



John Ray Neal

November 10, 1940 - August 1, 2024

John Ray Neal of The Villages, Florida, passed away on August 1, 2024, at Cornerstone Hospice after a long and courageous fight with prostate cancer. He was born November 10, 1940, in Hazlehurst, Georgia and was the beloved only child of Ross Stein Neal and Martha Puckett Neal. His family moved to Memphis, Tennessee when he was 5 years old where he remained a resident until moving to Leesburg, Florida in 1971.

John grew up in Memphis and was a teenager when Elvis Presley was getting started there. He and his friends would see Elvis around town as a young “up and coming” singer, but most thought he was just an oddity not a phenomenon. After graduating Treadwell High School, John attended University of Memphis (formerly Memphis State University) where he received his bachelor’s degree. He then joined President Kennedy’s newly instituted Peace Corps, but after a short stint there he came back to Memphis and went to work for Traveler’s Insurance Company. As an adjuster with Traveler’s, John was one of a handful of people allowed on Beale Street the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. He was drafted right after that and served in Vietnam during the war as an interrogator for the United States Army where he was subjected to agent orange causing his health problems later. Upon his honorable discharge, John returned to Memphis and furthered his education with the University of Memphis earning a Master’s degree in Economics. He found a job opening at a small, relatively new college in

Leesburg and moved to Florida to work as an instructor at Lake Sumter State College (formerly Lake Sumter Community College) teaching economics for 30 plus years. Mr. Neal was a highly respected and dedicated instructor at Lake Sumter who had high standards for his students. His tests were notorious for being the hardest (non math) exams anyone took there and if you got an A in his class, you were pretty proud of yourself because there weren't many. His students went on to be bankers, presidents of banks, stock brokers, economists, university professors, lawyers and even a judge and he was proud of every one of them. While teaching at Lake Sumter, he attended night classes at Rollins College in Winter Park and received a second Master's Degree. He never stopped learning.

Though he was small in stature, he was a giant in intellect. As a lover of history, economics, and his adoring wife of almost 50 years, he never met a book he didn't like. Every room of the house has books on Greek and Roman history, US history and the founding fathers, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, economics, business, teaching, art, maps, religion, classic literature and mysteries, politics, philosophy, and law. He read them all making notes and outlining important passages in them and sharing those notes and thoughts with his wife over their martinis in the evening.

Those left to cherish his memory are his wife of almost 50 years, Terry; his beloved and almost lifelong friends, Henry Ireland (Shelia), Jimmy Couch (Linda), Tommy Scott (Betty), Ed Jackson (Dana), and Jared Graber (Sherry); his loving cousins, Linda Taylor (Jimmy), Judy Brickhouse (John), and Leven Williams (Mary); and his sweet cat, Bunny. John was loved by many and will be dearly missed. We are comforted knowing he is now nestled in the love and grace of God and is pain free.

A Funeral Service of Remembrance will take place on Friday, August 9, 2024 at 10:00 am at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida where John will

receive full military honors and will be laid to rest following the services.

Arrangements are under the direction of Beyers Funeral Home and Crematory of Leesburg, Florida.

In lieu of flowers, you may make a donation to Hillsdale College, Cornerstone Hospice, Lake-Sumter Educational Foundation or Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

AUG 9. 10:00 AM (ET)

Florida National Cemetery
6502 SW 102nd Avenue
Bushnell, FL 33513

Tribute Wall

LT

“ When he was a young teenager, John Ray played the accordion. He and Aunt Martha came to visit us in Neuhardt, Arkansas. Aunt Martha had him perform for us, much to his chagrin. We were excited and clapped for him. Several years ago, I couldn't resist sending him a musical birthday card-accordion music in the background, and a chicken on the front. I couldn't tell if he enjoyed the gesture. He was always very serious.

Linda Taylor - August 10, 2024 at 04:13 PM

LT

“ As a boy, John Ray had a playhouse in the backyard of his home in Memphis. Inside were toys, and many soldiers-all neatly all set up as you can imagine. The soldiers were perhaps too equip him for a future tour of duty in Vietnam. I knocked over something and out I ran.

Linda Taylor - August 10, 2024 at 04:10 PM

JS

“ Was unaware of Mr. Neal's passing until this day, the day that he will be forever honored as a Veteran. I do want to say Mr. Neal left an everlasting impression on me after taking his economic class at Lake Sumter CC. I still remember some of the things he taught us about economics and reasoning. I also admired his wife's accomplishments in law and met her when she worked for a Sumter County attorney. Such a nice person and well matched to Mr. Neal (Mr. by respect). May you cherish the memories and I for one will always remember Jon Neal as one of the best.

James Guy Simmons - August 09, 2024 at 11:08 AM