



## Samuel James Renfro

June 12, 1947 - April 8, 2019

Samuel James Renfro, formerly of Harriman, Crossville and Baxter, left earthly life to be with his Heavenly Father on April 8, 2019. Sam(my) was born June 12, 1947 in Chattanooga to parents Samuel Marion Renfro and Minnie Ann Walker, who predeceased him. He grew up in Harriman and for many years in the 1950s and 1960s parents Sam and Minnie operated Renfro's restaurant there.

Sam was known locally, regionally and nationally for his automotive engineering and racing skills. He won many races in the 1960s with his Chevys at Harriman Drag Strip and regional dragways. His all-time favorite car, an Aztec bronze Chevy II ("Nova SS 327-350HP close ratio Muncie 4-speed 456 gear AA/Stock"), was undefeated in competition. He won the NHRA world championship in Super Stock Eliminator with a black/silver Camaro in 1968 at the Spring Nationals held at Bristol Motor Speedway.

Sam worked as an engine specialist in NASCAR focusing on qualifying engine performance and enjoyed the camaraderie of racing greats Dale Earnhardt, Joe Gibbs, Alan Kulwicki, Richard Childress, Smokey Yunick and Junior Johnson, among others. Sam was a three-time USCMT national champion, and was manager of Harriman Drag Strip, 411 International Raceway, Maryville Speedway and Crossville Speedway. In the 1980s Sam worked with Joe Lunati in designing Lunati camshafts, known for their quality and

performance. In later years, Sam's business Guardian Performance Technology in Baxter, Tennessee was well-known; he operated as an independent automotive engineering consultant and built high-performance engines for numerous regional racing champions.

Sam was an expert marksman and a certified NRA instructor. He was also in law enforcement and a member of the Memphis FBI Swat Team placing first in the Southeast Regional Swat Team Competition in 1979.

Sam was proud of his Southern heritage and advocated preservation of Confederacy history and honor. He was a staunch advocate of the Second Amendment and loved America. Sam always had an opinion and stood his ground. Facebook will now have one fewer "friend" to put in Facebook Jail. At times he could be a bit brusque on the outside, but inside Sam had a loving, caring, giving, tender heart. Computer and telephone traffic will be significantly diminished in Sam's absence since he loved keeping in touch with his many friends. He was known for his wit and dry sense of humor and could entertain family and friends with detailed oratory of events and milestones in his storied careers. Sam lived life his way and was truly one-of-a-kind.

Sam is survived by his sister Betty Fritts of Harriman; daughter Samantha Royster (Jim) of Oak Ridge; son Chris Renfro of Knoxville; daughter Tina Fox of Harriman; grandsons Brandon Bunch (Josie) of Oak Ridge, Adam Bunch of Clinton, Ryne Norris of Harriman; granddaughter Savannah Norris of Crystal Springs, Florida; great grandsons Liam and Leif Bunch of Oak Ridge; cousin Johnny Pemberton of Kingston; nieces Robin Bryant and Rhonda Melton of Harriman; nephew Lloyd Fritts of Knoxville; grandnieces Brooke Kelley, Morgan James and Lindsey Bryant of Harriman; long-time friend David Clark of Harriman, numerous cousins and other relatives, many social media and other friends, and Janice Whittaker Blaylock.

Sam was also known for the love and care he showered on all his pets. His long-time companion, yellow Labrador Retriever Abigail, preceded him in death. Memoriams in Sam's honor can be donated to Secret City Animal Rescue (SCAR), 969 Oak Ridge Turnpike #331, Oak Ridge, TN 37830 or Pleasant Hill Pet Rescue and Senior Sanctuary, 433 Pleasant Hill Road, Blountville, TN 37617, or an animal rescue of your choice; or the Princess Theatre in Harriman. Kyker Funeral Home of Harriman is assisting with announcements and arrangements. A celebration of life memorial service in Sam's honor will be held Sunday, April 28, at 5:00 p.m. at the Princess Theatre located at 421 North Roane Street in Harriman, Tennessee. Eulogy will be given by long-time friend and surrogate son Grant Rimback who is an Elder of Rio Revolution Church in Maryville. Afterward, one of Sam's favorite movies, Thunder Road, will be shown on the big screen with popcorn and drinks provided.

# Tribute Wall

GJ

“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



Gail Jones - April 21, 2019 at 03:26 PM

GA

*miss you everyday and night*

gail - July 29, 2021 at 03:53 PM

GJ

“ Gail Edwards Jones lit a candle in memory of Samuel James Renfro



Gail Edwards Jones - April 20, 2019 at 03:15 PM

SP

“ Sammy was a wonderful person ~ full of sunshine.....always had that big smile. I've known him since Jr. High School. He would bring all his bikes, motorcycles, cars and helmets to my dad's Sign Shop. Preacher James Louis Johnson , my dad, owned Johnson's Signs & Displays in Harriman . Dad would free hand paint & letter names, designs , and pinstripes on race cars, etc. My parents thought the world of Sammy and loved to eat at Renfros Cafe. We will surely miss him. Our prayers are with your family during this sad time. He's with you in spirit ~ he's your guardian angel ~ always near. God be with you til we meet again.

---

**Sharon Poatterson** - April 19, 2019 at 10:16 AM

SP

“ Sharon Poatterson sent a virtual gift in memory of Samuel James Renfro



---

**Sharon Poatterson** - April 19, 2019 at 09:59 AM

JG

“ Sammy was a beautiful person. I met him in the Country Music magazine on single pages. We got in touch . We would talk for hours. I live in Boston Mass and of course he lived in Tennessee. I did get to meet him A few times I would fly to Nashville. And go visit him. He had a funny and dry humor. But we became friends. And to the day he passed . We just had a two hour telephone call . Laughing at our memories. I still have a heart key chain he gave me. He will be forever in my heart. I never stopped sending him a Christmas Card. 30 yrs have passed but I still send him a card. RIP . Till I see u again Love and light Jennie Granese.

---

**Jennie Lee Granese** - April 19, 2019 at 06:41 AM

DE

“ Sam has been a friend since childhood. Sam we are going to miss you. R.I.P my friend.

Dave Elmore - April 18, 2019 at 11:00 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Janice Blaylock - April 17, 2019 at 09:13 PM

JW

“ Sammy and I rode many roads together! RIP

Jim West - April 17, 2019 at 06:33 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Jim West - April 17, 2019 at 05:37 PM