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Durant Thompson Jr., 77, DHS Class of '61, Car Restorer, Loved Family, Music, Travel and Indulgent Food

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Date : June 9, 2020

Durant James Thompson Jr., 77, of Knoxville passed away Thursday, June 4, 2020, surrounded by family singing his favorite songs.

His ready smile, expressive laughter, and generous nature will be remembered by all who knew him. A man of many life-long passions, from family, music and cars, to travel and indulgent food, Durant loved sharing these with his wife, Courtney Shea, their family, and many friends.

In recent years, he was honored to play the flute with the Emancipators band, who were awarded the Peacemaker Award in 2016 by the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, for using their musical gifts in

support of peace, environmental issues, and justice.

Durant and Courtney's love for Fountain City and Knoxville runs deep, inspiring support for their children and community through the Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center, Knox Central High School Foundation, Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, and other civic and arts groups.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York on Jan. 11, 1943, to Durant James Thompson Sr. and Clementine Coyle Thompson. Durant survived a premature birth and overcame a difficult childhood where he supported his younger siblings by developing a jokester personality while enduring a comical number of jobs to make ends meet.

Graduating from Darien High School in 1961, he then served in the 141st Signal Battalion of the United States Army until 1963. An excellent scholar, Durant attended the University of Bridgeport, earned an associate's degree from Norwalk Community College, and later continued his education at the University of Tennessee.

Marrying Susan Louise Keyes (now Partch) in 1965, they raised his first daughter and only son in the Connecticut area.

Durant had a life-long love of tinkering, especially with cars, and he loved to make metal shine. He co-founded two antique and classic car restoration businesses, D&J Model A and Motor Car Guild, in the Willimantic area before relocating to Tennessee. Following his separation from Susan, Durant moved to Knoxville, married Courtney Shea in 1983, and celebrated the birth of two more daughters.

He continued working with cars, developing a reputation for expertise in BMW repair under a new business called Mobile Metric Mechanic. In 1995, his passion for travel was ignited with the first of many trips overseas, being particularly taken with the crepes and sidewalk cafés of the 5th Arrondissement in Paris.

But he was always happy to return to his Fountain City home, taking special pride in mowing the lawn and caring for his car collection.

Durant is survived by his wife: Courtney Woodruff Shea; his daughter, Duren Judith Thompson (her partners, Edward Burton McMillan Jr. and Ronald Edward White); his son, Durant Brian Thompson; his daughters, Christine Thompson and Carolyn Thompson Bolander (and her spouse, Dustin Bolander); granddaughters Emma Katherine & Solvi Bryce; his brother, Dennis Jeffery Thompson; his sisters Nancy S. Thompson Jones (her spouse, William C. Jones) and Sheila Nooney Ballard (her spouse, David Ballard), as well as a wealth of nieces, nephews, cousins, found-family, and friends who needed a loving father figure.

Durant will be interred at Greenwood Cemetery by close family, with a memorial service held later.

In lieu of flowers, Durant's family requests that memorial gifts be made to [Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center](#) or a worthy cause towards peace and justice.

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To honor Durant best, make a friend or stranger laugh, order that \$5 milkshake, and soak up life's sunshine.

— [an obituary](#) from *Bridges Funeral Home*, where online condolences may be left