with my mother-in-law and me at the reception. Wishing all the family peace and comfort. Dr. and Mrs. Willis were both wonderful people and they set a good example for me to follow.

Linda Jackson - February 09, 2021 at 08:16 PM