



Gayle Howard Mills

May 31, 1945 - July 7, 2023

Cary, North Carolina - Gayle Howard Mills of Cary, North Carolina, passed away peacefully in her daughter's home in Carrboro, NC, on July 7, 2023, after a long struggle with progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP).

She was born in Wake County, North Carolina, on May 31, 1945. The youngest of four children and the only girl, Gayle grew up on her family's farm in Carpenter and graduated from Apex High School.

When she was a freshman in high school, Gayle met the cutest boy in school, a senior of all things! Ralph Clayborne Mills was the love of her life. Maybe it was his expert bus-driving skills or his cute and sweet demeanor. Maybe it was her expert baton twirling skills as a majorette, basketball skills on the court, piano playing, or her beautiful smile! Whatever it was, they were smitten with each other and married on December 1, 1963. For 64 years, they have shared a beautiful love story and life together.

Gayle worked with The University of North Carolina upon graduation. Gifted with caring for others, she worked with and eventually operated Howard's Rest Home, her family's nursing home, until its closure in 1992. Gayle also served as a volunteer firefighter and first responder for the Morrisville Rural Fire Department and the community of Carpenter. She was one of a group of six women in 1976 to train and work as volunteer firefighters—the first female

firefighters in Wake County—of which she and her family have always been proud! She was hired as a firefighter in 1991 to work with the Morrisville Fire Department and eventually transitioned to a full-time position, earning the status of EMT, Captain, Inspector, and ultimately Fire Marshal. Gayle retired as Fire Marshal from the Morrisville Fire Department in 2008.

After retiring, Gayle spent time traveling to her home away from home, Emerald Isle, where she, Ralph, and her girls enjoyed fishing (especially flounder fishing), beach walking, boating, and thrift shopping. The beach was her happy place! When she wasn't at the beach, she loved to hop in the car for a day trip with Ralph and head off to often unknown destinations. It wasn't unusual for the two of them to return with something random and unexpected from their adventure—butter dishes, tea sets, furniture, boats, or even cars! Rarely a trip went by without a visit to one of their favorite eateries...usually grabbing a hotdog and having a picnic!

Early in their marriage, Ralph and Gayle traveled and performed with a Gospel quartet for which Gayle was the accompanist. Throughout the years, Gayle enjoyed camping with family and friends, playing softball, Fire Department BBQ fundraisers (cooking hushpuppies for hours!!), and playing cards with close friends. There were many trips to Myrtle Beach with the O.W.L.S. and women's group gatherings at Good Hope. She loved receiving beautiful flowers and musical tributes from her son, boating and jet skiing with Ralph and the girls, Cheetos, cherries, grapes and her infamous "lake cookies." She and her girls were well known for their synchronized jet ski routines and inner tube floating afternoons at Jordan Lake. Gayle could commandeer a boat like no other! Gayle liked to have fun and had a wonderful sense of humor!

Gayle was guided by her faith which sustained her through her own health challenges. She was an active member of Good Hope Baptist Church for her

entire life, serving as an organist and pianist for over 60 years. We can't begin to count the number of weddings, funerals, and special occasions that she played for! Gayle was also a member of the Good Hope Praise Band and Senior Gospel choir, taught various Sunday School classes, and participated in many other church activities.

With the progression of progressive supranuclear palsy, Gayle and Ralph moved into the Carrboro home of their daughter, Karin, for care and to be closer to their daughters.

Gayle was a cherished wife, dear friend, amazing mother of three, loved mother-in-law, and gift to us all! We are thankful for our many years with her!

Gayle was preceded in death by her beloved son, James "Jimmy" Mills; parents, Troy Mason Howard and Mildred Yates Howard; and brothers, Gerald Howard and Billy Howard. She is survived by her husband of 59 years, Ralph Mills; daughters, Karin Mills (Linda Bourne) of Carrboro, NC, and Tina Mills of Carrboro, NC; her fur babies Lila Mae and Missy; and four grandpuppies. She is also survived by her brother, Harold Howard (Alice) of Pittsboro, NC, sister-in-law Kaye Howard of Cary, NC, and numerous nephews and nieces.

A Memorial Service will be held at 11:00am on Friday, July 28, 2023, in Binkley Baptist Church, 1712 Willow Dr. Chapel Hill, NC 27514. The family will receive friends before the service from 10:00-11:00am. The service will be held in person and livestreamed at <https://youtube.com/live/y3zHZ7NX1f8?feature=share>

The family would like to thank our extended and special family and friends, and our Binkley Baptist Church and Good Hope Baptist Church families, for their help and support during this time in our lives. We thank you for walking

this path with us. We are grateful for the many wonderful folks at UNC Hospitals; and Transitions LifeCare for the kind, compassionate, and loving care they provided our entire family during our hospice care.

Memorial gifts may be made to CurePSP and Transitions LifeCare. We hope and pray that one day this disease finds a cure! In honor of Gayle, live every day on Earth to the fullest...and have a bowl of strawberry ice cream!

The family is being assisted by Wake Funeral & Cremation Service.

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 28. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Binkley Baptist Church
1712 Willow Dr
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Memorial Service

JUL 28. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Binkley Baptist Church
1712 Willow Dr
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Tribute Wall



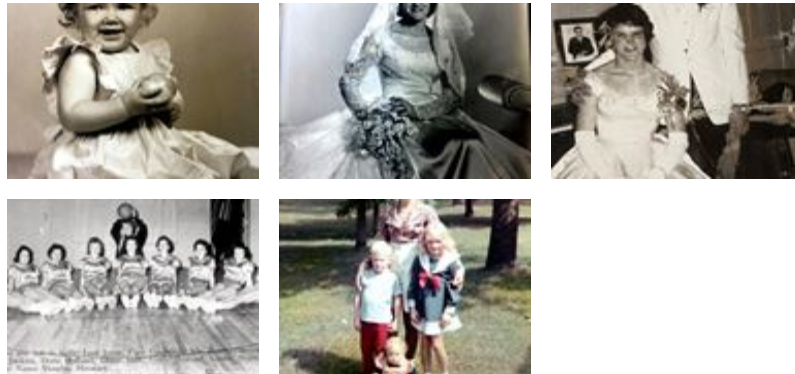
“ *Wake Funeral & Cremation Services, Inc. created a Tribute Video in memory of Gayle Howard Mills*



Wake Funeral & Cremation Services, Inc. - July 27, 2023 at 12:42 PM



“ *57 files added to the album Life Tributes*



Wake Funeral & Cremation Services, Inc. - July 27, 2023 at 11:48 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Gayle Howard Mills.*



July 26, 2023 at 11:40 AM

MD

“ The Morrisville Fire Department is greatly saddened by the loss of a family member. Ms. Gayle was such a big part of our history, and we cannot begin to express our gratitude. Gayle and Ralph are in our thoughts and prayers.

Morrisville Fire Department - July 24, 2023 at 02:38 PM

RK

“ Ronald K. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Gayle Howard Mills.

Ronald K. - July 18, 2023 at 03:03 PM

WS

“ I had the pleasure of working with Gayle at Morrisville FD. Many good memories of her. Please accept my sincere condolences.

William Savage - July 18, 2023 at 08:27 AM

JR

“ Jane R. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Gayle Howard Mills.

Jane R. - July 16, 2023 at 08:26 AM

MW

“ So sorry to hear of Gayle's passing. Many memories of her - especially as majorettes. 🙏❤️

Mary Olive Woodall - July 15, 2023 at 11:05 AM

PA

“ First time I showed up at Good Hope Church in 2009/2010 I went to the 35+

"Olivette Byrd" women's Sunday School class where Gayle was a regular contributing member who sometimes taught the class. Over time, I was surprised to learn Gayle was a Morrisville Fire Marshal and both my high school friend Renee Vaughn and her husband Asst Town Manager (former Fire Chief) Todd Wright knew both Gayle and Ralph.

Once I got them to tell me how to get from W. Cary, NC55 to South Point Mall without taking the highway. Mom and I have been on O'Kelly Chapel Rd long before all the development there.

I think it was 10 years ago when I got Gayle a "play on" greeting card and had the Church Choir, (few churches in our area are able to support a choir) to recognize and Thank her for her many decades accompanying the GHBC Choir. My last good pic of her was when she and Sandra sat at the table I decorated for the Christmas Women's Luncheon back in 2018. Thank You for all her dedication, contribution, and tireless work as part of our church and ministry. I fully expect Gayle has earned quite a comfortable mansion in the presence of Christ, the Creator.

Patty - July 15, 2023 at 09:49 AM

TM

Thank you for sharing these wonderful pictures.

Tina Mills - July 16, 2023 at 12:24 AM

PA

“ 8 files added to the album Gayle



Patty - July 15, 2023 at 04:39 AM

MW

“ Ralph: I am saddened to read of Gayle's passing. I have many fond memories of Gayle especially playing for church with Gayle at the organ and me at the piano and also the honor to have been asked to play for your wedding. I extend my sincere condolences to you and all the family.

Marlin Womble - July 14, 2023 at 04:15 PM

DK

“ Dear Karin and Family, I was so happy to be able to spend some time with your mom before her passing. Despite the awful disease she had a smile on her face and your dad sat beside her holding her hand showing the love of all those years. I have some fond memories of playing cards with them at the beach. My love to all of you. Diane Noll Koenigshofer



Diane Koenigshofer - July 14, 2023 at 08:16 AM

EA

“ *Ernie Autry lit a candle in memory of Gayle Howard Mills*



Ernie Autry - July 14, 2023 at 07:04 AM

DR

“ *Many a beautiful sound has come to my ears from this ladies' fingers! Rest In Peace.*

Dan Rhew - July 14, 2023 at 06:50 AM

BR

“ *Barbara Rupert lit a candle in memory of Gayle Howard Mills*



Barbara Rupert - July 13, 2023 at 05:13 PM

JC

“ *Jesse, Renee & Charles lit a candle in memory of Gayle Howard Mills*



Jesse, Renee & Charles - July 09, 2023 at 08:02 PM

RS

Dear Ralph, Karin and Tina.....Our hearts are so saddened to learn of sweet Gayle's passing. A light in this journey of life she has been for our family. Much love, Jesse, Renee' & Charles

Renee Spell - July 09, 2023 at 08:04 PM

AB

So sorry.

Aileen Bourne - July 13, 2023 at 06:52 PM

GS

“ *Grady & Donna Shields lit a candle in memory of Gayle Howard Mills*



Grady & Donna Shields - July 09, 2023 at 06:48 PM