



Robert Bonner Norcross

August 8, 1961 - December 27, 2023

Robert Bonner Norcross died December 27, 2023, stolen by Early Onset Alzheimer's at 62.

But Rob lives in the wind in the trees, in the ripples in the water, in the flap of wings, in the flash of a white tail in the woods at Hatchie Coon, and in the hearts of his hunting and fishing friends there, and in the deep brown and now sad eyes of a beloved Labrador, Shug.

He lives in the unlikely combination of homemade gumbo and a Manhattan. He lives in the unlikely combination of a tiny town and a big city, as comfortable with his hand in rich earth as his hand in the realized vision for the transformation of a cityscape.

As much as anyone in Memphis history, he lives in our built places, where we live and work, where we play.

He lives in the memory of a man who barely looked old enough to drink that Manhattan or legally buy a beer. When he talked about what he'd done, he had that sparkle in his eye and that gee whiz tone in his voice that young people have – anything is possible, everything is an adventure.

He had that to almost to the very end, and Alzheimer's can't steal the memory

of that sparkle, of that gee whiz in the promise of every day.

Rob leaves his wife of 37 years, Jill, and their children, Phoebe and Brandt Norcross. And Shug. He is predeceased by his father, Bob, and Bob's two brothers, Rick and Bill Norcross as well as his uncle Bill Prest. He is survived by his mother, Ginger Norcross, his sister, Helene Norcross Rayder, brothers, Jon Norcross (Scott Paterek) and Michael Norcross (Mira), his aunts, Barbara Prest, Jeanie Norcross, and Julie Norcross, his first cousins, Herrick Norcross (Lucy), Gary Norcross (Amy), Jenne Williams (Tom), Bill Prest (Jennifer), Tommy Prest (Shelly), Christopher Prest (Jessica), Amanda Norcross Brody (Stu), Matt Norcross (Jessilyn), three nieces, four nephews, brothers from another mother, Mike Sullivan, Pierre Landaiche, and Scott Van Der Jagt.

He started on a big cotton, rice, and bean farm in Tyronza, Arkansas – a wide spot in the road not far from Memphis, and Rob is never far from there. His past is part of his present, his family – past and present – integral. His respect for land and its use came from there. His fascination for form and structure came from there, too, roaming among the bones of old farm buildings and foundations. And there he learned that things don't move until people pull together.

He was a proud graduate of Marked Tree High School and the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design (formerly the University of Arkansas School of Architecture). He made friends for life there, in the School, in his fraternity, Phi Delta Theta, and he met Jill in his final year.

Three years later at their rehearsal dinner, Jill rose and raised her glass for a fun toast, "May he serve me well," she laughed.

And so he did. And his kids, and his family, and his friends, and his church, and his profession. And his city.

Rob was an architect's architect, licensed in seven states. You may not think you knew him, but you did. And you liked him.

The next time you walk the broad and shady concourse on a hot day in AutoZone Park, or spill a beer at the crack of a bat or the joy of a goal, raise that beer to Rob. The next time you see Grizzlies growl at FedExForum, or Tigers roar, or the entire building rock at a concert, wave a towel or tip your hat or dance in the aisle for Rob.

He was the architect for, hands down, the most acclaimed minor league ballpark in the country, and for the commodious and boisterous home of first grit and grind and now Penny and Ja – places where we get together and come together to cheer.

And if you ask Rob about either of them, he'll just smile and say something that defines him as much as the landmarks he's designed, as much as the big ideas he's had.

"I was part of a team," he'd say.

And he's right. He was a principal in Looney Ricks Kiss, and for the last three decades he was a principal player in the firm's unquestioned influence on this city's built environment. In Rob's estimation, the credit for all of that is shared, all the accolades and awards are shared, all the ups and downs, all the all-nighters, all the elation and rejection – all shared.

That kind of recognition of others and that kind of humility in someone so creative is to his credit and his colleagues' benefit.

To our benefit as a city.

As South City continues to transform one end of downtown and St. Jude the other, as Soulsville grows, know that Rob had a hand in that. When you have a drink in Eight & Sand or dinner in Bishop, or anything in the Memphis-centric, reimagined Central Station Hotel, he had a hand in that, too. And in the Memphis-Shelby County Land Use Control Board, the Memphis Landmarks Commission, many of the homes in Harbor Town, and in AutoZone's headquarters, and in the FedEx World Technology Center in Collierville.

And more, and in recognition Rob was awarded the prestigious Francis Gassner Award by AIA Memphis in 2020. Scott Van Der Jagt, AIA, cited his friend and colleague's many accomplishments in the nomination, among those not already mentioned:

Leadership Memphis

Memphis Leadership Academy University of Arkansas Deans Circle, Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design

Grace-St. Luke's Vestry St. Columba, outreach ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee.

Regional Memphis Design Center, Founding Committee Member

Boys & Girls Club of Memphis, Board Member

All that being said, Rob was as comfortable and at ease in all those rooms as he was with his friends at Hatchie Coon, or with the guys at his Tuesday lunches, or with his buddies on a golf course. As comfortable in a

conversation about city planning or about his 1957 Chevy.

All that being said, if you asked Rob what his proudest accomplishment might be he'd probably tell you passing all sections of his licensing exams in a single setting, or the people he's mentored, or maybe how far he hit a four iron that afternoon.

And then he'd tell you about a putt somebody else made.

Rob Norcross's vision is in the Memphis we see today, and that vision has helped set the standards for the Memphis we hope to see tomorrow.

He lives in that vision. He lives in our hearts.

A Requiem Eucharist will be offered Saturday, January 13, at 11 a.m. at Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 1720 Peabody Avenue, in Memphis.

The family asks that you wear blue or red, Rob's favorite colors, to his funeral service. We have grieved too long. It is time to celebrate as a community in honor of this fine man.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church, St. Columba Episcopal Retreat Center, or The Walk to End Alzheimer's Team RoBoNo http://act.alz.org/goto/Team_RoBoNo.

Tribute Wall

VA

“ Rob Norcross, first met in Jackson, TN on a JV project, the Lowell Thomas State Office Bldg, worked with Rob and Tony P.. He (and Tony) were incredible to work with. I've seen the LRK video recod, that was great, captured his essence in a nutshell. He will be missed much by many. Peace and prayers to his all of his families.
Vic

Victor C. Buehler Architect - January 04, 2024 at 10:59 PM

TA

“ Rest in Peace Brother.

Troy Ammons - December 31, 2023 at 07:41 PM

JM

“ I am saddened by the loss of our friend who I have known since kindergarten. We have many great memories like his 1956 Chevrolet (which ran out of gas on our way home from Jonesboro and we had to get a ride with a sketchy driver). The trips to Memphis, weekend trips to Fayetteville, and growing up in rural Arkansas. He always wore a smile. He and his family were very influential in the early years of my life and I am forever grateful to have been his friend. I ask God to be with his family and friends in this time of mourning. 🙏 Jerry K Miller



Jerry Miller - December 31, 2023 at 06:45 PM

SG

“ I remember Rob and his family as a child while my grandmother Anna Watson worked for them in Tyrnza. Rob was so nice as well as the rest of them. I didn't realize until now how close in age Rob and I were. As kids I always thought I was so much older. They loved my grandmother as much as we did. I remember going to work with her from time to time and getting to play with them. Life happens and we grow older and miles apart and don't see or talk as much as we would like. I am grateful for Facebook where I was able to be his friend and from time to time keep up with what was happening in his life. He was truly a sweet and compassionate soul and I am thankful to have know him. I will continue to lift you all in prayer. Rest well Rob 🙏

Shelia Newton (Anna Watson granddaughte) - December 30, 2023 at 12:09 PM

CD

“ Rob, Helene, and I went to school at MTHS. I remember Rob asking me to the prom (1976) He was a 10th grader and I was a 9th grader. He wore a burgundy tux and I wore a light pink gown. Rob was always so nice and sweet. I'm so glad to have this precious memory of my wonderful friend.
Heaven has gotten a beautiful angel. Fly high Rob Norcross. ❤️

Cynthia Schulz Driver - December 29, 2023 at 10:09 PM

BR

“ I had the honor of hiring and collaborating with Rob at Wilson/Jenkins & Associates and Barretta & Associates in South Florida circa 1984-1987. His obituary magnificently captures Rob as a person and professional and I echo it. In addition to our shared love and commitment to architecture we were Phi Delta brothers and enjoyed sharing stories of our college days. I also remember his golfing prowess and his proclivity for wearing Duck Head chinos as an integral part of his preppie wardrobe.

I knew that he had a bright professional future ahead of him and was very sorry to see him depart for "home" but understood his motivations. It is very rewarding to know that he more than lived up to his potential and that I played a small part in his early professional development.

Rest in peace Brother Rob. I am very saddened at your passing but know that you are in the arms of the Savior and healed forever. Jill and family, my love and condolences to you all.

Bruce W Retzsch AIA

Bruce Retzsch - December 29, 2023 at 12:47 PM

CG

Hello, my sincere condolences Toto Jill and their children. My name is Cheryl, my Grandmother, Anna was Rob's maid growing up in Tyrnza. I remember Rob as a young boy very kind. Before my Grandmother passed, He and Jill brought their baby girl for "Mother" (that's what her family and Jon called her) to hold. I still have the precious photo of them. May God bless you, Rob. My Grandmother loved you dearly. Prayers 🙏 for your dear Mother, Miss Ginger, your sister, Helene, and your brothers, Mije and Jon.

Cherryl Burnett (Anna Watson's Gdaughter - December 29, 2023 at 11:50 PM