



William "Willie" Lee Strell

February 13, 1954 - July 20, 2025

William "Willie" Lee Strell, 71, of Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family. Born on February 13, 1954, in LaSalle, Illinois, to the late Frank and Amelia Strell, Willie was one of four boys who grew up with a deep love of sports, camaraderie, and family. He went to LaSalle-Peru Township High School, where he was captain of the golf team and built lifelong friendships.

An exceptional student and natural leader, Willie earned a prestigious appointment to the United States Air Force Academy, graduating with the Class of 1976. He proudly served in the United States Air Force as a fighter pilot, flying the F-4 Phantom, T-38 Talon, and the A-5 Aggressor during his distinguished career. While stationed at Hahn AFB in Germany, Willie met the love of his life, Vickie Stinnett. They married and shared over 44 wonderful years together, raising two children, Rebecca and Bradshaw.

After returning stateside, the Strells lived in Alamogordo, New Mexico, and later Las Vegas, Nevada, before settling in Memphis, Tennessee, where Willie transitioned from military service to a career as a commercial pilot for Federal Express. He proudly served as a Captain for FedEx for over 30 years, balancing his professional life with his greatest joys: family, golf, and cheering for his favorite teams—the Chicago Cubs, Chicago Bears, and Alabama football.

In retirement, Willie and Vickie moved to Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, where they became active members of Wachesaw Plantation Club. There, Willie spent countless happy hours on the golf course and developed cherished friendships. He and Vickie also loved to travel, exploring more than 50 countries together and especially enjoying river cruises with friends. The couple split their time between South Carolina and their beloved retreat in Fairhope, Alabama, where Willie loved spending time with his precious grandchildren and walking his dog, Wrigley, along the shores of Mobile Bay.

Beyond his achievements and passions, Willie will be remembered most for the way he lived—with loyalty, humor, and a quiet generosity that touched countless lives. To know him was to love him, and his legacy lives on in the love of his family, the friendships he cherished, and the many memories he leaves behind.

Willie is survived by his devoted wife, Vickie Stinnett Strell; his daughter, Rebecca Strell Roberts (Mark); his son, William Bradshaw Strell; his cherished grandchildren, William York Roberts and Amelia Ann Roberts; his brothers, Frank Strell and Fred Strell; sisters-in-law Jill Strell, Gaynelle Stinnett, and Pat Campbell; brother-in-law Ricky Stinnett; and numerous nieces, nephews, and lifelong friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Frank and Amelia Strell; his father-in-law Roy Gay Stinnett and mother-in-law Mozelle Stinnett; his brother Richard Strell; brothers-in-law Bill, Ronnie, and Gay Stinnett and Bill Campbell; and sister-in-law Dorothy Stinnett.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 29, 2025, at Precious Blood of Christ Catholic Church in Pawleys Island, South Carolina. A celebration of Willie's life will follow at Kimbels at Wachesaw Plantation in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina where all are welcome.

The family requests that memorial gifts be made in support of the Heart and Vascular Center at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) in Charleston.

Previous Events

A Mass of Christian Burial

JUL **29**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Precious Blood of Christ Catholic Church
1633 Waverly Rd
Pawleys Island, SC 29585

Tribute Wall



“ *Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.*



August 09, 2025 at 08:48 PM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.*



August 07, 2025 at 08:48 PM



“ *A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of William "Willie" Lee Strell.*

August 07, 2025 at 08:48 PM



“ *Willie, I'm sorry I lost touch. So many years....You were a great roommate at the Zoo. We survived Evil 8 and Smiling Jack. You beat me at tennis and golf every time. But I cherished your friendship and laughter. My thoughts are with you and your family.
Bruce Kuelz*

Bruce Kuelz - July 30, 2025 at 06:39 PM

NC

“ Gonna miss you Willie. Pilot Training class 7708. Neil Cahoon '76

Neil Cahoon - July 29, 2025 at 12:28 AM

M'

“ RIP, Willie.

Mick Erdle, '76 - July 28, 2025 at 10:22 AM

JB

“ Jerry and Anne Burgoni purchased the Basket Full of Wishes for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.



Jerry and Anne Burgoni - July 27, 2025 at 08:51 PM

MI

“ Vicki, kids, and grandkids - Willie was our dear dear friend. Afte we got into the Academy together we became brothers. We'll be praying for you and forever praying to him in heaven. You have MaryAnn and my love forever.

Mike - July 27, 2025 at 01:46 PM

BS

“ Great pilot, great friend, and great classmate! Going to miss seeing you in T-town and having our "Tide talks". Roll Tide! Nickel on the grass, my friend!

Brad "Moose" Sharpe

Brad Sharpe - July 27, 2025 at 12:00 PM

DS

“ Don (Shady) and Cindy Shadensack purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.



Don (Shady) and Cindy Shadensack - July 26, 2025 at 05:19 PM

GB

“ Greg and Brenda purchased the Enduring Grace for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.



Greg and Brenda - July 26, 2025 at 07:53 AM



“ Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.



July 25, 2025 at 12:53 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of William "Willie" Lee Strell.

July 25, 2025 at 12:53 PM

MH

“ Willie - it was a damn good run.

Marty Holland - July 24, 2025 at 06:28 PM

KA

“ Our sincere condolences for the loss of your loved one. May 'the God of all comfort' be with your family at this difficult time. Isaiah 41:10

Kathryn - July 24, 2025 at 04:37 PM

JP

“ Will and I left Colorado Springs after graduation to convoy down to Phoenix for pilot training. We were crossing the Four Corners region at night, he in the lead with his 'Vette, me in radar trail with my Firebird. We were in the middle of nowhere, which made the flashing red lights behind me stand out even more. Fortunately, the officer let me off with a warning but said, as he walked off, “And when you catch up to your friend in the Corvette, tell him to slow down as well”. Will was waiting for me at the next gas station.

Later, at George AFB in California for F-4 training, he and I were BOQ roomies (the shared kitchen arrangement, you know). One day, Will made the most wonderful Tollhouse cookies. They were absolutely awesome. Of course, I had decided to go on a diet and I told him “I can have one cookie, and then on Tuesday I can have another”. He rolled his eyes and looked at me like I had lost my mind. And, he was right. One of my regrets in life was not sitting down to that warm baking sheet with a glass of cold milk and doing serious damage to his output. My loss. We'll catch up with you out west, Will.

Jim Porter - July 24, 2025 at 02:43 PM

LA

“ Many great memories. The Zoo, Gomers, golf, and many more. Willie was a great pilot and better friend. Nickel

Larry 'Dirt' Austin - July 24, 2025 at 11:00 AM



“ *Willie was our Honour Rep in CS 08. I remember him as a voice of reason and stability! He made USAFA a better place!* ”

Carl Nuzzo - July 24, 2025 at 10:03 AM

C7

“ *Willie was more than an Academy classmate, he was also a good friend. We had many good conversations and shared experiences as cadets. Such a good guy. He will be missed.* ”

Calvin Allen, Class of 76 - July 24, 2025 at 12:30 AM

C7

Calvin Allen, Class of '76

Calvin Allen, Class of 76 - July 24, 2025 at 12:36 AM

KD

“ *Willie was a great fighter pilot and an outstanding friend. We had a great time fighting each other at Holloman AFB and we had a wonderful time causing mischief there. We painted a concrete parking slot right next to the Wing Commander's parking place labeled, "435th TFTS/Snacko" which really upset the boss. He had the concrete slab repainted, but, magically, it got painted again that night. Thee next morning the Wing Commander was looking for blood, but never figured out who did it. Nickel in the grass, Willie. Love you, buddy and miss you very much!* ”

Karl "Lips" Dittmer - July 23, 2025 at 11:34 PM

SK

“ *Godspeed classmate!* ”

Steve Krikorian, Spirit of '76

Steve Krikorian - July 23, 2025 at 11:15 PM

LN

“ Love you, Gina and Joe Nicosia purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of William "Willie" Lee Strell.



Love you, Gina and Joe Nicosia - July 23, 2025 at 06:02 PM

LN

“ Love you, Gina and Joe Nicosia planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William "Willie" Lee Strell.

Love you, Gina and Joe Nicosia - July 23, 2025 at 06:02 PM