



Don Williams

November 1, 1949 - May 23, 2007

Don Williams was a man who simply loved people. He was a man who truly invested in others, with personal interest and sacrifice, genuine caring and deep compassion. He had a quick wit and a natural charisma, both serving as a charming veneer to his heart of pure gold. He was a loving husband and devoted father, a good man, and a great friend to all who knew him. Don's story began on a cool fall day in 1949, in the little town of Tuscombia, Alabama. Those were good times in this country, the deep breath before the start of the Korean War. On November 1, J.D. and Marie (Lang) Williams celebrated the birth of a baby boy, a son they named James Donald, after his father. He was known by his middle name, Don, and joined six siblings in his family's home - Duane, Dwight, Deb, Robin, Kim and Tony. When he was just two years old, the family packed up and left their little northern Alabama town, moving to the Kalamazoo, Michigan area, where several members of his father's family worked for General Motors and Eaton Corporation. The family settled in Plainwell, where his parents developed Pine Crest Mobile Properties. Don was a student at Plainwell Schools, and as a youngster he enjoyed playing football. When he got to high school, he thought he was too small to keep playing football, so he moved on to other activities. He was a charming, well-known and liked student. He loved music and played trombone in the school band. After graduating in 1967, Don headed off to Detroit to attend Wayne State University, taking courses in Business. He was drawn back to West Michigan, however, when he was offered the job as manager of

the Otsego Elks Club. He wasn't yet old enough to be a member, and when they named him as manger he became the youngest manager of an Elks Club in Michigan history. With his professional life on a fast track, Don's personal life also began gathering steam. He met a beautiful young woman named Katie Stephens, who was attending Western Michigan University and worked in the Kalamazoo area. It didn't take long for Don to ask her out, and even less time for him to fall in love with her. In fact, he waited only until their second date to tell her he was going to marry her. They dated for awhile, and true to Don's prediction, were married on July 6, 1974, in Scottville, Michigan. The following year, the newlyweds took a chance on a new adventure and bought the Emerson Lake Inn in Walhalla, a fine food restaurant in a pleasant wooded area, with lakes and rivers nearby. Don just knew he could make the place a success, drawing on his manager's experience, his business schooling, and of course, his overflowing charm and hospitality. Don and Katie were blessed with two wonderful sons in the next few years, first Stephen, in 1978, with Jesse rounding out the happy family in 1980. Don was thrilled to become a father, and was an excellent dad, as well. He loved kids, not only his own but others around him, and whenever people brought their children to his restaurant, he went out of his way to make them feel special. That was Don's philosophy with everyone. He had a way of making you feel special, with a twinkle in his eye, natural charm and quick wit. The restaurant was his life, where he felt most at home, with unending opportunity to meet new people. He had great skills as a bartender, not only taking care of orders, but easily carrying on three conversations at once! He loved to tease his patrons, too, with good-natured ribbing. Whenever a couple came in together, he'd greet them with "so nice of you to bring your daughter in for dinner tonight, sir!" People sitting at the bar knew to keep a watchful eye on Don, too, or he'd pelt them with a hail of ice cubes! Underneath the charm and wit, Don had a heart of gold, and truly cared about his customers and employees. He was always helping people in some way, with their yard work, plowing their driveways, or giving them a ride home, and he always did so gladly and graciously. Don

gave many kids their first jobs, mentoring them with great patience and guidance. He held them to a high standard, and required they keep good grades in school, or he'd tell them to come back to work when their schoolwork improved. So many parents were grateful for Don's example and leadership. While the restaurant was indeed Don's life, he was far from all work and no play. He had many other passions and interests. He loved to play cards, especially cribbage and setback, and was a lifelong Beatles fan, too. Don enjoyed golfing, and in the summer he never missed a week playing with his buddies. He also was known for being Mr. Fix-It, and for his creative use of Duct tape. He could fix anything, as long as he had Duct tape. His favorite spot to relax and unwind was the "Red Moose Lodge" - his own garage, set with a place to work on his Corvette and a spot to watch sports on TV. Each year, Don planned and anticipated his moose-hunting trip to Wawa, Ontario, Canada, on the shores of Lake Superior. He was passionate about moose hunting and that was a special trip for Don, to a special place, and he made many special friendships there over the years. Throughout the year he'd collect clothing, eyeglasses, food, oak timber for carving, pheasant feathers for fishing lures and much more to take to the Wawa locals. The town became his second home, and he its adopted son. At the young age of 57, Don died unexpectedly on Wednesday, May 23, 2007, at his home on Emerson Lake. He was a wonderful man, full of lovable quirks, caring and compassion, with a quick wit and great charm. In his lifetime, brief as it was, his gracious spirit touched countless others. His life will continue on in the memories and example he set for those around him. Surviving Don is his wife Katie, his sons Stephen (Tammy) Williams of La Plata, Maryland, Jesse Williams and his fiancée Jessica Kortge of Lansing; his mother Marie (Robert) Meyers of Plainwell; his brothers and sisters Duane (Susie) Williams of Brighton, Dwight (Doreen) Williams of Jenison, Deb (Rick) Hyde of Climax, Robin (Jeff) Bishop of Pine Lake, Kim (Larry) Cooper, and Tony (Karen) Mitchell all of Plainwell, many nieces and nephews from the Williams family; his mother-in-law Virginia

Stephens of Tennessee; his brother-in-law Tim (Debbie) Stephens of Ludington; and his nephews Kasey and Ben Stephens of Austin, Texas. A Celebration of Life service, where stories and memories of Don will be shared, will be held at 3 p.m. on Sunday, May 27th at the Stephens Funeral Home in Scottville. Friends may meet with his family for a time of visitation on Saturday evening from 5-7 p.m. and on Sunday from 1 p.m. until time of services at the funeral home. Those who are unable to attend the service or visitation are invited to join the family Sunday afternoon following the service at the Emerson Lake Inn. Memorial contributions may be made to the Mason County Humane Society, or to the American Cancer Society Relay for Life. Funeral arrangements are being cared for by the Wyman Funeral and Cremation Services - Stephens Funeral Home in Scottville.