



## Willis Smith

May 13, 1939 - January 18, 2018

Willis G. Smith, died peacefully at home surrounded by family on Wednesday, January 14th, 2018 in Spirit Lake, Iowa after 10 years of battling cancer.

He leaves his wife of 42 years, Blanca Smith; daughter Meghan Smith and step daughter Cathy Burket, step son Lawrence Pierson. three grandchildren; one great grandchild and many close friends.

He was born and raised in Pipestone, Minnesota, the son of Fred K. Smith and Myrtle Smith . He graduated from Pipestone High School in 1959.

From a very early age, Willis found a life long love of writing and music. He attended South Dakota State University. He was the managing editor of the school newspaper, sang in the mixed chorus and was a member of the golf team. He was a police reporter for the Winona, Minnesota Daily News and later the tri-state editor for the Hagerstown, Maryland Morning Herald.

He married Mary Beth Anderson in 1965 and they had one child in 1970. They divorced in 1973.

He starting working at the Omaha World Herald in 1966, as a copy editor. In 1974 he met Blanca Pierson. Blanca had 2 children prior to meeting Willis. In 1975, they married and a bought a house in Omaha, Nebraska.

He remained working at the Omaha World Herald as a copy editor and remained there until retirement. During his time at the Omaha World Herald he had a few different music columns including Disc-o-team a 1960s youth oriented record column. And had a Sunday morning jazz column for many years. He wrote liner notes for records and briefly had a jazz radio show.

Later both Blanca and Willis retired to Spirit Lake, Iowa.

A commemoration will be held at Schuchert Lentz Funeral Home on Saturday, May 19th at 2:00 PM with a visitation one-hour prior at the funeral home. Burial of his cremains will take place in the River View Cemetery in Rock Rapids, Iowa.

# Cemetery

---

# Events

---

**River View Cemetery**

Rock Rapids, IA, 51246

**MAY  
19**

**Visitation**

01:00PM - 02:00PM

---

Schuchert-Lentz Funeral Home

2317 32nd St. P.O. Box 272, Spirit Lake, IA, US, 51360

**MAY  
19**

**Service**

02:00PM - 02:30PM

---

Schuchert-Lentz Funeral Home

2317 32nd St., Spirit Lake, IA, US, 51360

# Comments

---



“ North Templar Park Association purchased the Secret Garden Basket for the family of Willis Smith.



**North Templar Park Association** - May 13, 2018 at 05:05 PM

---



“ Will and I were kindred spirits when it came to our tastes in music and we shared a life-long correspondence and exchanges of our favorite recordings. This friendship was launched while our classmates were busy listening to rock and roll, we were listening to Jazz Goes to College with David Brubeck's rendition of Duke Ellington's memorable masterpiece, Take the A Train and that continued on for more than 50 years with Will sharing music he reviewed in his newspaper column and on liner notes for upcoming jazz stars. He struggled for many years to overcome various bouts of cancer before finally succumbing. He will be missed by those who appreciated his many gifts as a writer and jazz critic.  
Craig Forman

**Craig Forman** - April 12, 2018 at 11:15 AM

---



“ Caitlin Burket sent a virtual gift in memory of Willis Smith



**Caitlin Burket** - March 20, 2018 at 09:56 PM

---



“ I will remember Will through his love of Jazz and sharing his music with me - Friends,  
Lori Harms



**Lori Harms** - January 21, 2018 at 12:16 PM

---



“ Will was our lake neighbor. We will always remember his fantastically detailed memory of Templar Park and his enthusiasm for jazz music. He will be missed. Our sympathies to his family.

**Alice Etler** - January 18, 2018 at 10:51 PM

---



“ Gayle Mayer lit a candle in memory of Willis Smith



**Gayle Mayer** - January 18, 2018 at 12:26 PM