

Eulogy for Gerry Lites Watkins

Greetings, I am Milton Lites, and Gerry was my oldest sister. A few words about Gerry Lites Watkins would be woefully inadequate in order to paint a complete picture of this talented and accomplished woman. We often speak of a person as man of the year, or woman of the year. How about Woman of the Century for Gerry. She survived one world war, conflicts in Korea and Viet Nam. Born In 1924 she was the oldest of four children 2 girls and 2 boys. Our father moved the family to Arkansas to homestead some property and so the family lived in an extremely undeveloped part of the state. Since there was no transportation to school, our mother provided whatever education she could until arrangements were made to pick up the children at the entrance of the tiny road that led to their house. On rainy days, they would need to ride mules to the bus stop. The surface there was black dirt and when it became mud, it was very sticky. It was told that one day on the way to the bus stop someone fell off the mule and into the mud. Gerry denied that it was her, but school was canceled that day for them. As an aside, I was born there in 1937 but escaped the hardships the others experienced because I was too young.

The family moved back to Louisiana because it proved to be too difficult to raise a family of four in that remote area. Gerry received her high school diploma from Many High School which at that time had only 11 grades. When World War 2 broke out our dad worked on construction of Camp Polk, located about 30 miles from our home. When the camp was complete Gerry and our dad worked there for the remainder of the war, boarding a bus in Many that took them to the Camp. They would leave the house about 5am and return about 6 or 6:30 in the evening.

From this humble beginning, Gerry made the most of her opportunities for her education. With help from a former pastor, she enrolled in Clark College in Laurel Mississippi. There she excelled in her studies and became editor of the school newspaper where she began to develop her ability to write interesting articles. Later she attended Louisiana Baptist College along with her sister and brother. After graduating from college, she lived for a time in New Orleans with her aunt and learned much about the city and the Cajuns who lived and worked in that area. Later she would write about her experiences in Arkansas and New Orleans. You may read about these adventures in two books which she published, and which are available on Amazon. After working with the Invincibles, a ministry to Hispanics sponsored by Texas Baptists, she enrolled in Southwestern Baptist seminary where she earned a master's degree in religious education. Later she was appointed as Baptist Student Director at Southeastern Louisiana College in Hammond, LA While she was serving there, I was studying at Louisiana Tech, and in the midst of a decision about God's call on my life. I hitchhiked from Ruston Louisiana to Hammond and spent the weekend with her. Although undergoing some challenges in her life at the time, she prayed with me and gave me good counsel in determining God's leading in my life. I hitchhiked back to Ruston confident that God was calling me into full time service in the music ministry. I shall always be grateful for her contribution to my life; she even bought me my first suit.

After serving there for a period of time, she moved to Fort Worth and began working in the Convair manufacturing company, now known as General Dynamics.

As if it were planned that way, she met George Watkins at Travis Avenue Baptist Church, and they fell in love and eventually were married in that church. I know this because I sang at their wedding.

It is not certain how she began her travel writing career, but a short biography on twitter in 2017 states that she had been doing travel writing for 27 years. Here is that brief bio.

For 27 years Gerry Lites Watkins wrote and published articles about travel, culture and history. During the early days of the internet, she was one of the few travel journalists to establish travel magazines online. Her magazines, Travel Destinations, Trails West and Sundancer's West attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Watkins served as vice president of National Association of Travel Journalists of America.

During her career, Watkins and her husband, a photographer, traveled to world sites, The Americas and throughout the United States.

Later, She and George moved to Euless, Texas and joined the First Baptist Church. They became members of a Sunday School class and George became the director of the class. They formed many friendships and served faithfully in that class.

More recently, health concerns caused them to move to Texas Masonic Retirement Center in Arlington Texas. Not content to just vegetate, Gerry began organizing book clubs and library visits for fellow residents. She began telling short stories to entertain fellow residents. This continued until her homegoing. During this time, she wrote and published three books.

The Palmetto House (about her time in Arkansas) I Remember New Orleans (which contains some interesting information about the Acadians who are popularly known as ("Cajuns.") Her husband George who had been her beloved companion for many years preceded her in death. George was famous for his story telling and He is memorialized in a third book of stories by Gerry titled "The Year They Stole Mamas Turkeys."

Recently Her health began to fail, and she was confined to her bed until her recent homegoing.

Yes, I think we can truly say that Gerry Lites Watkins was a Woman of the Centuries. We have all been blessed for knowing her and benefitting from her ministry and I am glad she was my sister.