



Lester Eugene Hughes

January 24, 1939 - December 21, 2025

Lester Eugene Hughes died peacefully at home on Sunday, December 21, 2025, after suffering several years from the neurological disease multiple system atrophy.

Lester was born on January 24, 1939, in Center, Texas and was raised on a farm outside of Center in the community of Arcadia. He was born into a musical family, with his mother and father both being music teachers. In fact both Lester and his brother, Bruce, became band directors. Lester was drum major in high school at Timpson where he graduated in 1957. He was also drum major at Stephen F. Austin three years while he received his bachelor's degree in music in 1960, and during his fourth year when he received his master's degree in school administration. Always approaching everything with enthusiasm and a strong work ethic, Lester took up to 21 hours per semester while working. His jobs were the campus library, the SFA Theater, and he was the band director for three years at Shelbyville. Lester was very talented as he perfected every instrument and played piano.

Lester acquired his job by unusual circumstances. He did not interview for his job of band director at Rusk ISD. In July 1961 Gerald Chapman and Mack Philbrick showed up to Lester Hughes' class at Stephen F. Austin. Having already talked with Lester's college band director, teacher, and former employer, they offered Lester the job as they were anxious to get someone

hired by August in time for band practices. Having never been to Rusk he agreed to come over next week and sign a contract. But as busy as he was, he forgot to show up for the scheduled time. Probably due to their desperate need to have someone in place and Lester's likable nature, the school officials overlooked this and signed him anyway. So, at age 22, Lester began his career at Rusk High School. Many have said that when Lester first arrived, they thought he was a new student because he looked so young.

Not long after arriving in Rusk, Lester was invited by his friend, Bubba Jared, to the First United Methodist Church, where he was a proud, actively involved member until his illness. Lester truly loved the Lord and his church, which is why he agreed to serve as interim choir director six different times. Every day he carried a marble in his pants' pocket with the Bible verse Luke 6:31 (NIV) "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And anyone that knew him knows he truly lived this way.

Lester was also an active member of the Rusk Lions Club in the 1970s-80s. Even being one of the honored hosts of the club's sponsored exchange student from Australia, Ray Lowe. Ray stayed at Lester and Fay's home and then would rotate to other Lions members' houses. Lester and Fay remained in contact with Ray and his wife, Julie, all these years.

When school integration began, Lester was asked to teach two band periods a day at the G. W. Bradford School during the school years 1966-68. Lester really enjoyed it because he became acquainted with a lot of people, which was beneficial when the schools fully integrated. Unlike today with multiple directors leading the Rusk band program, Lester was the only band director all the years he taught both junior high and high school band. In addition to band directing, he also taught driver's education at Rusk, Cushing, and Central Heights. He would have the students bring their bathing suits, and they would stop for swim breaks at Camp Tonkawa or at homes of students who had

pools with slides. Lester always liked to have fun and make fun memories for others.

Interestingly, Lester obtained his driver's education certification one summer at Arizona State University where he went for a summer vacation of fun and learning. Lester's friend, Mike Day, also went with him, and they enjoyed meeting everyone in the apartment house they lived in across from the campus. They also got a free couple of nights lodging in Las Vegas because their landlady became their good friend and fudged the amount of time they lived in the apartment to qualify for the Vegas trip.

One summer Lester wanted to take a vacation to Hawaii, but he couldn't find any friends to go. So, he enrolled at the University of Hawaii to make friends for the summer. He didn't even remember what class he took, so he must have had a lot of fun!

Back in Rusk as a fundraising project for the Rusk Band Program, Lester started an annual baton twirling contest. It was the first contest in this area of Texas which attracted hundreds of participants from Texas and Louisiana and continued for about 15 years.

Around the same time as the baton twirling contest, Lester and his brother, Bruce, formed H & H Trophy. Lester provided medals and trophies for his contest, other twirling contests, track meets, awards presentations, and other events at various school districts as well as horse shows around the greater East Texas area; while his brother, Bruce, sold trophies around the Beaumont area where he was band director.

Lester married in his early 30s to Fay Birkelbach. Lester and Fay were introduced by their good friends Judy and Jimmy Ramey, who later

accompanied them when they eloped in the summer to Las Vegas.

Lester and Fay had two daughters, Cynthia and Adriene, who both followed in the band tradition, as well as being baton twirlers and drum majors in the band. Of course, Lester was a great mentor in addition to the many, many, many lessons that Fay drove them to in various surrounding cities. He helped the girls learn their new band music, sometimes by playing the songs by site and seemingly perfectly which was both astonishing and infuriating to the girls who spent so many hours learning the same songs. And it wasn't always easy as Lester's persistence and Adriene's defiance would often leave to squabbles between them.

Lester and Fay provided a loving household with home cooked meals that included lots of vegetables from the garden the family worked together. Lester had always been a good saver and careful investor. He invested in rental properties, and the family would help in the clean-up of new properties. His money management allowed the family to enjoy many vacations, including their trips to Vacation College at Slippery Rock State University in Pennsylvania. Lester found out about Slippery Rock offering Vacation College while reading the Wall Street Journal and decided that would be a unique experience. They attended many years, participated in fun activities and classes for all ages, and made lasting friends. Fay, Cynthia, and Adriene consider themselves very blessed to have had Lester for a husband and dad.

Through the years, Lester had other smaller side businesses. Some of the most memorable to the family being when he became a clock dealer for the New England Clock Company. He saw a grandfather clock that he liked at a restaurant, so he wrote down the clockmaker and the town that was displayed on the face of the clock. He then got their phone number to contact them about selling clocks without a store front. The whole reason he did so was to purchase a grandfather clock at wholesale cost. He took advantage of a ten

percent discount for paying cash. Soon his parents wanted a mantle clock. Then, various aunts and uncles, cousins, their friends and his friends were buying both grandfather and mantle clocks from him. One day he received a call from the clock company representative who said, "We've never seen anyone without a display sell as many clocks as you. How do you do it?" Lester said, "I live in a small town and know a lot of people. I invite them over to look at my clock." Not telling the representative that he sold them all at cost!

Lester also peddled shrimp out of his garage with his good friend Joe Radford. Because he loved to eat fresh gulf coast shrimp, he found a good deal on the coast where they purchased shrimp in bulk. Then, they would bring it back to Rusk where they would weigh, bag, and sell it. He and Joe also entered and competed in many slot machine tournaments through the years in Las Vegas.

Lester's next side business was the Rusk Pecan Company. He purchased quality shelled pecans from Parras, Mexico. Lester was known for his pecan tart recipe, so he had the recipe printed on the label of his pecans. Adriene and Fay recall many nights at the dining room table where they sat measuring, bagging, and applying the labels. Fortunately, for Cynthia, she was away at college.

On his many trips to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, he would purchase and bring back cases of vanilla and other items to sell.

After nineteen years of being a band director, Lester went to work at Citizens 1st Bank in Rusk. Then after 12 years at the bank, Lester wanted to complete his teacher retirement years and went to work for the Windham School System at the Coffield Prison Unit at Tennessee Colony, Texas. He also worked there for 12 years and retired at the age of 61. During his tenure at Coffield, he bought Rusk Mini Storage from Travis McCain, which was located behind Cherokee Shopping Center. He later bought storage units from Tom

Ball, which were located on Loop 343 near TDCJ. He continued and increased the business for 23 years.

In 2020, he sold his two storage building sites. He and the family laughed because several had asked, "What is he going to do now?" And at the age of 81, Lester had more than earned the privilege of doing what he wanted most days...which usually included reading lots of books, watching westerns on T.V., visiting with people on the phone, and zipping around town in his little silver truck multiple times a day to run to the grocery store for Fay, drink coffee and have donuts at the donut shop, visit friends, and check in at the banks for a visit and account information.

Lester once said "I have enjoyed every moment in Rusk and especially the people. I hope to remain in Rusk the rest of my life." Unfortunately, not long after retirement, he developed this horrific, debilitating disease that took so much from him.

Lester was preceded in death by his parents: Voyde Lester Hughes and Nara Emanis Hughes, brother: Bruce Hughes, brothers-in-law: Ron Birkelbach, John Birkelbach, cousins: Bonnie Bee Hughes Lane, Joy Hughes Covington, Jason Covington, great-nephew: Jose Antonio Barahona and many additional aunts, uncles, and cousins. He is survived by his wife: Fay Birkelbach Hughes, daughters: Cynthia Hughes Campbell of Tyler, and Adriene Hughes Stanaland and husband Jason of Appleby, grandchildren: Marilyn Metzger Bundrick and husband Brent of Longview, Cooper Stanaland of Appleby, great-grandchildren: Anderson Bundrick and Beau Bundrick, nieces and nephews: Kimberly Hughes Barahona, John Hughes, Elaine and Tom Peterson, Mark and Amy Birkelbach, Michael Birkelbach, sister-in-law Pauline Birkelbach, aunt: Marie Emanis McCauley, cousins: Jackie Emanis and Neil Grant, Pamela Emanis and Dick Vance, Janet Marcone Simmons, Karol

Emanis Elder, Judy Emanis Ellis, Johny and Tammie Covington, Jennifer Covington Golden, Brady Wells, Shelly Bee Hughes Cantrell, Brandt Wells, Jesse Hughes, Michelle Covington Richards, Brent and Debbie Hughes, Barry Hughes, Bart Hughes, Dwayne and Carol Emanis, Jay Emanis, Sherry Emanis, Dustin Emanis, Russell Emanis, Deborah Emanis and many more.

A memorial service will be held, February 14, 2026, at First United Methodist Church, Rusk, TX. Former Rusk pastor Jacob Smith will be officiating. Visitation will begin at 1:00 before the memorial service at 2:00. Lester's ashes will be laid to rest at Rusk's Cedar Hill Cemetery.

Honorary pallbearers: David Beard, Bobby Brooks, Lewie Byers, Jamie Campbell, Johny Covington, Lobo Cruz, Sammy Dance, Neil Grant, Charles Hassell, James "Bubba" Jared, Jody Jordan, Elmer Kennedy, Dr. Jim Largent, Tyson Metzsig, James I. Perkins, Harold Porter, Ray Rayson, Abel Rosales, Apollo Serrato, Jerry Thompson, Russel Turner.

Any memorial donations may be made to First United Methodist Church (P.O. Box 99, Rusk, TX 75785). www.ruskfumc.com

The family thanks Lester's caregivers Brittany Cobble Birdwell, Karmon Johnson Spurlock, Marla Sikes, Sherry McKay, Rachel Arellano-Verhage, Briley King, Kayla Langford, Debbie Garcia and others with Compassionate Care of East Texas. Crystal McClosky, Mikayla Bonner, Aleigha Ball, Norma, Shannette, Penny, Tracie, Jessica, Lindsey, and Teresa with Vital Caring Home Health. Choice Hospice and later Harbor Hospice. Physicians Joe Moss, PA-C, Erin Furr-Stimming, MD (neurologist), David Goldfarb, MD (urologist), Allen Wegener, MD. UT Jacksonville Emergency Department and Hospital, Mark Shaw, MD, Royal Becker, MD. They took care of him as if he was family, and for that we are grateful.

Also, the family thanks the wonderful and generous cooks of the First United

Methodist Church for sharing their special dishes for both Lester and Fay over the past year. And Judy Faye Garner for organizing the schedule. You gave Cynthia, Adriene, and the caregivers much needed breaks that sustained us through those difficult times.

Services are under the direction of Wallace-Thompson Funeral Home.

Previous Events

Visitation

FEB 14. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Church
255 S. Henderson St
Rusk, TX 75785
(903) 683-4675

Memorial service

FEB 14. 2:00 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Church
255 S. Henderson St
Rusk, TX 75785
(903) 683-4675

Tribute Wall

SL

“ *Mr. Hughes was a great band teacher and was a really nice person. He will be greatly missed.* ”

Suzanne Holcomb Litchford - January 30 at 11:36 PM

MP

“ *He was such a wonderful person and a real inspiration for his band students and those who had him for study hall* ”

Mary Patterson - December 22, 2025 at 10:11 PM