



Emma Lou Gray

July 17, 1941 - November 10, 2025

Emma Lou Gray was born into this world on July 17, 1941, to her loving parents, Forrest and Phoebe Brideweser in Lima Ohio. She was raised in Wapakoneta, Ohio. 4 years later her sister, Phama, was born. Emma had a great love for music and started playing the organ for her church and the trombone in her high school's marching band. Emma graduated Wapakoneta Senior High School and turned her attention toward the desire to help others. She attended college going to the Lima Memorial Hospital School for Nursing.

It was during this time she found the love of her life, James Gray whom she married. They moved to Florida in 1961 as Jim and his family were joining the citrus industry. They planted groves and opened Grays Groves Incorporated which soon became Gray's Orange Barn. This was a wholesale/retail citrus packing facility & gift shop in Lady Lake. They shipped 1000s of boxes of fresh, Florida citrus across the United States. Emma did help with this endeavor and was the creator of the Orange Creme. This was an ice cream sold in the gift shop and became a true local's favorite. She had also joined the practice of Dr. Sammuel Vinci the first OBGYN in Leesburg as their registered nurse.

Soon, it was time for Emma to start her family by giving birth to Rhonda Renee Gray and Nathan Douglas Gray. Dr. Vinci who was on the Board at Leesburg General Hospital, asked Emma to become and became their

Director of Nursing. Her love for music continued as she was the organist for Gloria Dei Lutheran and she filled in for several surrounding churches. In 1983, her daughter and father's lives were cut short in a horrific traffic accident. Her faith in the Lord prevailed which ignited a desire to teach. She decided to advance her career by returning to college so she could earn her teaching degree. She joined Lake County's Vo-Tech as the instructor of the LPN program. She found this to be so rewarding. She was able to convey her loving, caring and skilled techniques to her students, and earned her the nickname from the students of "Sgt Slaughter" as she demanded the best from them. Her teaching with motherly love produced 100s of skilled nurses that culminated in their capping and pinning ceremonies held at Leesburg's United Morrison Methodist Church. While teaching, she also continued her work at Leesburg Regional Medical Center's emergency department. In 1997, Emma was involved in a serious car accident in which she had significant back Injuries that left her disabled and ended her career.

Emma was so inspirational in helping her son Nathan's dream of opening a restaurant and the creation of Legends Cafe in Fruitland Park. Her last years were spent at the Lake Port Square Community, that she loved so much. The friends and fellowship she encountered there after Jim's passing was truly amazing. On Monday, November 10th, 2025, at 1:18pm, as a patient in the very hospital she once had the pride and privilege of serving others, ended. Her last words were "I'm going with the angels" and is now reunited with all of the loved ones that preceded her. Emma Lou Gray, a life very well lived.

Her funeral service will be Sunday, November 16, 2025, at 2:00 pm at Morrison UMC which is located at 1005 W. Main Street; Leesburg, FL 34748.

Arrangements entrusted to Beyers Funeral Home of Leesburg, Florida.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

NOV **16**. 2:00 PM (ET)

Morrison United Methodist Church
1005 W Main St
Leesburg, FL 34748-4924
(352) 787-3786

Tribute Wall



“ *Beyers Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Emma Lou Gray*



Beyers Funeral Home - November 14, 2025 at 02:03 PM

RB

I was one of Mrs. Gray's nursing students and I'm a better person from knowing her. She will always hold a special place in my heart and I consider her to be one of my heroes. Nate, you will be in my prayers as you grieve and remember your Mom. She always spoke of you with pride and love.

Regina Bushee - November 16, 2025 at 10:56 PM

DD

Emma Lou had the sweetest most caring spirit! I will miss our chats, her advice, her humor, wit, and constant smile!! May God's peace and comfort be with Nate and the rest of her family and friends.

Denise Donahue - November 16, 2025 at 11:18 PM

JS

“ *Our deepest sympathies to Mrs Gray's family.
The Sam and Donna Smith Family.*



Jolinda Smith - November 16, 2025 at 01:17 PM

BH

“ I was honored to know her! She was a fantastic person and dedicated teacher.

Bill Hayes - November 15, 2025 at 10:19 PM

H&

“ Heather &. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Emma Lou Gray.

Heather &. - November 15, 2025 at 02:58 PM

TC

“ There are no words in the loss of the most wonderful friend in Emma Lou! My heart is broken and I will miss our visits, especially at Nathans restaurant, Legends. I will forever cherish the memories, the tears, the words of encouragement and the laughter over the many many years. I always looked forward to The Orange Barn and all the goodies. You brought light in darkness, kindness to everyone, always there to lend a helping hand in anyway possible and to anyone in need. The world has lost a treasure but heaven has gained a rare gem. You are now with the angels, free from pain and reunited with your loved ones. Thank you for being a friend. I love you bunches! Forever in my heart, never forgotten and blessed for the friendship.

Teri (Hein) Cherry - November 12, 2025 at 06:53 PM

SW

Sgt. Slaughter was my mother's nursing instructor at LakeTech in 1991. She was just a year younger than my mother Harriet. She was such an inspiration to her during her schooling. She had the utmost fondness and respect for EmmaLou. She imparted so much love and compassion into an already loving and compassionate person. Yes, she was a wonderful nurse. I'm so very sorry for the loss of your loved one. I had the pleasure of meeting her on several occasions and it was always filled with encouragement and laughter. An angel in the arms of the angels. Say hello to my mom. Bless you and your family during this time of grief and love. She left a very big impact on my mother's life. Thank you for sharing her with so many.
Shirley Whitehead.

Shirley Whitehead - November 13, 2025 at 05:08 PM

CL

I was in Sgt. Slaughter's first nursing class of 1984-85. Terrified but determined at the age of 18, Ms Emma Lou made sure that the 3 of us at that tender age, knew the importance of the career we had chosen. She was passionate about Nursing. She passed that on to all of us. She was tough but thorough and instilled in all of us that Nursing was not a job but a profession. She was tough, insisting that Our uniforms were pressed, hats on straight and shoe's bright white to every detail of Our charting be professional and complete to making sure we gave the absolute best care to Our patients. She only accepted Our best and her love, kindness and compassion produced some of the best Nurses I have ever worked with. I feel so blessed to have known her, a true Angel among us. ❤️ Cynthia (Esposito) Lukowicz

Cynthia Lukowicz - November 16, 2025 at 10:40 AM

SB

Emma Lou was such a great teaching partner at Lake Tech. I missed her when the accident caused her disability that made her leave her beloved teaching position. She and Jim were good friends to my husband and me. Fly high Emma Lou and I will see you on the other side.

Shirley Benson - November 16, 2025 at 07:45 PM