Celebrating

THE LIFE OF



WILLIE CLARENCE SMITH

October 28, 1951 - August 31, 2026

Celebration of Life
Friday, September 11, 2026
Family Hour - 11am
Service - 12pm

St. Luke AME Zion
At Calvin Church
700 Ethel Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Order of Service

Welcome	Rev. Dwight Gutridge
Prayer	Rev. Dwight Gutridge
Song Selection	Sauda Smith
Scripture	Elijah Smith- Verwys

Slide Show

Remarks	Britney & Gabriel Smith-Verwys
Eulogy	Rev. Nathaniel Moody
Alter Call	Rev. Nathaniel Moody

Military Honor

Commital	Rev. Nathaniel Moody

Obituary

THE LIFE OF WILLIE C. SMITH

Willie Clarence Smith was born on October 28, 1951. He was the first-born child of Mildred Ann (Roberts) Smith and Willie Bell Smith. Willie, or Clarence, as he was called by many family members, was raised in the farmlands of Shannon, MS.

In 1958, the family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Once there, Clarence attended schools including South High and Central High. He played several sports and also played trumpet in the school band. He graduated from Central in 1971.

Like millions of other young men during the early 1970s, Willie Clarence was drafted. After joining the United States Army, Clarence was stationed in several places, including Maryland, California, and Alaska. He played intramural basketball for the Army and also played trumpet in the Army band.

After receiving an honorable discharge, Willie Clarence returned to Grand Rapids. At a party thrown by his future brother-in-law, Rondy Brown, he was reintroduced to Cynthia Figures. The two married in November 1976. To this union, three children were born: Nareissa, Britney, and Sauda (Oodie).

Willie wanted to give his family a solid foundation. So, like his father and grandfather before him, he was an active member of St. Luke A.M.E. Zion church. He accepted Christ there at a young age.

Willie served as chair of the church Usher Board, but his involvement didn't stop there. On many Sundays, you could find him in the church kitchen making his special blend of punch to go with the after-church meal. He also drywalled and wallpapered the upstairs bathrooms for seniors in the choir area.

Willie supported his family by working at Steelcase as a machinist and hi-lo driver. However, his entrepreneurial spirit knew no limits. Clarence started many successful businesses. He was also the driving force behind his family's investment group, F.A.C.T.

Obituary

THE LIFE OF WILLIE C. SMITH

While the businesses were important, Willie's true passion was horses. He especially loved Tennessee Walkers. Willie became an accomplished horseman and rode show horses professionally at horse shows around the nation. He was one of the first Black men to do so.

In the early 2000s, Willie Clarence met Fatima Jones, a woman who shared his love of horses and riding. The two married in a western-themed ceremony in April 2007.

Beyond everything, Willie Clarence loved people. People were drawn to his warmth and wit. He never met a stranger, because if he did, they'd soon become his friend. Willie collected friends at work and church, on deer hunting trips, on the basketball court, on the ballroom dance floor, and everywhere else he went.

It helped that Willie Clarence had a wicked sense of humor. He loved to tell stories and jokes. He could tell the wildest stories so sincerely that the listener could almost believe that the tall tale might be true. But the twinkle in his eye or his giggle would nearly always give it away.

Willie Clarence departed this life on August 31, 2026, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, unexpectedly.

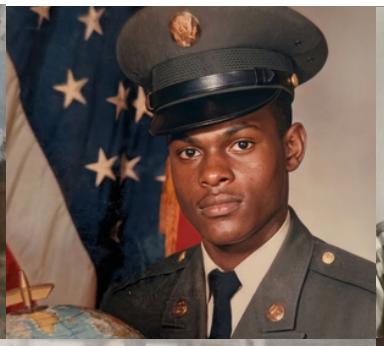
Preparing the path before him in heaven are his father, Willie Bell, and mother, Mildred, as well as his sister Mary Brown, nephew Derek D. Smith, and many beloved aunts and uncles.

Left here to mourn his passing are his daughters: Nareissa Smith, and her daughter, Makeda; Britney (Raymond) VerWys, and their children Gabriel, Elijah, Lucas, and Zoe; and Sauda Smith, and her son, Christopher;. He also leaves behind a very special bond with Nathifa Smith, whom he held dear to his heart, as well as her extended family.

He also leaves his siblings, Danny Smith, Pauline (Chris) Mitchell, Jerome (Aleta) Smith, and David Smith; brother-in-law Rev. Dr. Rondy Brown; former spouse Rev. Cynthia Smith Keys; former spouse Fatima Jones, and her daughter Catrina Jones; a special friend, Doris Hall, three former sisters-in-laws, Cheryl Turner-Smith, Lisa Mack-Gholston, and Raquel Milton; aunts and uncles Reuben Roberts, Pauline Ussery, Glover (Alene) Roberts, and Ernestine (Fred) Bowman; close friends James and Sandra Brown, Richard and Robin Parks, a host of nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews, and too many friends to count.

Life in Color


















Life in Color



Life in Color

























PALL BEARERS

Gabriel Smith-Verwys
Elijah Smith-Verwys
Christopher Crudup
Lucas Smith-Verwys
Ray Verwys
Daniel Smith

HONORARY PALL BEARERS

Danny Smith
David Smith
Jerome Smith
Clarence Marshall
Rev. Dr. Rondy Brown
Chris Mitchell
James Brown
Richard Park

STATEMENT FROM SIBLINGS

Willie Clarence was a joyful, larger-than-life brother who filled our childhood with laughter, dancing, jokes, and unforgettable memories. While his playful teasing and stubborn streak often drove us crazy, his love for his family was never in doubt. One of my fondest memories is when he came to pick me up after learning our father was dying, making sure I didn't have to face that difficult drive alone. That simple act of kindness reflected the compassion and love our parents instilled in all of us. Clarence's presence, humor, and caring heart will be deeply missed, but his memory will forever remain with those who loved him.

SPECIAL THANKS

St. Luke A.M.E. Zion Church
Aunts & Uncles

ARRANGEMENTS

Toombs by Crystal

REPAST

Repast will follow immediately after services in the Fellowship Hall

BURIAL

Tuesday, September 15, 2026
11:30 AM
Fort Custer National Cemetery
49012 W. Dickman Rd.
Augusta, MI 49012