

Community Corner

# Remembering Ray Rainwater

He loved to be busy.

By James Cullum, Patch Staff

Jan 28, 2013 1:29 am ET | Updated Jan 28, 2013 4:41 am ET

Like 1 Share

Reply



Ray Rainwater, the owner of the Rainwater Concrete Debris Landfill in Lorton, died of heart failure on Jan. 5 at age 85. He was surrounded by his family at his home on Mason Neck.

Ad closed by Goc

Stop seeing this ad

Why this ad? ▶

His widow Linda Rainwater is managing, and she smiles generously as visions of her husband pass through her mind.

Subscribe

"The last words that he said... He called out my name and the kids came and got me, and he said 'Linda.' He hadn't moved for hours, but he looked up in a very controlled way," she said, "and he lifted up his left arm and put it on my shoulder and walked it underneath my hair, and he said, 'Love,' and that was his last word. It was such a beautiful, beautiful thing."

The story of Ray and Linda Rainwater is about true love, and to her, he was a force of nature, a man's man who took chances with a good-hearted aggressiveness that endeared him to many.

Ad closed by Goc

Stop seeing this ad

Why this ad? ▶

"It has been a beautiful marriage in every way. We fit together like two spoons. I never questioned that," said Linda. "Someone once asked me what I would miss most if Ray died, and what I said was his generosity and his sense of humor. Both knew no bounds."

Percy Raymond Rainwater's life was busy. He was born June 9, 1927, in Borden Springs, Alabama. Ray, as most knew him, was one of four children raised in an uncharacteristically divorced household, quit school in the 8th grade and worked odd jobs until 1945, when he lied about his age and joined the U.S. Navy to enter World War II. After the War and his discharge, he married for the first time and started a career as a country-western disc jockey in New Jersey. He also helped book gigs for his elder brother, country music star Marvin Rainwater, who wrote and performed such hits as "Whole Lotta Woman," and "Gonna Find Me a Bluebird."

"Ray's claim to fame was that he was the talent scout who took Patsy Cline to be on the Arthur Godfrey Show," said Linda.

But Rainwater's wife Barbara died unexpectedly, leaving him to raise his two young children, two-year-old Randy and four-year-old Linda. He moved to Northern Virginia where his mother, Stella, helped raise the kids. He started over, and since Fairfax County needed paved roads, he bought himself an asphalt paving machine and worked until he could buy a second machine and go into business for himself. His empire slowly grew. It was during this period that he met and married Joan, his second wife. The couple were married for 24 years and divorced.

Rainwater's business ventures included owning the "John Boy Portable Toilet Company" (his brother Don founded "Don's Johns"), owning a saw mill, a paving company and the Rainwater Concrete Debris Landfill. He worked throughout his life, and was never happier than when he was on top of a machine.

"He'd say, 'I made a million at one time, lost it and made another,'" said Linda. "When I met him he was wearing three-piece power suits and going up to the Hill to talk with Senators about a contract he wanted. He could be a completely different person at the drop of a hat, and he never held a grudge."

Rainwater met Linda Gaulding in 1985 (when he was 57) at a party in Alabama. At the time, Gaulding was a recently divorced and tenured English professor at Auburn University, and had no intention of getting into a relationship.

When a friend told Ray about Linda's divorce, "He didn't let the tail end of his shirt touch his back before he was out the door," she said. "He showed up at my door and he came into my kitchen and my 16-year-old son walked in and said he needed \$10. I made him a check, and Ray said, 'Let me see that check, son,' and he gave him the \$10. He kept the check because it had my phone number on it."

The couple married two years later and spent the next 25 years traveling the world.

"I had been around PhDs, and those people only focused on a small area of expertise. That's all they knew how to talk about. I guess Ray was like my daddy - a real man's man," Linda said. "He was so exciting. He was gorgeous. He had the most beautiful hair and these piercing blue eyes and a smile that broke you down. His physique was muscular and as manly as you can be and still be a businessman. He was Super Man. The guys I knew wanted to know if he had a sister and the girls I knew wanted to know if he had a brother."

One of Linda's favorite stories about Rainwater occurred before they were married:

"When we first met, he had a 1967 Silver Shadow Rolls Royce. Remember when those Grey Poupon commercials came on TV? Well, Ray saw them. One night I was following him home in my car and we stopped at a light and this 18-wheeler pulls up and I see the driver lean his head out the door and say, 'Say fella, you got any Grey Poupon in there?' and Ray turned to him and said, 'You bet your sweet ass I do!' and handed him a jar."

Ray and Linda spent the winter months in their home in Acapulco, Mexico. There, they paid the Salvation Army to care for sisters Elena and Betty Montero, who credit their good fortunes to the generosity of their adopted parents. Rainwater was supposed to have attended Elena's wedding this April.

"Ray wanted so badly to walk her down the aisle," said Linda, who is acting as mother of the bride.

Rainwater had two heart attacks over the years. "I think that's why he has left his body to the Georgetown Medical School, because so many doctors asked, 'How are you doing this?' and he said, 'Well, now they'll be able to find out.'"

Mount Vernon District Supervisor Gerry Hyland considered Rainwater a close friend. "Ray had no artifice. He was a real person, a rugged individualist. He spoke his mind, and worked very hard. It's a great loss to the community," said Hyland.

Hyland saw Rainwater a few weeks before his death. "The last time I saw him we were at Davis Industries and he jumped out of his truck with this great big beautiful hard-shelled crab in his hand," he said. "He'd been to Joe's Crab Shack and liked the way that they looked, and was dropping one off and asked me if I wanted one. I said, 'Sure,' and he gave me this gorgeous crab from his truck. We talked for a few minutes, and he said, 'It's good to see you. We should get together more and talk about some things that I want to do.'"

Lorton's Shep Crow spent Friday mornings with Rainwater (both were founding members of the South Fairfax Chamber of Commerce) at a Denny's restaurant in Woodbridge.

"He's 85 and I'm 80, and I would tell the waitresses that my father was coming a little later, and he got a big kick out of that, and he, in numerous cases would call me his son," said Crow. "He'd order biscuits and gravy, but with his heart he wasn't supposed to get that sort of thing. But he just loved it, and he'd say to me, 'Don't you tell Linda!'"

Crow and Rainwater would sometimes climb to the top of the landfill. "We'd go to see the wild turkeys and the deer and we would just watch them and sit there and enjoy our individual presences," said Crow. "I'm proud to say that he considered me a good friend. On the day before he died I went to see him, and he and I talked several minutes about things in general, and before I left, he reached up and took my hands and held them and said, 'Goodbye, buddy.' That was pretty touching."

There are too many stories to tell, said Linda. Like the time in 2011 when he bought a van, filled it with supplies and drove it down to a tornado-ravaged Joplin, Missouri.

"He drove it to a church that was left standing and took a plane ticket home," Linda said. "Nobody knew about that. He didn't toot his own horn. I bet there are a lot of stories like

that that we never knew about that could fill a book."

Ray Rainwater is survived by his brothers Marvin and Bob and his sister Patsy Sartain; his children Randall, Linda, Steven, Robin and Karen Rainwater; step-children Jason and Joey Thrower, and adopted child Elena Montero Fernandez; grandchildren Matthew Michael Jenkins and Mark, Luke, Benjamin, Cason and Cameron Thrower.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be sent to the [St. Jude's Hospital for Children](#), [Smile Train](#), or the [Wounded Warrior Project](#). A memorial in his honor will be held Saturday, Feb. 9, at the First Baptist Church of Woodbridge, 13600 Minnieville Road. The service will be held from 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., with a reception following, from 12:30 - 2 p.m.

