



## Harris Duke Smithson

December 20, 1945 - May 15, 2022

Harris Duke Smithson, 76, died of metastatic brain cancer at home in Horseshoe Bay, Texas, on Sunday, May 15, 2022. He was born on December 20, 1945, in Franklin, Tennessee, to Henry Creasy Smithson and Clara Anna (Moore) Smithson. Harris had 11 half-brothers and -sisters. He was preceded in death by his parents, several siblings, and his beloved wife, Karen (Hunt) Smithson. He remained widowed until his death. He is survived by his son, Christopher Blake Smithson (Jenny O'Brien); his daughter, Shannon Claire Oelrich (David Oelrich); and his grandchild, Greta Hayley Oelrich.

Harris grew up on a farm near his birthplace in Tennessee. At age 11, soon after the death of his father, he and his mother moved to Bessemer, Alabama, where he lived until starting college at the University of Alabama. He was active in Theta Chi and became a lifelong Alabama football fan. Harris married Billie Lynn Vines in 1966, and they moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky, where their children, Blake and Shannon, were born. He worked in his family's college bookstore at Western Kentucky University and graduated from there in 1968. Two years later, he moved the family to San Antonio, Texas, to manage L&M Bookstore. He became the owner within a few years.

Harris soon found his passion and his people in the book world, and opened The Twig Bookshop in 1972. Throughout the years, he established several locations of The Twig, plus The Red Balloon (a children's bookstore) and

Booksmiths on Alamo Plaza. Harris and Billie divorced after 14 years of marriage, and in 1983, Harris married Cheryl (Lemon) O'Toole. Cheryl's children, Dawn, Lori, and Zach, were dear to him, and their 10-year marriage saw many joyful gatherings when all five kids were in the house.

In 1999, Harris married Karen Hunt, whose two sons, Brock and Wade, were also dear to him. Karen and Harris enjoyed traveling and playing golf together, but they were happiest at their lake house in Horseshoe Bay, when all the kids were around. Later, they loved watching their grandchildren, Greta and Harper, play together. Losing Karen when she was only 58 was the great tragedy of Harris's life.

Harris was active in the San Antonio business community, including the Old Main Avenue Association, the Paseo Del Rio Association, and the Alamo Historic District. He sold The Twig in 1999, which continues today at The Pearl complex in San Antonio, in care of the new owners. A restless entrepreneur, he also owned T-shirt shops in several area malls, called Insta T-shirts and later Rag Tops. He went on to manage several real estate projects in his retirement.

Harris will be greatly missed by many, including Blake Vines, Pat and Michael Kelly and Leisa Hans, Peggy Lemox Means, Beverly Dahlem, Carla Thompson, Jon and Ruth Oelrich, the Lemon/O'Toole family, and the Hunt/Burchard family.

Harris loved spending time with family and friends, eating good food and drinking wine, traveling to beautiful places, and hosting people at his lake house. His zest for life is best expressed by his many friends and loved ones: "Harris was a force of nature. Loads of fun, supportive. Honest, fair and fearless. Loved gardens and tomatoes (especially homegrown). He liked to laugh. He was easy to be yourself around."

“Harris’s love of life and family touched many people.”

“He was extremely loveable.”

“We have many happy memories of time spent with him.”

“He was the sunshine that broke the heavy clouds—always!”

“He was so special to our family, and we will always cherish the time we spent with him.”

“He was truly one of the best people I’ve ever known, a dear friend.”

“He was a special, wonderful, full of life and always kind man.”

“He was the father I wished I had. His lust for life was always an inspiration.”

“I will remember him as a great man with a big heart.”

A private memorial gathering will be held later in the summer. The family asks that donations in his memory be sent to the YMCA of Greater San Antonio (<https://ymcasatx.org/make-donation>), a place Harris spent a lot of time and made numerous friends over 35+ years.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Harris Duke Smithson*

October 05, 2023 at 10:58 AM



“ *Harris Duke Smithson*

October 04, 2023 at 06:25 PM



“ *Harris Duke Smithson*

September 26, 2023 at 10:57 PM