



## Gary Padgett Smithson

November 8, 1950 - August 18, 2020

It is with great sadness, and a heavy heart, we announce the passing of our beloved father, Gary Padgett Smithson, on August 18th 2020, at the age of 69 years old, in Chuluota Florida.

A man of great faith, our father was an angel sent from heaven who illuminated the hearts of everyone he met with his bright and shining light. Survived by his two children Ashley and Todd, his grandchildren Cooper and Olivia and his cherished dogs Molly and Charlie.

Gary was born in Wilmington North Carolina on november 8th 1950, the only son of Hugh McDonald Smithson and Ruby Grace Padgett. After graduating high school, Gary became a student at UNCW, studying marine biology before joining the Wrightsville Beach Police Department in 1973. During his time with the department Gary had many advancements in his career becoming a Sergeant, Juvenile Detention Officer and Volunteer FireFighter before opening the Wrightsville Beach Detectives Division in 1979.

After 10 years of service in The Police Department, Gary transitioned his career in 1983 and began his new chapter investigating explosions and arson for INS Investigations. As an investigator his work took him around the world, eventually relocating him to Florida after receiving a promotion. Orlando would become Gary's forever home. He set down roots in Chuluota and developed great bonds and friendships in his surrounding community. A member of St. Stephen Catholic Community Church, Gary made it his purpose to help friends in need, and devoted his spare time volunteering or caring for his children and grandchildren.

In 1996 Gary became the victim of a major car accident, but with the support from his family, friends, church and community, Gary survived and went on to become a speaker for Florida Safety Council, along with Advocates against Drunk Driving and participating in new Beginnings, a St. Stephen Catholic Community program created for separated, divorced and widowed.

Gary's heart was as big as the Ocean. He lived a 1000 years in the 69 calendar years God gave him. He was afraid of nothing, and though his accident gave him an obstacle, he never slowed down. He had an acute awareness of the importance of a life lived, and he left a lasting impression on everyone he met. To his family he was a rare combination of simplicity and abundance. He lived for his long winded speeches at his annual BBQ where he showcased his famous secret sauce, a delicious sauce he apparently kept no recipe record of (believe me we've looked). His greatest passion was his land. He created a paradise for his family to gather, tinker in his shop, jam out to Pink Floyd, or watch CasaBlanca with his dogs on his lap. We will miss him

greatly, but hold the memories we shared and the stories he told.

Rest easy Papa. We will love you forever. You were a great man!

# Tribute Wall

KS

“ I am so sorry to hear of your loss. I believe that today is the anniversary of his accident. I was reaching out to say hello and found his obit. We loved attending his December gatherings at his home. He was always positive and cheerful. May watermelons no longer break your heart dear friend. Rest in peace.

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**Katherine Skrobiak** - August 26, 2022 at 10:48 AM

ET

“ I am trying to contact Gary's family. Many many many years ago, he dated (or so I thought) my mom, Barbara, when I was in 10th grade. He treated her like she was a queen. Years later after I had graduated, served in the Air Force, and then moved to Orlando, Mom asked me to find him so I did. It wasn't long after that that I had to have emergency surgery so Mom flew down here. While she was here Gary came to Florida Hospital, East to meet up with Mom and I and I remember telling him that I wished he had married my Mom and that I appreciated how he ALWAYS treated Mom and I with respect. Gary reminded me that if God had wanted him to marry Mom that he would've married her. I remember when he left the hospital that I felt a huge sense of loss. Several years went by before I talked to him again and that's when I learned about the wreck. He obviously heard the anger in my voice at someone injuring him, because he told me it was OK and that he had made peace about it and that God would use it for His glory somehow. We talked about meeting up one day since I was struggling with something personal however, we never did get together. I'll never forget the last thing he said to me is that he would pray for me. The Gary I knew never wavered in his faith and ALWAYS was a gentleman. I admired and adored him. I am so sorry to learn of his passing.



To his family, please know that Gary was a great man to many folks. I am so sorry for your HUGE loss. I can't imagine the depth of hurt yall are feeling. May God send His Holy Spirit to comfort you and wrap His loving arms around you.

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Elizabeth Page Thomas - July 15, 2022 at 07:52 PM

TC

“ Just learn about Mr. Gary's passing , It was my honor to have meet him and as a Disney Vacation club guide I help him become a member and he loved Disney , he was always a gentleman and full of kindness. I will miss our long talks about Disney Mr. Gary.

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**Tony Capetillo** - December 05, 2021 at 11:08 PM

TM

“ My name is Tom Montgomery. I have just learned of Gary's death and it breaks my heart. I met Gary when we were both students at UNCW and worked at the marine research center there. We shared many adventures, both devoting our careers to law enforcement. We lost touch over the years, but I have many fond memories. RIP, my good friend.

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**Tom Montgomery** - November 20, 2021 at 10:20 AM

DD

“ I only recently became aware of Gary's passing. Gary was my Uncle, half brother to my Mother. I moved away to Hawaii, my Mom has since passed and Gary and I had grown apart, not been in contact in many many years. Grand Daddy Smithson took me to Boseman Sporting Goods when I was about 5 and bought me my first baseball glove. I have amazing memories of that day and used that glove all the way thru High School, I still have it today (I am 63 now). Gary's Daughter-in-Law Carly recently found me thru Ancestry.com and put Gary and I in contact again. It was awesome to re-connect and speak again.

So many years lost, but I am heartened by all of the wonderful memories shared by his friends here. It gives me a glance into his life after we parted ways and it is wonderful to see that he was a man of faith, lived a full life and touched so many other's lives. I am very sad that we did not have more opportunities to re-connect but also very thankful to Carly for finding me and thankful that we had the chance to speak again. I now have family that I didn't even know that I had and hope we can stay in contact as well. God bless and A Hui Hou (Until we meet again)!

Dan Dolan-Sept 19, 2020

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Dan Dolan - September 19, 2020 at 11:48 PM

JS

“ Gary, we met over 40 years ago at San Pedro Center. You were cleaning chickens in the sink for the upcoming dinner to be served to those attending the Separated, Divorced, Widowed conference. For years you cleaned those darn chickens and did a great job. You were there for Mike when he was dying of cancer and always made us smile and eager to hear your stories and there were many. You were there for me at Mike's celebration of life and we stayed close after that. You were my rock. We had lots of fun going to eat at Boston's Fish House, your favorite Italian restaurant and the DeLeon Springs pancake house with the "flying" Nuns (Sr. Gini and Sr. Pat), You are now an angel in heaven watching over all of us that loved you deeply. Many wonderful memories to keep in our hearts until we meet again. Keep watch over your loving family and especially Charlie & Molly. You will forever be in our hearts. JoAnn Simmons

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**JoAnn Simmons** - September 04, 2020 at 04:19 PM

BE

“ I am at a lose for words! Gary always was a guy who had your back ! He was a man who my children thought of as an Uncle. He was a friend who I met at St. Stephen's Springfest doing security! We being retired cops . Gary from a small southern town , Me retired from the NYPD. The country cop & the city cop, but we became brothers! My wife cleaned his house every Monday, and he became part of our family!  
The Egans feel like we lost a brother & Uncle! He's in a better place with the Lord. Of that I have no doubt! But we still miss him !

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**Bill Egan** - September 02, 2020 at 08:27 PM

WH

“ While meeting Gary later in life, I found him to be a true man of God with many great stories and a willingness to engage all he met. He will be well remembered and missed.

*Bill and Crys*

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**William Hoge** - August 31, 2020 at 12:39 PM

GW

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Greg Williamson** - August 29, 2020 at 08:13 PM

“ On Friday, August 21, following a dream I had about Gary, I called his mobile number and Ashley answered. She told what I feared to be true. Gary passed to Life Eternal on August 18.

*Gary was and still is my very best friend forever (BFF). Forever, for me, can also mean present tense. Due to Gary's deep, abiding faith in God, and also mine, my hope is unequivocal; we we WILL see each other again.*

*Gary and I grew up together. We were in Band together for six years, lived less than a mile from each other, and when Gary was not at my house I was at his. We were so close that we shared each other's joys, tears, and even some trying times together.*

*Gary and I shared a few cryptic, personal and private jokes - greetings if you will. When we called, the greetings would instantaneously lets the other know who was calling. I expect to hear one of those again someday at a reunion in heaven. Speaking of reunions, I spent practically every single moment with Gary when Ashley drove him to our New Hanover High School's 50th Reunion two years ago! I so cherish our time together and have a photo that a friend took of me with Gary.*

*Gary was Best Man at my wedding. Although I am no longer married, Gary gave my ex a parking ticket at Wrightsville Beach the very week of our wedding when he was on the police force. I thought it was a hilarious! Our careers took us in different directions after that. I worked in American Embassies overseas and years later, one day during my assignment in Quito, Ecuador, (1994-95) I received a call out of the blue from Gary. He was there in Quito working on an arson investigation! I suggested we meet at a British Fish 'N Chips Bar, a quaint hole in the wall. As soon as we met, the years melted away!*

*Gary and I were so close that even though years would go by as soon as we reconnected it seemed as if we've never been apart. We always prayed for each other's families. I knew the names of his*

*children and grandchildren; Gary knew mine and we prayed for each other .*

*My deepest condolences go to Gary's family, Ashley, Cooper, Todd, Olivia, and any I have missed.*

*Until we meet again Gary,*

*James G. Williamson (GREG)*

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**Greg Williamson** - August 29, 2020 at 07:50 PM

“ There are people that are put in this world to not only live their life but to enhance and enrich the lives of those they meet. Gary was one of those people. His soul was beautiful, his mind was unbelievable and his love was never ending. Gary came into my life many years ago. He was just a customer but every time he came, he always smiled. He was always talking. It didn't matter what was going on in the day, he had stories to share and they were wonderful stories. I was eagerly waiting to hear and learn about his life and about his adventures and about the randomness that he would talk about . As the Years went by, a beautiful friendship developed.I started to look forward to seeing him on the schedule. As time passed , His pets got older. I made it a point to be there for him at the vets as he said goodbye, to his soulmate and best bud Rocky. A big lab mix full of energy and love. I've never seen such compassion and unconditional love. Gary was determined to do right by Rocky.They were a team,people knew them at stores restaurants, friends family. If you knew Gary ,you knew Rocky they go hand-in-hand. When Rocky passed, I was there. That was a hard day, is never an easy thing ,to see a man cry. To see a man you feel to be one of the toughest men in the world cry over what some people just consider a pet ,breaks your heart. We move forward and we find Gary not one but two more dogs to fill that hole that Rocky left in his heart with Charlie and Molly. We raise these dogs together. We trained these dogs together and slowly they started to fill his hole. There's a little piece that will never be filled ,that was only for Rocky . Here we are, years into our friendship that is now grown more to that of a surrogate father and a surrogate daughter. The name Poppa Bear comes about years ago, And from that point forward that is what he is to me, my papa bear. My big teddy bear ,the man that I can look at and know ,he does not mind crying. He's was strong as a bull , a heart of gold. I now become his daughter and he refers to me all the time as a second daughter. That term is enduring and I will never forget. Days months years go by, he always makes it a point to call me out of the blue just when I need him the most. To hear his voice, we meet up for lunch, we have an annual birthday lunch since our birthdays are very close together.

*I can go on and on about our stories, as Gary would want to do. This is my story , saying goodbye to the man who meant the world to me. I take joy in knowing he is finally in his resting place with his soulmate Rocky by his side you will be deeply missed. ~ Your 2nd daughter, Sharon*

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**Sharon** - August 29, 2020 at 05:22 PM

SN

“ Gary came into our lives in the early 90's as our next door neighbor. We shared laughter friendship and food. When he moved to the "Puckerbrush", those dinners around the pool became ritual bar-b-ques and beer. We helped grill the ribs and serve at those annual "thank you" feast to all his friends from church, work and neighbors. His children, Jimmy and his dogs were also part of our lives. As time went on we all took different journeys in life but those by gone memories will be cherished. Rest in peace old friend.

*Barry, Susan, Amy and Nancy*

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**Susan Nichols** - August 27, 2020 at 02:27 PM

JD

“ Farewell, Gary, and onto heaven for you. Please intercede for us before the Lord. We were brothers in Christ at the Saint Stephen Catholic Community, Winter Springs, Florida, and would share our spiritual lives in Guy-Talk.

*I still share with others his account as a police officer of Wilmington, North Carolina: During early morning duty, Gary discovers a station wagon of a Mid-West family, which had travelled through the night and which was seeking directions to the ocean....for they had never seen the ocean. Gary thinks to himself 'I gotta to see this'. In his police car, he escorts the family to the shore and accompanies the parents and young children to the water's edge. The sun rises. The little son cries 'Oh Pa, Oh Pa!' upon seeing the vastness of Mother Ocean.*

*Due in part to Gary, I have a fondness for Northern Ireland, from which Gary's father emigrated. Gary corrected me - It's Derry, not Londonderry. Gary would wistfully listen to the songs of the Republicans. 'Come out ye black and tans, come out and fight me like a man...'*

*I am going to reach out to my living friends now, because I failed to reach out to you in these past fifteen years.*

*Dona Nobis Pacem,*

*John Dittmeier  
Silver Spring, Maryland*

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**John Dittmeier** - August 27, 2020 at 09:36 AM

JC

“ Gary was a wonderful boss and mentor and a Great Friend. He had a strong faith in GOD. I am sorry we lost touch over the years. He loved the Irish and Gumbo. RIP Gary. He will always be in my heart.  
- John Criswell

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**John Criswell** - August 26, 2020 at 02:46 PM