



## Clete Kelly

December 22, 1942 - February 5, 2025

In Loving Memory of Clete Kelly

A Life Well-Lived

Clete Kelly, a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend, passed away peacefully on February 5th, 2025, at the age of 82. Clete was born on December 22nd, 1942, in Queens, NY. From there, the family moved to Elkhart IN, where he spent his formative years surrounded by the love of his family and the support of his close-knit community. His father ran a local manufacturing plant and that role afforded Clete a running tab at the nearby soda fountain and candy stores. His frequent generosity to his friends and classmates while visiting those locations, affectionately earned Clete the nickname, "Jelly Belly Kelly."

Early Life and Education

From a young age, Clete exhibited a remarkable talent and drive for sports. Whether it was on the wrestling mat, the basketball court, or the baseball diamond, his enthusiasm and skill were apparent to everyone. Clete even made his way to being an accomplished pole vaulter, not an easy task for someone that was only 5 feet 7 inches!

However, Clete's engagement with school and education was a different story. Despite his natural intelligence and potential, he found it challenging to connect with academic pursuits. His heart belonged to the world of sports, and the traditional classroom setting did not capture his interest or imagination. He did, however, have a strong entrepreneurial spirit even at an early age. One of

his first business ventures was returning glass bottles for their refunds and then later in the day, circling back to where they stored those bottles and “liberating” them so that he could “re-return” them the next day for another refund!

Another interesting story about Clete was his early love for college football. Their local college team was none other than the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame. However, Clete and his father were not fans of the “Golden Domers” but not to worry. They still bought season tickets and attended many home games in South Bend...they would just cheer for the visiting team! Clete was even fortunate enough to continue that tradition for one more time as he visited South Bend again in 2017 to watch his beloved Georgia Bulldogs beat the Irish in a great game. What a trip that must have been!

### Career and Achievements

After graduating from Purdue University with a Bachelor of Science in Interior Design, Clete returned to the Big Apple to pursue a career in Visual Merchandising where he would help design the window displays for Bloomingdales. He quickly made a name for himself in the industry, known for his dedication, integrity, and innovative spirit. Over the years, he held various positions with large retailers and ultimately made his way to work for Rich’s in Atlanta. While here in Atlanta, Clete started and built Exhibits South, a thriving tradeshow business that has employed and helped many wonderful people and still does to this day. Clete had many career moments that he was proud of but the one he spoke most of was that prior to building Exhibits South, he was fired from every other role he ever held. A true story that he would often recite quite fondly.

### Family and Personal Life

Clete's greatest joy in life was his family. While at Purdue, Clete married his high school sweetheart and they had two children, Shane Christopher Kelly and Shannon Paige Kelly-Fyke. At Exhibits South, Clete met Marlene, married her in 1993, and built a life filled with love and laughter. They were blessed

with a growing blended family that included Stacey Mercer Dickinson and Nikki Holliday. Sons-in-laws would come in the form of Chad Dickinson and Brad Holliday.

Clete's boundless love extended to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He cherished every moment spent with his grandchildren that included Kristen Davis (and her husband Chris), Caleb Cotner, Sadie Dickinson, John Dickinson, Lucy Holliday, and Ruby Holliday. As well as time spent with his great-grandchildren Jackson Davis and Hayes Davis.

Between Clete, Marlene, and never to be forgotten (and never far from their side) Nannie (Joyce Ann Hartley), they built a home that was the central focus for everyone they knew. It remains a place of magic and cherished memories, a home built with love.

#### A Legacy of Love

Clete Kelly leaves behind a legacy of love, kindness, and dedication. His impact on the lives of those he touched is immeasurable, and his memory will live on in the hearts of his family and friends. To honor his life, the family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Salvation Army of Gwinnett County, a cause close to Clete's heart. Clete was also very fond of animals of any sort but especially of his little dachshund Marley. So, if you get a chance today to hug your dog or cat or maybe even your neighbors' pet for Clete, he would have liked that.

Beyond his family, Clete had several additional passions. He was an avid supporter of the Georgia Bulldogs and the Atlanta Braves. He enjoyed watching sunsets at Seacrest with a glass of white Zinfandel on the rocks. He also appreciated rare steaks, preferring them to come out still mooing! Clete relished weekends spent by the pool, spending time with family, watching the latest grandchild's dance routine, and engaging in water basketball where he could not be beaten!

Clete also loved his tools and was extremely handy. He could make just about anything and would bring it over to you in his big blue Tundra that had about a

million miles on it before he traded it in.

#### Conclusion

A memorial service to celebrate Clete's life will be held on Sunday February 9th from 1 to 5 PM at Flanigan Funeral Home in Buford. On Monday February 10th, there will be a viewing at 1pm followed with funeral service at 2PM at Buford First United Methodist Church on Main Street in downtown Buford.

Clete will be laid to rest at the Sugar Hill Cemetery.

Friends and family are invited to share their memories and pay their respects.

As we gather to remember Clete, we reflect on the incredible journey he undertook, a journey marked by love, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place. He was a kind man, he was a caring man, and he was a constant source of serenity to those around him.

He's taking those big blue eyes up to Heaven!

Rest in peace, Clete and know you are loved.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

FEB 9. 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

Flanigan Funeral Home  
4400 S. Lee St.  
Buford, GA 30518  
(770) 932-1133  
<https://www.flaniganfuneralhome.com/>

## Visitation

FEB 10. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (ET)

Buford First United Methodist Church  
285 E. Main Street, N.E.  
Buford, GA 30518

## Celebration of Life

FEB 10. 2:00 PM (ET)

Buford First United Methodist Church  
285 E. Main Street, N.E.  
Buford, GA 30518

## Interment

FEB 10 (ET)

Sugar Hill Cemetery  
W Broad St NE & Church St  
Sugar Hill, GA 30542



# Tribute Wall

KC

“Clete moved me from Tampa to Atlanta to join the ExhibitSouth team. We were just moving into a new building in Norcross and one of his first actions was to make sure we had a Basketball hoop in the warehouse.

*I was young, alone and new to the area. He made sure I was welcome and taken care of as I built my new life here. I owe so much to Clete.*

*Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for taking a chance on me. Thank you for the many games of around the world and understanding what is important in life. I love and miss you my friend.*

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**Karl Cartwright** - May 24, 2025 at 05:34 PM

HA

“Clete is just such an amazing person and impacted so many people's lives. He has been a great person taking us to football games, providing lots of love and happiness. We love you papa, love Harper



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**Harpernh2@gmail.com** - February 10, 2025 at 01:07 PM



“ 5 files added to the tribute wall



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**Shannon Fyke** - February 09, 2025 at 01:23 PM



“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



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**Shannon Fyke** - February 09, 2025 at 12:55 PM



“ *I remember Clete's generosity in sharing his SEC championship tickets with Chad who is a Gator because UGA seldom qualified for that game, but Florida usually did. Of course this was many years ago, but recently Clete has been able to enjoy the success of the Bull Dawg's. I hope they have a good football team in heaven that he can follow.*

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**John L. Dickinson** - February 09, 2025 at 11:39 AM

CA

“ I am very lucky to have had this fun loving man in my life. We had a lot of laughs together. I loved collage football time texting back and forth. Me being a Michigan fan. But I do have to say he has made me a Dawgs fan. I love you with all my heart and will miss you deeply. Your favorite niece Christy

Christy L Adams - February 08, 2025 at 07:31 AM

DS

“ We used to play tennis with Clete on Sundays We were introduced through one of his design Buddies.

He was an excellent athlete and one of the kindest people we ever knew.

Rest in Peace, You made the world a. better place!

Dean and Sweetlana Stewart

Dean Stewart - February 07, 2025 at 01:32 PM



EK

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Ed Holliday, Brad Holliday & Clete Kelly - February 06, 2025 at 06:03 PM