



Mr. Robert Hughes Willetts

July 15, 2024

Robert Hughes Willetts, 71, transitioned to eternal life on July 15, 2024, surrounded by loved ones. The son of the late John E. and Evelyn B. Willetts, Bob was born in Reading, PA. He graduated from Suffield Academy and received his bachelor's degree in Art from Coker College and master's degree in Fine Arts and Photography from the University of South Carolina.

Bob divided his childhood between two worlds. Growing up in Camden, SC, he played in the woods and sailed on Wateree Lake. Summers were spent in Pennsylvania near his grandfather, who was a pivotal person in Bob's life. Living near the railroad tracks, he crawled into windowsills as a young child to watch the trains go by, beginning a lifelong passion.

As an adult, Bob combined his love for art and trains into a career. A gifted and talented artist in his own right, Bob taught art in various public schools, stressing both art techniques and critical thinking. His students loved him, dubbing him their "crazy art teacher." In his spare time, Bob purchased and restored the J. Pinckney Henderson private railcar. His meticulous craftsmanship caught the eye of longtime friend and mentor Elton Miller. With Elton's guidance, Bob turned his hobby into an expansive career. Combining his artistic sensibility and his mechanical aptitude, Bob spearheaded the private railcar restoration shop for the Lancaster & Chester Railroad before opening his own shop a decade ago in Spencer.

Through the years, Bob and his crews transformed derelict railcars into showpieces with elegant interiors, functional layouts, and precision mechanics. Some of his most notable work includes the restoration of the historic SunBeam, a 1903 wooden Pullman palace car on display at Hildene: The Lincoln Family Home, and the Belford/NS 99, a state-of-the-art track geometry car featuring stadium seating and an all-glass platform end. He was also very active at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, where he painted and restored many rail cars.

Bob lived in Spencer with his dogs. He was active in Spencer Presbyterian Church, where he served as an elder and property manager. Easily recognized by his handlebar mustache, Bob humbly served his community, being a judge for local elections and volunteering to help with the annual Christmas parade and clean-up days.

Bob is survived by sister, Lyn Wooten, and brother, Mac Willetts, both of Camden, SC; stepmother, Susan Willetts and stepsisters Colette Slemp, Camden, SC, and Dede Hamlet, Richmond, VA; daughter Tammy Blume, Harrisburg, NC, grandchildren Grady and Claire Tate, Kannapolis and Harrisburg, NC, respectively, and many friends.

A celebration of life will be held at 1 pm on Monday, July 22, 2024, at Spencer Presbyterian Church. The family will receive friends immediately after the service. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Spencer Presbyterian Church, PO Box 4, Spencer, NC 28159, or the charity of your choice.

Summersett Funeral Home is serving the Willett family. Online condolences may be made at www.summersettfunerahome.com.

Tribute Wall

EB

“ *Mr. Willetts was my favorite teacher at Hartsville Junior High. I still remember many of the skills & projects from his art class. He took the time to connect with his students.*

Elizabeth Duncan Butler - July 30, 2024 at 05:49 PM

TT

“ *Mac, Sorry to hear of your brother's passing. You will be in our prayers.*
Terry Thomas



Terry Thomas - July 23, 2024 at 01:10 PM

JG

“ *Prayers for the family.*



Jeff Galloway - July 22, 2024 at 08:34 PM

LW

“ *Letitia Griggs Ward lit a candle in memory of Mr. Robert Hughes Willetts*



Letitia Griggs Ward - July 19, 2024 at 08:48 PM

LS

“ *Met Bob back in the seventies when my wife was at Coker. We had a great time at the Carolina Cup together in Camden. Prayers for his family.*
Larry and Brenda Stewart

Larry Stewart - July 19, 2024 at 09:01 AM

RW

“ Ron Wall lit a candle in memory of Mr. Robert Hughes Willetts



Ron Wall - July 19, 2024 at 07:32 AM

CT

“ Mac I was am so sorry to hear of Roberts’s passing. He touched so many people. He will surely be missed. You are in our prayers.

Curtis A. Tyner - July 18, 2024 at 08:43 PM

GO

“ Mr willets was a great inspiration and one of my teachers at Hartsville Junior high from 1987 to 1981 he will be missed. Prayers for you all



Grady L O'Neal - July 18, 2024 at 08:06 PM

MR

Bob was an immensely talented individual! He will be missed by many !

Mike Rast - July 20, 2024 at 05:55 PM