

Benny Leo Simons

Obituary

Benny Leo Simons went to be with the Lord on December 2, 2013, after several years of battling Parkinson's disease.

February 9, 1939 was a special day for Jessie and B.B. Simons when they welcomed their newborn son, Benny, into this world. Growing up in Dallas, Benny attended W.W. Samuel High School and it was during that period of time that he met his soon to be wife, Mary Ann. They married on January 31, 1958 and began a wonderful journey that lasted almost 32 years until Mary Ann's death in 1990. Benny and Mary Ann were like peas in a pod. While she was the more high-spirited, lively one of the two, Benny generally balanced their great relationship by standing idle with a smile on his face, simply nodding and occasionally interjecting. They raised three children together and served as "surrogate parents" for other neighborhood kids who were often stopping by for a meal or to spend the night. Their hobby was their children, and Benny and Mary Ann spent much of their free time attending their kid's activities and keeping them heading down the right path. Benny was very proud of his grandchildren, always quick to praise them for their efforts, and to encourage them whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Professionally, Benny was "all in" when it came to serving the firefighting industry. He worked for over 28 years as a fireman in Mesquite. During that time he rose through the ranks up to Deputy Chief of Training. He served as VP and later as President of Mesquite Firefighters Association, VP of Greater Dallas Area Fire Instructors Association, and organized various local firefighters associations. Upon "retirement," Benny's commitment to firefighting became even more crystalized, forming the Texas Retired Firefighter's Association, advocating on behalf of retired firefighters in Texas, as well as nationally and internationally. He started a movement at the 2000 Chicago Convention to organize the International Association of Fire Fighters, worked on it again at the 2002 Convention, and instated it after the 2004 Convention. Benny was also an innovator who led the way in progressive fitness/wellness programs, mass casualty drills, and flash-over operations. There was no occasion too big for Benny when it came to advocating for the needed benefits for his fellow firefighters, and he became respected for his political tenacity at the local, state, and national levels. He was a friend's best friend and a political opponent's biggest obstacle!

His professional achievements speak for themselves, being named the Stonecutter's Award recipient in 2007 at the Texas State Fire Fighters Convention, which is an award that Benny organized in 2001. The City of Mesquite honored Benny in 2011 by designating a Benny Simons Day in Mesquite, and just earlier this year, he was once again recognized at the State Fire Fighters Convention for his lifetime contributions to his profession. He was voted Fire Fighter of the Year in 1986 by members of his Department.

When Benny was not busy with his firefighting duties, he spent much of his time as a plumber, providing repair work for many citizens in the Dallas and outlying areas. His benevolent character was often expressed when those people who were short on money received their work free of charge....he was always willing to help those in need.

Hunting was a passion for Benny and he spent several years traveling to Colorado with his father-in-law, Eugene Gilliam, along with several other family members and friends. One such location that eventually became his favorite is now known as Gilliam Springs near Montrose, where Benny helped erect a commemorative sign in 2011. He shared his love for hunting by introducing both of his sons to this outdoor activity. He made many hunting trips across Texas over the years, but his favorite hunting activity was calling varmints.

Benny was a true pillar of his community in the Combine and Crandall area, often contributing in many ways that were out of sight, as he was always content getting things done in the background, preferring that others receive praise and recognition. His volunteer work spanned school functions, church, Special Olympics, local fundraisers, and various other meaningful ways that he was always willing to contribute. He was a quintessential "giver," in the truest of form.

A true friend he was for many, stopping in at the fire station to chat with the men he admired and respected, and during his later years of having his daily breakfast with his crew of friends at the Crandall Cotton Gin. He genuinely loved his community of people, and they loved him!

Benny is survived by daughter Kathy Compton, son Robby Simons and wife Susan, son Greg Simons and wife Deborah; grandchildren Caleb Compton, Sara Simons, Tyler Simons, Erin Simons, Hannah Martinez, Ashley Martinez, Haley Schluter, Jeffrey Schluter, and C.H. Schluter; great grandchildren Teagan Compton and Krystaleigh Schluter; sister Rose Camp; many nieces and nephews; his special friend Alma Simons; and his favorite dog, Boss.

Benny is preceded in death by his parents Jessie and B. B. Simons; his wife Mary Ann; grandchildren Kara Simons and Jim Bob Simons; and siblings Elizabeth Lamb Spivey, Robert Simons, William Simons, Thomas Simons, Minnie Mae Calloway, Cora Harrell, Walter McCullough, and Dorothy Baker.

A special thank you goes out to his beloved niece, Julia Handlin, who provided such special care for him over the last few years of Benny's life, as well as other family and friends, and the kind workers at Kemp Care Center.

Donations in his name can be made to your favorite charity to commemorate the life of Benny Simons.

Viewing will be held Wednesday evening, December 4 at Gonzalez Funeral Home in Mesquite on Military Parkway from 6:00 to 8:00. Funeral services will begin at 10:00 am on Thursday at Point View Baptist Church in Combine, followed by graveside services at Pleasant Grove Cemetery in Combine, with a reception following at the church.