



John Neilson Furniss

December 18, 1941 - June 5, 2024

John Neilson Furniss passed into the loving arms of his Heavenly Father on June 5, 2024, at Lower Cape Fear LifeCare after complications from a recent surgery. He was preceded in death by his parents, Frances Beverley Hill Furniss and John Perkins Furniss, his brother Allan Furniss, and his nephew, Furniss Maxwell.

He is survived by his beloved wife of over 50 years, Mary Ann Biggs Furniss, of his home in Belville, NC, his sister and brother-in-law Emory and Charles Maxwell, and his niece, Christy Harris and her family, of Roswell, GA.

Surviving loved ones also include his sister-in-law Terry Quinn and his nephew Patrick Quinn of Wilmington, NC., and his nephew Rob Quinn of Ringgold, GA.

John was a genuine southern gentleman and a character who had a strong character. All who knew him loved him for that. Many people now understand how to write and speak correctly and love good literature because of his teaching. Many understand loving and serving God through kindness because of his lifetime example. He was truly one of a kind: intelligent, humble, funny, deep, and expressive. Above all else, he was loving and kind. He had a self-described 'Mark Twain' childhood in Selma with his cousins who were like brothers to him. They fancied themselves explorers and pioneers, playing among the trees and creekbanks. They formed a group among themselves they called the Royal Order of Tarantulas and continued to call themselves Tarantulas and hold onto that brotherly bond throughout their

lives. John was very proud to have achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in those early childhood days as well.

John was a cradle Episcopalian with strong ties to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Selma, AL, where his father had associations going back three generations. His involvement with St. Paul's would be the beginning of his lifelong spiritual journey. He continued that journey at St. James Episcopal Church in Wilmington after moving here and was involved in many ways in the church: studied with Education for Ministry (EFM), served as a beloved lector with his wonderful voice, helped organize and participated in the Disciples Christian Formation group, was a greeter, and participated in several small spiritual study groups.

He had an extensive formal education and was a lifelong learner. He began that journey at Indian Springs School in Birmingham, where he broadened his horizons with innovative instruction methods and began to be concerned with what he called 'The Great Metaphysical Issues of Existence'. This all became part of his 'Search for Self' as a touchstone precept that became a lifetime endeavor for him. After graduation from Indian Springs, he went to Washington & Lee University in Lexington, VA, where he majored in English but with a strong interest in French, history, and the sciences. He then made a slight detour and studied Law and later achieved an MA in English from the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa.

After his MA he went on to teach Literature at Ole Miss, which he considered to be a literary shrine, where he taught Faulkner among other writers. Then he moved on to teach for a year at Memphis State University before going to Duke for his Doctoral studies. After completing his PhD in English Literature, he did post-doctoral fellowship/studies at Pittsburgh and Northwestern. While completing his doctorate at Duke, he met Mary Ann, who was to become his wife, while she was working for NASA at the Research Triangle Park. They were married in the Duke Chapel in August of 1973.

After completing his PhD, he decided to return to Memphis to teach at Memphis State, where he and Mary Ann lived for the next 17 years and she worked in information systems for Holiday Inns, Inc., which was founded in Memphis. While there he also started a small self-publishing company, River Mark Publishing, and among other books, published a book by Elvis' cook about her life with Elvis. He also wrote and published several highly acclaimed genealogy books on his and Mary Ann's families.

In 1991, Holiday Inns was sold to the Bass Brewing Company and John and Mary Ann moved with the newly acquired company to Atlanta, where they lived for 13 years before retiring to Wilmington, and he continued his teaching career at Georgia State University.

After retiring to Wilmington, John taught some classes at Brunswick Community College, and he and Mary Ann soon became involved with St. James Episcopal Church and with various community organizations. He did extensive volunteer work with StepUp Wilmington, which was known as Phoenix Employment Ministries in the early days. John used his many skills to coach and teach those who came to Phoenix/StepUp with difficult circumstances in their lives and assisted them in finding employment and spiritual meaning in their lives.

Throughout his life John continued to teach and love others, and many lives are the better for having known him. He will be missed in this world.

A celebration of John's life will be held at St. James Episcopal Church at Third and Market Streets in Wilmington at 10 AM on June 20, with a reception following in the Great Hall.

Tribute Wall

- KM** “ *Mary Ann, thinking of you today. We will miss John.*
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- Kit Mason** - June 20, 2024 at 11:04 AM
- CB** “ *My condolences to you Mary Ann and John's family*
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- Cynthia Buell-Christian** - June 19, 2024 at 02:50 PM
- TT** “ *My thoughts and Prayers are with the Family during this difficult time*
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- Tommy Thompson** - June 19, 2024 at 12:05 PM
- SW** “ *Thank you John for the wisdom and knowledge that you shared at Stepup Wilmington over the years. We love you and truly you will be missed.*
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- StepUp Wilmington** - June 17, 2024 at 01:20 PM
- MN** “ *With my condolences to all the family. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Mary*
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- Mary Bush Norwood** - June 16, 2024 at 08:04 AM
- JC** “ *What a fine Renaissance Man John was! We share our heartfelt condolences.*
The Jack Camp Family
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- Judge & Mrs. Jack Camp** - June 15, 2024 at 10:56 AM