

Joseph M. Gray, 90, passed away peacefully on October 4, 2024, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, surrounded by family and those he loved and cared for. Born on March 28, 1934, in Bristol, Virginia, Joe was raised in Bristol, Tennessee, where he lived on Fifth Street and on Gray's Dairy on Weaver Pike with his adored sister, Sylvia. One of his favorite childhood memories was a summer trip with his Aunt Mary, sister, and cousins Charlotte and Charles to go to Aspen, Colorado, to see Albert Schweitzer speak at a conference. They started in Bristol and toured 33 states across the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, playing one of Joe's favorite songs along the way: "Ghost Riders in the Sky."

He attended Bristol Tennessee High School where he was a student manager of the football and basketball teams. Joe spent his summers working for his uncles on the family dairy where their chocolate milk was his favorite. During college, he worked for the U.S. Forestry Service near Kooskia, Idaho, one summer, stationed on a remote fire lookout tower only accessible by horseback. Joe attended East Tennessee State University where he received a B.S. in History. He was a proud member – and president – of Pi Kappa Alpha, was selected for "Who's Who in American Universities and Colleges," and was a member of the ROTC.

Joe's life was dedicated to service to his country. He began his military career in the U.S. Army as a Second Lieutenant in 1957, retiring as a Colonel after 28 years. He served at Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; Vietnam; the Pentagon; Korea; and Germany. His final military assignment was as Command Director and Crew Commander at Cheyenne Mountain, North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado Springs. During his military career Joe received the National Defense Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, the Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Service Stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, Meritorious Service Medal, Armed Forces Honor Medal, and the Joint Services Commendation Medal. Joe said that being in the military was a proud, treasured, and most important period of his life.

After retiring in Colorado Springs, Joe continued to support the military. He sponsored four U.S. Air Force Academy cadets through a program that provides cadets without local family with a home away from home during breaks from the Academy. Joe was active with The Crawford House, which provided support to military veterans with housing, obtaining their authorized benefits, employment, and getting back on their feet. He helped put out hundreds of American flags in his community for national holidays that recognized our military and celebrated our nation's democracy and independence. He loudly cheered from the stands – and later from his living room – for the U.S. Air Force Academy football and basketball teams.

Joe was committed to serving others and was active in the Gleneagle Sertoma (Service to Mankind) which helps people who need assistance in overcoming speech and hearing health related challenges and supports other projects that improve the quality of life in the community. Joe was a proud member of the First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, and his faith was of the utmost importance to him. Joe donated every month to the Weaver Pike Cemetery in

Bristol, TN. He always told us to remember to find that way to "give back" as the need is always there.

Joe was proud of his son David's "Dave's Dogs" business and was excited to have the "Dad's Dog" named after him. Every week he looked forward to the updates on weekend desserts and specials that would be featured. Joe donated every month to the local shelter that Dave's Dogs and their customers supported to increase the finding of new homes for homeless dogs and cats in Prince William County, Virginia.

Joe was an avid golfer and played in the Patriot Golf Tournament, many times with his son, Joe. He also supported the Senior Golf Tournament when he could no longer play himself. Joe was a faithful New York Giants fan and rooted for the University of Tennessee Vols.

Joe treasured the family vacations each December in Folly Beach, South Carolina. He loved our traditions including the family Christmas Grab Bag and breakfast at Lost Dog Café, and he adored being with his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. A visit to see Joe in Colorado always included a drive out to the infamous Gray Acres and photos with the hugging tree.

Up until the very end, Joe ran his loser football pool as Commish Joe, kept us all well-educated with his daily Brain Quiz, and participated without fail every Sunday during our family FaceTime – signing off with his signature wave goodbye. He had breakfast and dinner every day with his friends and was well loved by all who knew him. Joe was a friend to all and could make you feel like the most important person in the world – whether he knew you for his entire life or just met you.

He met and married Betty Jean Palmer from Kingsport, Tennessee, and was the cherished father of their four children: Lisa Deyo of Glen Allen, Virginia; Karen Edwards of Woodbridge, Virginia; Joe Gray, Jr. (Rolla) of Leesburg, Virginia; and David Gray of Woodbridge, VA. Joe was a devoted grandfather to – and beyond proud of – Lauren DeMarco (Kellen) of Moseley, Virginia; Logan Deyo of Issaquah, Washington; Austin Gray of Coxsackie, New York; Christian Alexander Gray of Ranson, West Virginia; and Michael Kallam (Rachel) of Leesburg, Virginia. He adored his great-grandchildren: Bennett, Julia, Ari, Amelia, and Betty Lynn. Family meant everything to Joe.

Joe is also survived by his beloved cousin, Charlotte Williamson of Aiken, South Carolina; niece, Mary Edgar Berry (Mike) of Williamsburg, VA; nephew Frank Edgar, Jr. (Ann) of Hampton, Virginia; and brother-in-law, Frank Edgar, Sr. of Hampton, VA.

Joe also leaves behind his treasured friends: Toni Fleming, Mark Alcorn, Gloria Milhoan, Lynn and Kay Stricklan, Loreen Kollar, Marsha Bishop, and Jackie Welz.

Joe was predeceased by his mom, Ruth Cowan Harris Gray; his dad, David E. Gray; his adored

sister, Sylvia Edgar; his uncles: Charles Gray (Grace), Paul B. Gray (Marjorie), and Cecil W. Gray (Marguerite); aunt Mary A. Gray; and cousins, Elaine Gray and Jim Gray.

A private inurnment service will be held later in Arlington National Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, please give to Partners in Housing ([partnersinhousing.org](http://partnersinhousing.org)) in Colorado Springs, CO, or the Veterans Community Project ([veteranscommunityproject.org](http://veteranscommunityproject.org)) in Longmont, Colorado.