



Thelma Lee Smith

June 4, 1934 - May 1, 2025

CELEBRATING THE LEGACY AND LOVE OF THELMA LEE SMITH

Thelma Lee Smith was born on June 4, 1934, to the late Henry and Ocie Lee Smith in Lee County, Georgia. Raised on a farm, Thelma spent her early years surrounded by love and family. Her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many cousins played an important role in shaping the joyful and grounded spirit she carried throughout her life.

At the age of 12, Thelma and her family made a significant move, traveling by train to Detroit in search of new opportunities. They settled at 3217 McGraw Street, just down the street from the Historic Olympia Stadium, home of the Detroit Red Wings. Her Uncle Charlie and Aunt Winnie Walker (Ocie's sister) owned the property, cleverly using the backyard as a parking lot during events at the Olympia, a reflection of the family's ingenuity and close-knit community ties.

Thelma was known for her kindness, her unwavering faith, and her bright, welcoming smile. She had a deep love for nature, nurtured from her childhood days on the farm, and carried that connection with her throughout her life. Her warmth and laughter could light up any room, and she had a special way of making everyone feel seen, valued, and loved.

In 1952, Thelma graduated from Northwestern High School. That fall, she enrolled at the University of Detroit, eager to continue her education. On December 31, 1952, she attended a party with her friends, Lillie and Hardy from across the street, a night that would change her life forever. It was there

that Thelma met Dave Smith, who was at the party with his brother Andrew. Dave, who knew Lillie, noticed Thelma right away and asked about her. Lillie proudly replied, "that's Henry Smith's daughter!". Thanks to Lillie's introduction, Thelma and Dave spent the evening together. Dave kept Thelma laughing and smiling all night and by the end of the party, he asked her for a date, to which Thelma happily agreed.

Their relationship blossomed quickly. After several weeks of dating, Thelma's mother asked the important question, "What are Dave's intentions?" Dave didn't hesitate, he went to Thelma's parents and respectfully told them they wouldn't have to worry about paying for another semester at the University of Detroit because he was asking for Thelma's hand in marriage.

Dave and Thelma married on April 11, 1953, at Central Baptist Church. The church was overflowing with family and friends. Thelma was a radiant and beautiful bride. Have you noticed; Thelma never had to change her name. She was born a Smith and married a Smith!

To their union, six children were born: Cynthia, Sharon, Dave, Sandra, Eric, and Sarah. After Sarah started kindergarten, Thelma devoted herself to her family while also taking on several jobs over the years. She worked in the cafeteria at her children's schools, served customers at the Woolworth's lunch counter, worked at Facet Bendix, a factory that made carburetors for Detroit's Big Three automakers and later served as secretary at New Grace Missionary Baptist Church. She also worked as secretary to Rev. J.C. Hope for the NAACP, President of the Department of Religious Affairs, showing her lifelong commitment to faith, family, and community.

Throughout her life, Thelma remained deeply devoted to her family. She took pride in maintaining the bonds of kinship that were so important to her upbringing, staying connected to relatives near and far. Her strength, generosity, and wisdom were a source of comfort and inspiration to all who

knew her.

Thelma was a long-time member of New Grace Missionary Baptist Church, where her best friend, Catherine Starks, convinced her to join in the 1960s. At New Grace, Thelma joyfully served in many capacities, including on the Usher Board, the Choir, Communion Ministry and eventually as Church Secretary. She loved New Grace deeply and always made herself available to serve the Lord with gladness. Her dedication to her faith community was steadfast, and she built many lasting friendships through her years of service.

Thelma also had a passion for travel. She explored the beauty of Alaska and Hawaii, embarked on several cruises, and cherished long road trips driving south to visit family members. We couldn't tell Thelma that we were going on vacation, because Thelma will have her bags packed ready to go with us! These journeys reflected her adventurous spirit and her deep love for connecting with loved ones near and far. Thelma was also a wonderful cook. Family members looked forward to her hosting Thanksgiving dinners at her home every year, with her delicious peach cobbles, fried chicken and sweet potato pies.

Thelma leaves a legacy of love to cherish. She is survived by her daughter Cynthia (son-in-love, Joseph); her son Dave (daughter-in-love, Lisa); her daughter Sandra (son-in-love, Melton Sr.); her son Eric; and her daughter Sarah.

She is also survived by 11 grandchildren: Severence (Shelley), Melton Jr. (Navarsha), Stefen (Kaniqua), Ryan, Mylan (Brittiney), Shannon, Malcom, Eric (Samtia), Chelsea, Jordan and Timothy (Marissa). 14 great-grands and 1 great-great grandson, sister Mamie, brothers Henry, Jr., Eddie (wife Ruby Jewel), Aaron and sister-in-law Belinda, and many families and friends. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband of 46 years, Dave. Her loving daughter, Sharon ("aka Boo-Boo") sons-in-love Tim Jackson and Ronald Simpson, brother George Smith, sisters-in-law Joan and Sebrina Smith.

On May 1, 2025 at 2:00 am, Thelma departed this life peacefully at home surrounded by family.

Thelma will be remembered for her strength, warmth, and quiet grace. A woman who carried herself with dignity and poured love into the lives of those around her. Whether through her stories, her presence at family gatherings, or the way she cared for others, Thelma's legacy is one of resilience, devotion, and kindness.

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 8. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services
24585 Evergreen Rd
Southfield, MI 48075
(248) 702-5367
info@kempfh.com
<https://www.kempfuneralhome.com>

Family Hour

MAY 9. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

New Grace Missionary Baptist Church
25 Ford Street
Highland Park, MI 48203

Funeral Service

MAY 9. 11:00 AM (ET)

New Grace Missionary Baptist Church
25 Ford Street
Highland Park, MI 48203

Tribute Wall



“ Sending my condolences and love to a great team member, Cynthia Welch. Ramona Rushing-Gagnon.

Ramona Rushing-Gagnon - May 08, 2025 at 02:04 PM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



May 07, 2025 at 08:28 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Thelma Lee Smith.

May 06, 2025 at 05:44 PM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



May 06, 2025 at 05:44 PM

AF

“ Thinking of you (Sandy, Milton, and Family) in your time of grief and sorrow. May God bless and keep this family. May God grant you peace and understanding.
Robert and Alisa Holding



Alisa Fleming - May 05, 2025 at 10:20 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Thelma Lee Smith.

May 05, 2025 at 01:25 PM



“ Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



May 05, 2025 at 01:25 PM

CH

“ To Cynthia, Joe & the Welch Family,

We are praying for your peace and comfort during this time. Nothing nor anyone can ever take the place of a dear mother, but I hope you find peace in knowing that she is safe in God's arms now and you will see her again. You are in our thoughts and prayers. Love,
Carolyn & Mikehl Hafner



Carolyn P. Hafner - May 04, 2025 at 04:49 PM

CP

“ Carolyn P. purchased the Be My Love Bouquet with Red Roses for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



Carolyn P. - May 04, 2025 at 04:46 PM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



May 03, 2025 at 11:27 AM



“ Pink Potpourri Bouquet was purchased for the family of Thelma Lee Smith.



May 02, 2025 at 06:51 PM

CL

“ My condolences to the people who, like their mother, have always treated me as family. I love you all. Chris Lewis, Chicago, IL

Chris Lewis - May 01, 2025 at 10:47 PM

GS

“ I’ll always remember the first time Uncle Dave took me to meet the Smith gang; Auntie, and my cousins (Cynthia, Sandy, Dave, BooBoo, Eric and Sarah. She welcomed me and my sister and was always welcoming to me. You will surely miss you. 🤔🤔🤔🙏🙏



Glenda Slater - May 01, 2025 at 08:37 PM