



Wesley Calvin Newton

October 28, 1929 - March 3, 2023

Gospel music legend, Calvin Newton, passed away peacefully in his home, on Lookout Mountain, Georgia, on Friday, March 3, 2023. He was 93 years old.

Wesley 'Calvin' Newton was born in West Frankfort, Illinois on October 28, 1929, to parents Irene and Leonard Newton. Calvin was the son of a Pentecostal preacher, and for young Calvin, he found that singing in church was as natural as talking. By the time he was six, he was singing with his mom and dad on a Saturday morning radio show in Harrisburg, Illinois. His Maternal grandfather (Luther A. Richard) was the very first national evangelist for the Church of God. His song leader, who traveled with him, was Otis McCoy

In the 1940's the family moved to Chicago. Calvin worked at night unloading boxcars and as a supervisor of grown men, then from 1945-46, Calvin attended BTS (Church of God Bible Training School, forerunner of Lee University), where he sang with Victory Four and later with the Kingsmen Four (with Vernon Klautt, Bennie Triplett, Jimi Hall), then left school, and Kingsmen Four went on their own, with Wally Varner playing piano.

In 1947, Calvin was asked to join the Melody Masters (with Jim "Big Chief" Wetherington, Wally Varner, Lee Kitchens, and Mosie Lister [later replaced by Jake Hess]). They had a radio show on WSUN in Tampa/St. Petersburg.

Hovie Lister heard them and suggested they contact WFBC in his hometown of Greenville, S.C. They got a regular show there and relocated to Greenville. Money was so scarce that all 5 members slept in one room—2 double beds and a rollaway (every 5 weeks, you'd get your turn at the rollaway), with only one tube of toothpaste (Chief one morning told Cal not to use so much toothpaste!)

Calvin joined the Blackwood Brothers in 1948 (with James & R.W. Blackwood, Bill Lyles and Hilton Griswold). They were on KMA in Shenandoah, Iowa, then in 1948 went back to finish high-school (Richmond, KY, where his parents had moved) and entered the Ky. State Golden Gloves in Lexington, and won the Kentucky State Middleweight Golden Gloves Championship.

Then in late 1949, Calvin sang with the Crusaders Quartet (with Glen Pennington [his son J.P. became famous as a member of pop/country group Exile], Mose Eteker and Rudy Shelton). The Crusaders were a regular part of the Renfrow Valley Barn Dance. They relocated to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to be a regular on a radio station; then to Columbus, GA, to represent an automobile dealer at events, and on a radio program sponsored by him

Calvin had a nightly radio program on WRBL in 1950, in Columbus, GA, called Dinner Interlude and also sang at two nightclubs in Phenix City, across the river from Columbus; then got involved in the Georgia State Golden Gloves, and was coached by HB Yates. On February 28, 1950, Calvin fought in a preliminary bout on the same card as Joe Louis, who was fighting an "exhibition match" (he was officially retired from boxing at the time). Calvin left boxing undefeated.

Fall of 1950, Calvin moved to Macon to enroll at Mercer University, enrolled in ROTC program, and sang with Deacon Utley's Smile-A-While Quartet (one of the Stamps-Baxter sponsored quartets). They had a twice-a-day radio

program on WMAZ. He also briefly sang with Carl Raines and the All-American Quartet. But before he could graduate, he was drafted to serve in the Korean War and on March 30, 1951, reported to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, then went on to Fort Bliss, Texas, for basic training. While there, Calvin sang with Lou Barton and his Orchestra at the Officers Club. After basic, went to Tokorozawa, Japan—served as a medic, and also sang at night in two clubs in Tokyo—the Rocker Four Club was a noncom officers' club, and the Crystal Ballroom was an officers' club (both clubs under one roof). Calvin was Honorably discharged in 1953.

From 1953-1956, Calvin sang with the Oak Ridge Quartet (now Oak Ridge Boys) (with Wally Fowler, Bob Weber, Joe Allred [replaced by Cat Freeman], Bobby Whitfield [replaced by Livy Freeman]). They recorded on three labels—Oak Ridge, Gospeltone, and Dot Records. They did covers of two hit “pop” songs—Crying in the Chapel and I Believe, that Calvin was featured on. In 1955, Bob Weber took ownership from Wally Fowler and moved the group to his hometown of Statesville, North Carolina.

In 1957 Calvin joined the group Sons of Song (with Bob Robinson & Don Butler)—the unique, show stopping, charismatic group, that Calvin was probably most known for. On March 9, 1957, they sang at intermission at Wally Fowler's All-Nite Singing in Birmingham because he had no time slot available during the program. The concessionaires filed suit against Wally because he didn't have intermission; he said he called intermission, but hardly anyone chose to leave the auditorium because this “new” group was singing. They caused quite a stir! They traveled to Los Angeles to sing at the World Church, pastored by O. L. Jaegers, and were introduced to the folks who owned Sacred Records. They signed the Sons to do an album immediately. That session was produced by Ralph Carmichael, as was their next album on Sacred. (Riverboat Jubilee in June, 1958). In August, 1957, they sang at

Legion Field in Birmingham on a Wally Fowler program with Sonny James to an audience of over 10,000. In 1958, they traveled ALL OVER Alabama on a tour for gubernatorial candidate A. W. Todd.

On June 27, 1958, the Sons of Song were involved in a terrible accident right out of Fort Lauderdale (on their way to the DJ Convention in Miami). Calvin was the least seriously injured (Bob was almost killed), and they slipped out of the hospital to sing at the DJ Convention (in the Sons' slot). Calvin was in Marty Robbins' motel room, with several other singers, when the police knocked on the door and escorted him back to the hospital. After the accident, Calvin tried to put back the pieces of the Sons of Song—Little David Young replaced Bob for a few months in 1958. In September, 1958, Bob was able to come back, but Don then resigned (to sing with the Sentinels—3 members of the Statesmen-- and become Hovie's assistant pastor). Les Roberson sang baritone with them for awhile. Then Bob left (to sing with a group called the Ambassadors put together by Hovie) and Jimi Hall filled in his slot.

In 1959, Calvin recorded a "pop" record on Bill Lowery's "Scottie" label—2 songs written by Cotton Carrier (Ray Stevens and his wife sang back-up). It became a big regional hit in several areas, and was previewed (and given a high score) on Dick Clark's "American Bandstand"; however, the pressing plant went bankrupt and they couldn't meet orders, but in 1960, Calvin reprised the Sons of Song with Lee Kitchens and Bob Robinson. This line-up recorded our biggest hit, Wasted Years, but never achieved the popularity of the original group.

From 1961-63, the original Sons of Songs got back together. They performed with Mahalia Jackson at East TN State University at the first racially integrated gospel concert. She then asked if the Sons would like to do a European tour with her, and they happily agreed, but her health failed shortly after that, and it never took place.

In 1963 Calvin married the love of his life, Joyce Wonder.

In 1964, Calvin joined the All Stars Quartet (formed by Lee Roy Abernathy, also with Bob Robinson, Jerry Redd and Paul Downing) out of Marietta, GA. The group only lasted 3 months and never got into a recording studio, but had a great, very unusual sound.

In 1965, the Sons got back together with Bob Robinson and Lee Kitchens, and toured briefly with Jake Hess and the Imperials, Then went to California on tour with the Imperials, then Polly Grimes booked them at some churches and other venues. On one of these shows, they met Doris Akers. The Sons sang at her church and were spending a few days at her house in August, 1965, when one of her neighbors (and fellow church members) came to her door and advised that the “white boys” should probably leave her home. That’s when the Watts Riots began, and that man could have saved their lives by warning them to leave before the violence spread to her neighborhood.

In 1970 the Sons of Song (Cal, Bob and Lee Kitchens) made a one-time “reunion” appearance at the All-Nite Singing (now taken over by J. G. Whitfield) in Birmingham (April 11); and it seemed the magic was still there!

October, 1973—the Sons (Cal, Bob & Don) sang at the National Quartet Convention, another one-time reunion that also had the “magic”!

In 1980, Calvin formed Cal Newton’s Family of Song, and included Jean Bradford (Shorty Bradford’s wife), their daughter Carolyn, Calvin’s son, Wes, and his daughter Jackie, and toured regionally for several years, then on New Year’s Eve 1983 the Sons (Cal, Bob & Lee) performed in Birmingham. Then in

1988-1989, Cal & Bob reprised the Sons of Song with Charlie Burke on

baritone.

Cal, Joyce, Wes, and Jackie moved to Lookout Mountain, Georgia in 1988.

In 1994, Bill Gaither invited Calvin to be a part of the Gaither Homecoming Friends family, and has performed in countless videos and concerts up until his wife passed away in 2020. Calvin's last performance on stage was on his 90th birthday celebration on October 28, 2019.

As a past member of the Oak Ridge Boys (Quartet), Calvin was honored to be inducted into the GMA Gospel Music Hall of Fame, in 2000. Then in 2004, Russ Cheatham captured Calvin's biography in *Bad Boy of Gospel Music: The Calvin Newton Story*, and has been loved and appreciated by fans and friends. In 2005, he became a member of the Tri State Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame, and Calvin Newton was presented with the Living Legend Award by the Grand Old Gospel Reunion.

Calvin was preceded in death by his parents, Irene and Leonard, his sisters, Nora & Glada, his beloved wife, Joyce, their much adored pups Bimbi & Reb, and countless friends and fellow gospel singers. He is survived by his son, Wesley Newton, his daughter, Jackie Harling, his son-in-law, Keith, his adored granddaughter Samantha Harling, all of Lookout Mountain; Nephews Dennis and Randy Karasik of Colorado, Mark Miller of Bartlett, TN, and niece Melissa Sullivan of Cordova, TN. Calvin and Joyce were members of New Salem Baptist Church, and Calvin was a Noble in the Alhambra Shriners.

Calvin genuinely loved his family and his friends, and touched so many lives on his journey. He loved to praise the Lord, through his beautiful voice, and loved gospel music with all his heart...and we all loved Calvin. He will be greatly and profoundly missed.

Calvin Newton lived his life to the fullest and we're so thankful he is with Jesus and Joyce, and all those he loved who got heaven ready for him.

He sang like an angel...now he is one.

*****Calvin Newton's Going Home Celebration will be on Monday, March 13, at 2 PM at
Rising Fawn Baptist Church
4411 US-11, Rising Fawn, GA 30738

Calvin will be sung home by the Gaither Homecoming Choir, featuring the Easters, Nelon's, the Blackwood's, and The Oak Ridge Boys, and many more joyful voices!

After the service, there will be visitation at the front of the church, and anyone who wishes, may bring a dish to have Calvin's favorite thing, DINNER ON THE GROUND in the Fellowship Hall.

Then on Tuesday, March 14, Calvin's Chattanooga National Cemetery, 30 minute graveside service, with full military honors, will be at 2 PM. (arrive at 1:45)

We hope you join us to celebrate Calvin Newton's legacy and life--let's sing him home!*****

Online condolences may be shared at ryanfuneralhome.net.

Arrangements are by Ryan Funeral Home & Crematory, Trenton, GA

Cemetery Details

Chattanooga National Cemetery

1200 Bailey Ave
Chattanooga, TN 37404

Previous Events

A Celebration of Life

MAR 13. 2:00 PM (ET)

Rising Fawn Baptist Church
4411 Highway 11
Rising Fawn, GA 30738
(706) 462-2126
<http://risingfawnbaptist.com>

Graveside Service

MAR 14. 2:00 PM (ET)

Chattanooga National Cemetery
1200 Bailey Ave
Chattanooga, TN 37404

Tribute Wall



“ *He is the best singer in the world it was a big shock to hear that you died and I did not know that and now I know. And I am sorry very to hear that. Rest in peace Calvin.*

Diana - April 02, 2024 at 03:16 PM



“ *I grew up with Bob Robinson children as we were neighbors to Bob's parents. My love for gospel music was found at a young age leaning on a fence post listening Bob play and sing. The song on you tube Come Home and Wasted years will be with me till I die. Thanks Mr. Newton for your voice and grit. I consider it a honor to be able to imulate your style of singing Gods wonderful songs Randy Wilson. Mills River NC*

Randy Wilson - December 03, 2023 at 04:03 PM



“ *Wesley Calvin Newton*

October 09, 2023 at 03:12 AM

LR

*Calven was my 2nd cousin
We loved him up here in owensboro ky area
He would come to the family reunions and the whole bunch Linda
newton Betty Newton bonnie Newton James Newton
Danny Newton George Newton
And more of my cousins would have a gospel singing right there in the
park. Most of my family has gone on to God now I have only one aunt
left now Helen Newton. It was good growing up with so much love for
each other and the music singing was the best memories I have as a
young child I would set and listen for hours .
Those was happy days that have long past but I will forever have it my
heart.
I am Bonnie newton's daughter
Lovae Ramirez
I am back in owesnboro ky once again much older now but my life was
good as a child with such a large musical family .*

Lovae ramirez - November 12, 2025 at 04:05 PM

DF

“ *We were saddened to hear of Calvin’s passing but happy in the
knowledge he is in a better place, with no more suffering and
together again with Joyce and his many friends in the arms of
Jesus. Such wonderful memories of a precious week we spent with
Calvin and Joyce on Lookout Mountain when they showed us
around so many wonderful places, and spending time worshipping in
their church with them. A blessing to meet his lovely daughter
Jackie and his delightful son Wes it was a real privilege. Our sincere
condolences to the family Mike and Dee (Scotland)*

Dee Fyfe - March 27, 2023 at 02:21 PM

JG

“ *Jackie, I was hoping to watch your dad's memorial service but I
couldn't find anything. Was it live streamed that I could watch it now.
Love & Prayers to you from your mother's cousin Jean Bennetch
Grover*

Jean Bennetch Grover - March 15, 2023 at 09:11 PM

AC

“ dear wesley calvin newton may god blessyou in heaven your friend andy

andycason cason - March 14, 2023 at 10:23 PM

JN

“ Calvin Newton, was loved and especially by his devoted family. It was because of the love of his life he washable to carry infer over 90years.WOW!!! Ilovedthe sound of his group"The Sons of Song"My prayers are with you....

Judy Nelon - March 14, 2023 at 03:23 AM

PJ

Iam glad Calvin Newton lived TO be 90 Yrs old! And live THAT long! And he Loved his Family ALOT! And was also loved by Them! May he rest in Peace! He sounded LIKE a GOOD And Great MAN! Have a good day! To the PEOPLE in his family!

Pam Jones - March 14, 2023 at 03:30 PM

BG

To Wes, Jackie, Keith and Samantha, I knew your Dad, Father-in-law and Grandfather for over 60 years. The very first time that I met Calvin was when he would come over to our next door neighbor's house and she would feed him. The few times that he came down when he was sitting at her kitchen table and I would be next door with my Mom, Calvin would pick me up and set me in his lap while he was eating. I had not heard or seen Calvin until I saw him on one of the Gaither Homecoming videos, because I thought he was dead and so did my Mom. I finally got back in touch with Calvin when he sent me a notification that he liked my post on all the Alabama football players going in the NFL and then he sent me a friend request. At that time, I googled his name and got his phone number and started calling him I was hoping so bad that he and I could have renewed our longtime friendship. I always have and always will have a special place in my heart for Calvin. For two years straight, Karen Peck and myself would talk about what a sweet man Calvin was (this was at The Bessemer Civic Center in Bessemer Alabama). And now, Karen Peck and myself will still say what a sweet man he was and how much we are going to miss him. You will be in my thoughts and prayers during this time of grief. I know what it's like to lose a Dad and Grandfather (sorry, can't say anything about losing a father-in-law). May God Bless You and comfort you during this time of sadness.

Billie Guthrie - March 16, 2023 at 10:13 AM



“ 194 files added to the album Life Tributes



Ryan Funeral Home - March 13, 2023 at 11:13 AM

DB

“ Dear Newton Family..I read Mr. Newton's obituary and found it so interesting and intriguing. I looked him up on You Tube and heard what a voice our Heavenly Father had blessed him with!! Oh he sang so beautiful and with such feeling. How proud you can be to call him Dad, Granddad, etc. Many things on social media are not worthy of listening too or watching but how wonderful it is to be able to still hear his singing. I know he is now singing in Heavens choir.
Drue Burton Pikeville Tn.



Drue Burton - March 10, 2023 at 11:03 PM

TG

“ Terrie Goss sent a virtual gift in memory of Wesley Newton



Terrie Goss - March 09, 2023 at 08:42 AM

RW

“ I loved brother Calvin. I was able to meet him and hear him sing at The Grand Ole Gospel Reunion in Greenville, South Carolina. What a singer and man of God he was! Gospel Music lost a Legend but Heaven gained a great Singer. My Prayers go out to all the family members. We ❤️ y'all and Bro. Calvin's Music will live on. ❤️ ❤️ 🎤
🎤

Rev. Ken Williams - March 06, 2023 at 09:43 PM

SG

MY DTR IS APRIL ELLIOTT...SHE IS BLIND....SHE TALKED TO CALVIN MANY TIMES..HE WAS SO KIND TO HER

SUSAN GOLDMAN - October 27, 2023 at 11:50 PM

SP

“ Got to know Calvin when he and Buddy Sampson and Phillip Bell and I used to walk mornings at the track at our community center. I also loved Southern Gospel and appreciated his beautiful tenor voice. He and his wife were lovely people and I am glad I got to know them.

Sheila Phillips - March 05, 2023 at 06:11 PM

SP

“ Sheila Phillips sent a virtual gift in memory of Wesley Newton



Sheila Phillips - March 05, 2023 at 08:49 AM

SP

“ Sheila Phillips lit a candle in memory of Wesley Newton



Sheila Phillips - March 05, 2023 at 08:48 AM



“ Our thoughts and prayers are with ya'll. I still remember coming up with my father-in-law, David Carlock and James Hutto to visit with Calvin. He brought out memorabilia and told us stories of the early days. I so enjoyed it.

Charlie Rogers - March 04, 2023 at 10:53 PM