



## Ronald "Donnie" Stevens

April 6, 1939 - January 14, 2020

What a wonderful life I had knowing all of you and so many other great folks who have passed on before me. My life began on April 6, 1939 in a marvelous little coal mining town in West Virginia called Granttown; what a terrific place, full of heartwarming and giving people. At the time we were living in a company house at 149 Water Street along side Dunkard Creek. My certificate of birth at Fairmont General Hospital read that I was born colored and alive, thank goodness! My parents were Jeanette and Hoover Stevens. They named me Ronald "Donnie"; now that I'm dead I guess I'll never know. My mom came to Pittsburgh around 1942 with me, my brother Jesse and two of my sisters, Carol and Diane. I was three years old at the time we stayed with my mother's sisters in the Hill District until we acquired a place in paradise; a public housing project called Glen Hazel in May of 1942. We lived at 1066 Rivermont Drive, Apartment 2C. Man, we had a indoor toilet, a furnace, refrigerator, gas stove and a bathtub. We also had great neighbors all around us; too many to name. My mom soon gave birth to my youngest sister, Doris or as you all know her as "Tootie"; she passed on in 2005. Glen Hazel was such a super exciting place; we did so many things and built so many friendships. We played cricket, basketball on a dirt court, street skating, played tin-can alley; built shacks, picked apples, blackberries, and pears, and we could ride a sled from Broadview all the way the way to Hazelwood. We had community gardens, rode homemade skippies, we played post-office and spin the bottle, and had quarter dances in the basement. Some of the older crew went to Ivory Gardens in Glenwood; I was too young. We hung out at the center and Zwicks Ice Cream Parlor where we drank cokes and sodas and played pin ball machines. We went to night gym and went skating at the Diamond (it was located where what is now Market Square). We listened Mary Dee and Porky Chedwick on W.H.O.D on the radio; they both lived in Glen Hazel and would you believe we had junior proms at the center? I could write several pages about the many adventures I experienced in that hysterical paradise - Glen Hazel. I started first grade at Burgwin Elementary School in the fall of 1945; I missed kindergarten because I had the tedders. I was ahead of the game when I began school because I knew how to read thanks to my sister Carol who taught me at home. She also was a teacher's aide in Miss Moore's class in the 40's; imagine that, she was way ahead of her time and beautiful. She passed on in the year 1976. She was a great sister and also

a friend; she introduced several attractive girls to her baby brother - me. On the way to school we used to float popsicle sticks down Johnston Avenue on rainy days. They would sail so fast that we would arrive at school early after chasing them. I loved lunchtime sitting on the gym floor while eating mom's delicious lunches. She made great sandwiches. The usual were egg salad, baloney and peanut butter and jelly. We'd usually washed them down with a half pint of chocolate milk. I got teased all the time about a cartoon character named "Donnie Dingbat". He was the safety example of who not to be while crossing the street. The slogan on the posters around school read "Don't be a Donnie Dingbat" look both ways before crossing. Grade school was great; I was a straight "A" student. I was such a wild imaginative kid in grade school that mom asked me one day if I was on dope. I guess I was high on life, even then. I was enrolled in Gladstone Junior High from 1952 to 1954 under the rule of Bib Bob Cresswell, our principal. I played the bench most of the time for three seasons on Coach Folett's soccer team, but I was damn good at slaughter; I was the last dude standing quite often because I was shifty and agile. Walking to and from Gladstone across the prairie was a load of fun. Stealing pears, raiding gardens, chasing girls through the woods was just some of the many things we did. I was in 9th grade and in Mr. Park's music class singing Stephen Foster's Classics; Old Folks At Home, Camptown Races and Old Black Joe when I was called to the office. I was told I wanted at home; that was January 14, 1954 - that was the day my daddy died. If memory serves me correctly mom sold dad's 1939 Dodge, his 22 rifle, and 12 gauge shotgun to pay for the funeral. She also had enough left over to buy a used 13' inch Emerson floor model television from Ed and Sally Goins. Momma passed on in 1982. The first TV that came into Glen Hazel was around 1948; and I noticed how difficult it was to get your friends to come outdoors anymore. And then onto Taylor Allerdice in the fall of 1954; what a big school but very educational. Many of the kids from Squirrel Hill had cars and coming from the projects we had ninety cents weekly passes to catch the streetcar to school. It wasn't long before I used my artistic skills to counterfeit those passes so that I could spend 90 cents at the Hot Puppy Shop on hot dogs and Nehi pop; that we consumed on the front lawn of our campus. Many of you youngsters sitting here reading this are probably saying how square we were, but let me tell you - - you will never have the fun and friendships we had while you're sitting in front of a TV and a computer believe me, you missed it. We didn't have security guards in our schools; we didn't bring weapons to school, and we didn't kill each other. I joined the Army reserves along with Earl Harris, Alvin Robinson, Herky Lee, Leroy Scott and a few others in 1956 while still in school. I graduated in June of 1957. On my commencement night my only graduation gift came from my Aunt Emmy; it was \$2.00, but I appreciated it, and she told me to not stay out all night. No prom, no party, no ring, but I was glad to get out; it was beginning to get boring. I began basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky August 1957. I was a pretty polished soldier; I became a platoon leader and we had the sharpest platoon in our company, but I didn't like

being taught to kill. I had a honorable discharge without going to war; I would have never killed for country or anything else. How many of you old heads sitting here remember the big snow of 1950? I was eleven years old when we got 36 inches and had to dig out of our houses and make a driving path all the way to Johnston Avenue; the Main Thorofare. We never had a snow day ever in my twelve years of school. There is nowhere in the world that can boast that marvelous statistic. Unlocked doors was our trademark; there was no fear of home invasions. Once in awhile someone would get drunk and wander into the wrong house because they all looked alike from the outside. During Christmas holidays almost all of the one thousand homes were lit up. Coming up Johnston Avenue it was a sight to see in all its luminous splendor. The greatest thing about Glen Hazel was we didn't know we were poor and we were on welfare, but my mom was so organized that all my friends thought we were "Sadiddy". We also had outdoor movies before television. Chapter after chapter each week of Tarzan, Hop-A-Long Cassidy and others. Also films of Our Gang, Laurel and Hardy and W.C. Fields. I will never forget all the swell times I had in that wonderful place. After I came out of high school I was quite lucky that my brother-in-law, Carol's husband got me a job in the post office at eighteen years of age. I stayed there until 1966; I owed every loan shark there when I left. I drew my retirement money on my departure, a whopping \$3,000.00. I bought mom a 21' Admiral black & white television and me and Frank Waller and Nate Watkins headed for California to live. After shopping in Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and Amarillo, Texas we were just about broke when we got to Albuquerque, New Mexico; we were back in eight days. In Chicago a case of old crow was only \$36.00; that 12 fifths, so you know we got blasted. After reading all the things about California through the years I'm glad we never settled there. I was definitely a street dude. I hung out all over Pittsburgh and surrounding areas. Partying like crazy, man we drank everything we could put our lips on from the best like Remi Martin all the way down to Barrel-Wash and Moonshine, and plenty of beer. In the 60's 3 quarts of beer was only a \$1.00. In 1960 Big Jim Betsill called me on my job at Babyland and asked if I was interested in a job as Roving Leader in Hazelwood working in the streets and schools keeping racial tensions down. It was paying \$8,000.00 a year; I didn't hesitate-that was the beginning of a wonderful twenty-one year adventure and career. Me and several teenagers formed a group of boys and girls to begin to raise money to build a teen center in Hazelwood. Our slogan was "Hazelwood Youth On The Move" Man, we had a ball; having car washes, selling dinners. having dances at St. Stephens, visiting colleges and having raffles, but we never succeeded in our quest to build a center. Soon after the YMCA picked up my salary and thus my YMCA career began. In the early 70's the YMCA purchased the Moose Lodge on Chatsworth Street in Hazelwood; a magnificent building. I got busy and hired a superb staff of very dynamic people. Our program staff consisted of Vonnie Comer, Olivia Jones and Bill Holbrook, a trio of very talented people; they made

me look good. We did so many things that it would take several pages to mention all of them. We had basketball for all ages of 3-18 for boys & girls, volleyball, day camp, photography, tutoring, college orientation, senior citizen fishing trips, ceramics, computers, movies, dancing, and aerobics to name a few. Our soccer team played an international team at the Olympic training center in Colorado as well as local teams. We even did things like parachuting, cave exploring, river rafting, and rock climbing. We traveled to many colleges like Penn State, Norte Dame, Ohio State, Howard University, and Cheyney State. We experienced a lifetime of thrills in those twenty-one years. I also had the privilege and honor to work in Atlanta Housing Projects during the time of the infamous child murders initiating programs to keep children off the streets. I retired in 1987 the same year my brother Jesse passed. He was a helluva an artist and he had two beautiful daughters; Darling and Doretha; Carol had two kids, Phil and Patty Jo; Tootie had six, Chris, Steve, Turner, Mike, Michelle and Kelley. My sister Diane had four offspring, Butch, Chuckie, Kenny and Dawn. Retirement was quite boring after leading such an active life. In my lifetime I had two motorcycles, three convertibles and a customized van which resembled a plush apartment with all the comforts of home including framed pictures of friends/relatives. I loved to travel; I would hit the road quite often off to anywhere. My idle years brought some sadness; both of my sons passed - Michael in 1997 and DeAndre in 2006. My daughter, Autumn lives on. I have one grandson - Lil Michael. I lived twenty-six years in an attic apartment in Homestead and moved into a beautiful apartment in county housing in 1997. Where I resided til I passed. I partied there; drank about 10-15 beers a day; smoked a little reefer and still chased women. I planted vegetable gardens every year and beautiful the grounds with flowers. I enjoyed life to the fullest; if there;s anything better than living I'll be the first to come back and tell you, but seriously doubt that - I'm dead (and that's the end). I chose cremation because its cheaper and I don't think I would look as would look as good dead as I did alive. Ole' Redd Foxx once said when we die we turn to dust and it rains and dust turns to grass and then a cow comes along and eats the grass and he converts it in to a bi-product by pooping it out - so the moral of that story is be careful of what you step in it might be a relative. I am survived by many great and great great nieces and nephews. I was quite proud of them. Enjoy your life and treat others like you would want to be treated.

Walk around, mingle, and introduce yourself to some of the other spectacular people I knew in my life, and after my death presentations drop by the Colonel or Popeye's and pick up some chicken for a good time afterwards. Whoever gets my ashes blend it with some potting soil and plant a habanero pepper plant - I loved fiery hot peppers. I would like to thank you all for such a wonderful life. By the way I made a mistake earlier; we came to Pittsburgh in 1941 and moved to Glen Hazel in 1942 I was only two so don't be

hard on me. In grade school I was chosen to sing in a school assembly. I was coached by my sister Carol in Miss Schmidt's music class and at home. I sang "Santa Lucia" long before my voice changed; I really sounded quite feminine, but I recovered and sang a little bass as a teenager. I won the spelling bee at Burgwin and went to the finals at Carnegie Music Hall. When I was called the word that was given to me was "phase". I paused and got my nerves together and with a surge of confidence, I blurted out "Phase", F~A~Z~E; I guess you know I had to sit my ass down. I can remember how our family gathered around the radio in the 40's and listened to the Lone Ranger, The Shadow, Inner Sanctum, Fibber Magee and Molly, The Green Hornet and would you believe, Amos and Andy done by two white guys. We also played Chinese Checkers, Pick-Up-Sticks, did Jigsaw Puzzles together. What a good time we had together. We regularly spit polished our apartment every Saturday morning, together! I think my mom would still be doing time, in the joint for all those beatings she gave me with a belt or a switch and an ironing cord. I also knew right from wrong. I also got married in 1968 two days after Martin Luther King Jr. was shot; my life as a husband lasted only a few months. My life was always full of excitement. In 1966 my drinking buddies left me Steubenville, Ohio with one cent to my name. My only choice was to start walking. I hiked through Weirton, West Virginia all the way to Imperial, Pennsylvania where I was picked up by a truck driver who saw me in Weirton. He dropped me off downtown Pittsburgh. I walked and ran for normally 6 hours. Growing older and wiser was quite a thrill for me; people interaction was the biggest contributor to my wellness and as I grew older people hardly interacted at all. In my later years when I turned 68 I experienced high blood pressure and something stupid like anxiety. I don't know what I died from, but I know I didn't go easily, because living was the greatest thing in the world.

Composed by: Donnie Stevens

Written by: Donnie Stevens

Edited by: Donnie Stevens

Produced by: Donnie Stevens

Directed by: Donnie Stevens

# Events

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**JAN**   **Memorial Service**   12:00PM - 02:00PM

**25**

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High Rise Community Room

481 East 8th Avenue, Homestead, PA, US, 15120

# Comments

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“ Donnie never met a stranger. He had a big heart and was always willing to share his love of life with any one. He will be missed by many.  
Frank Stanley Lee (Glen Hazel resident 1952-1969)

Frank Stanley Lee - January 29 at 11:28 PM

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“ Selena Hamilton lit a candle in memory of Ronald "Donnie" Stevens



Selena hamilton - January 27 at 08:15 AM

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“ I called him Jesus because he always wore sandals even in the winter and he was always on a quest to make things better for the community children an to make better adults of us all. When the East Coast Band needed a place to practice he was there for us, and gave us the space to get better and share our talents with the youth. Dearly missed and forever admired.

Charlie “ Chuckie” Sealey - January 25 at 11:23 AM

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“ Condolences from the Bursey family

Lynda Bursey - January 25 at 10:32 AM

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“ Remembering are days at the Black Bull. That's where he gave me the nick name "Show and Tell". He was full of life!

Lynda - January 25 at 10:30 AM



“ Even though Uncle Donnie died, i never change my feelings. As a teenager , he would call me elephant . He woul buy my sisters and i art work to maybe become an artist. Culture was a part of his life. I pray that he had a conversation with our God.



“ April 9, 2019

My uncle had sent me a post card. Front side of the post card he had a picture of my father with my sis & I at a very young age sitting together. Put together as if our father was painting us...

Back side uncle wrote: "Who would A' Thought You Two Little Brats Would Become ANGELS?"

I Love You Both More Than You Will Ever Know.

Thanks For All Your Care And Concern".

Sincerely,

Jesse's Brother

Donnie

Uncle I Miss You Dearly, So Heart Broken.

I Love You Tremendously

Your Blond Hair Niece,

Re

Doretha Turner - January 25 at 08:33 AM

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“ What fun we had in your presence! Thinking of all the good times! Condolences to the family. Hug Char B for me!

Michele Veney-Akins - January 25 at 04:32 AM

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“ Donnie you were the greatest leader a community could ever had. You To say Hi "Daisy Mae" my grandmother's name, you tease my mom Dolores Wood all the time. You knew all my family. Dad Clifford, brothers Ricky. Kippy, Carlos, Marty, sisters Carmen ChiChi the whole Rice Crew

You greeted us with a smile and always made us laugh. Thanks for the Love Thanks for the reunion pictures Awesome! Awesome you Were . Wood / Rice Families will always treasure the Memories you helped us create. God bless Your beautiful awesome and wonderful Soul! 😊 Wish the world could have more Donnie's like you It define what true LOVE is for mankind REST IN PEACE WITH GOD

Rhonda Wood - January 24 at 03:18 PM

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“ Marva Sharpe lit a candle in memory of Ronald "Donnie" Stevens



Marva Sharpe - January 24 at 02:52 PM

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“ You were truley a great man,funny caring as nd definitely crazy in a great way ,the Kelley family greatly appreciated you for everything you done for our family Love you RONNEE you will be missed From the KELLEY FAMILY’



Sandra Gibson - January 24 at 08:47 AM

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“ Karen Wingfield Collins lit a candle in memory of Ronald "Donnie" Stevens



Karen Wingfield Collins - January 24 at 05:25 AM

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“ Lynda Irvin lit a candle in memory of Ronald "Donnie" Stevens





Lynda Irvin - January 24 at 04:30 AM

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“ So long my friend! I just found out today that you left this world that you lived in to your fullest. All that I would have to say to you Donnie you already know. Sleep in peace.

Lynda Irvin - January 23 at 05:00 PM

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“ Donnie will be truly missed by all his Glen Hazel friends and family. I'll miss hearing Donnie hollering out my name as he passed by in his bike as he traveled through the streets of Hazelwood and Homestead.

The family of Donnie; you have my sincere sympathy and heartfelt condolences.  
R.I.P...Donnie...

Inez McDonald Katzbeck - January 22 at 09:34 PM

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“ Truly a good friend for 80 years. He will be missed.  
Earl Harris

Earl Harris - January 22 at 05:32 PM

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“ Donnie was a person who everyone wanted to be around. As a child, I remember his loud affectionate laugh. He was a true pillar to the Hazelwood Communities and keeping us involved with the "Y" was so exciting and it was his passion. I remember Ms. Olivia (RIP) having us doing an African dance class there as well. We did so many exciting things through the "Y" i.e., riding dirt bikes, day camp and of course Burning Bush. Thank you Donnie for what you did for us during our youthful and adulthood days. May you rest eternally in peace knowing how much love we have for you.

Carla Wilburn-Miles

Condolences to Donnie's family - from the Wilburn Family! You will be truly missed.

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**Carla Wilburn-Miles** - January 21 at 08:56 AM



“ The Washington's from Broadview wish to offer our condolences. GLEN HAZEL FOREVER

**Richard Washington** - January 22 at 06:42 PM

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“ Rip in peace donnie,great memories at the ymca in hazelwood, tell aunt rita Jones I said hello, Jimmie and Camille Ferguson-herriott

**Camille Herriott** - January 19 at 04:11 PM

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“ Condolences to the Stevens family from Eli amd REV. Lois Lukus

**Eli and Rev Lois Lukus** - January 17 at 08:34 PM

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“ My condolences to the family

**Glenn E. Smith St.** - January 17 at 08:10 PM

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“ Deepest sympathies to the Stevens family. May God comfort you. I remember Donnie for his kindness, gentleness and since of humor to us younger kids. He was a blessing.

**Raceen Williams Jemison** - January 17 at 07:39 PM

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“ Hi, My Condolences 2 The Stevens FAMILY Priscilla Lawson

**Priscilla Lawson** - January 17 at 07:28 PM

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“ Donnie, the artist, was like another brother who lived a few doors away. I was in and out of the Stevens' apartment too many times to count.

Fern Rinsland Berry - January 17 at 04:30 PM

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“ I am comforted. I got to see Donnie one last time during a visit to Homestead. He was riding his unique bicycle at the Waterfront. I will always cherish time he spent with the youngster Collie sisters while he was dating our aunt. Donnie took us on field trips, played games, taught me some calligraphy, stretched our minds with riddles. The relationship with our family never dimmed. Donnie put on his poncho and is riding his motorcycle to a new destination.

Lynda Collie Johnson - January 17 at 03:46 PM

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“ Thanks to God for allowing us the pleasure to know this Mr Ronald Donnie Stevens and condolences to the Steven's family for sharing him with the community.

Joyce Betsill

Joyce Betsill - January 17 at 02:56 PM

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“ What a sad loss for our extended Glen Hazel family. Donnie was truly Mr Glen Hazel!! And then Mr Hazelwood YMCA!!! He was amazing on so many levels to so many people, young and old. I was fortunate to have known him since I was about 9 years old when I moved into one of those last two buildings at the end of Rivermont. What a great neighbor Donnie was, always willing to help, always spreading cheer, always there. He will be missed as he takes his place among the ancestors!!

Yvette Murphy Aidara - January 17 at 02:43 PM

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“ My sincere condolences to the Stevens family on behalf of Donnie Stevens; a great and dynamic person with the heart of gold, who extended himself well beyond the realm of greatness, especially with the youth. Donnie is now taking his well deserved rest, in the Lord!

Inez Katzbeck - January 17 at 01:52 PM

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“ We grew up next door to Donnie and in the early days our families shared a party-line phone! Donnie was always surprising us making us laugh! His dedication to the children during his days at the hazelwood YMCA was amazing and his love of Glen Hazel was second to none. He will be missed.

**Connie Portis** - January 17 at 01:31 PM



“ Hello, My Condolences 2 The Stevens FAMILY . Priscilla Lawson

**Priscilla Lawson** - January 17 at 05:25 PM



“ My condolences to the family of Donnie he was a great guy and fun to be around!! He will be truly missed! PRAYERS FOR THE FAMILY!!  
Rita Ford

**Rita Ford** - January 17 at 08:44 AM