



James Donald McGhee

March 8, 1937 - May 28, 2025

JAMES DONALD MCGHEE. Lathrup Village, MI. 3/8/1937-5/28/2025. Son (Clifford & Maurine McGhee), Brother (Howard {Kay}, Paul {Amy}), Husband (Maria), Father (Lisa, Tony, Sean), Uncle (Monica, Stefanie, Zachary, Nicole), Cousin (many), Photographer, Master Gardener, Volunteer, Music Lover, Producer, renowned Blues Warrior . . . and friend to many. After his career and family, his passion was highlighting Detroit area talent through the 20+-year production of Jazz and Blues at the Southfield Public Library . . . blues music! . . . and traveling around the country photographing blues musicians. He lived a great life, laughed often and loved unconditionally. He will be dearly missed.

Tribute Wall

TS

“ I meet Don at Heatstock, I was the videographer. We had a standard joke, when Reviewing Heatstock videos later at home with reviewers (not Donald) - if you see Don McGhee take a drink, by the time done watching videos, we were done, too. He was always a Nice Guy, to me and others.



Thomas A Sarnowski - July 21, 2025 at 08:53 PM

MB

“ Don was always a big supporter of blues here in Detroit, When I resigned as President of the Detroit Blues Society, one of my parting jobs was to find a replacement. Don was my first choice, but he resisted, saying "I wouldn't know how to do the job". I convinced him he would be perfect for the job, but he would only sign up if I agreed to be his Vice President for 1 year. I did agree and the society was well served under him. Don had no personal agenda, just a love of the music. - Mike Boulan

MICHAEL Keith BOULAN - July 16, 2025 at 12:22 PM

MK

“ I met Don through our mutual friend, Frank Lee, sometime back in the 1990s. They would travel together and go to various blues festivals like King Biscuit in Arkansas and Bean Blossom in Indiana, which I was doing too. I always enjoyed hanging out with Don. We had both the love of blues music and artist photography in common. I also got to know the Detroit music scene through Don, and discovered some wonderful artists I never would have known.

Mary Ann Kindel - July 13, 2025 at 09:59 PM

 Dori
Sumter

“ I always called Don one of my Photography Mentors. I loved showing up to an event and finding Don. We always rotated our spots so we could both get some great images. I appreciated his "Jazz and Blues" series at the Southfield Library. One night, the music was fire and Don and I were sharing the room, using the back table to switch out our lenses for the best pics. At one point, we both had our Canon f2.8 70-200mm lenses lying there unattended. Uh oh! Who's was who's? Well it only took about 20 seconds to figure out. Mine was the rode hard one. Don treated his equipment with such reverence. We had a good chuckle over that. I'm already missing him. I first met him at Heatstock where I met my husband Curtis 26 years ago. Time flies. I'll see you at the big show, my friend. Front row!

Dori Sumter - July 13, 2025 at 09:26 PM

VD

“ Don and I were about the same age, I being 4 months older, and over the years we had a loose connection due to my growing up in Maumee, Ohio and Don being in Michigan. In spite of the distance I always thought Don was a "cool cat".
We never discussed our common interests much...music, Master Gardening, community service, photography...but it was just understood.
Last Fall we had two opportunities to sit and talk...at Maria's memorial and Pat McGhee's memorial.
In the course of those talks Don commented, "You know, you were always my favorite cousin." Astonished, I looked at him and said, "You were MY favorite cousin! Why have we waited until we're 88 years old to tell one another?" We both grinned and hugged each other.
The message is: Don't wait to tell someone he's special. Do it now. Life is short and unpredictable.
Virginia (Ginny) McGhee Dean

Virginia Dean - July 09, 2025 at 12:09 PM

BL

“ 1 file added to the album *Capturing the music*



BluesPhotosbyDonMcGhee - July 09, 2025 at 01:36 AM

“ Memories of My Brother

I have nothing but good memories of my brother Don. He was the oldest of 3 brothers, brought into this world and raised by our parents Clifford and Maurine McGhee. Don was the oldest, Paul was the youngest, and I was in the middle. Don was about 2 years older than me and I am about 2 years older than Paul.

From my earliest childhood, all the way into adulthood and beyond, I was glad to have an older brother like Don. Since he willingly took me along with him on so many “adventures” during my growing up years, I got to be exposed to and do a lot of things earlier than normal. I guess our parents had an adequately high level of trust and confidence in him to allow him and me to go off by ourselves on various travels and adventures. When he was 11 and I was 9, they would let us get on a local bus in Detroit, by ourselves, and ride it to Sears and get off and wonder around, get a snack at the soda fountain and then ride the bus back home. When Don was 13 and I was 11 our parents let us take a Greyhound bus, by ourselves, from Detroit to southern Illinois, with a 3 hour layover in Chicago, for the purpose of staying a week with our grandparents. None of these type of adventures resulted in us either getting hurt or in trouble. From those earliest days of growing up, it seems that Don had, and further developed a sense of responsibility and caring and consideration for other people. In all of my life I never detected or noticed him displaying a confrontational approach in his interactions with other people.

Don had an active interest in music for most of his life. All 3 of us boys were exposed to taking piano lessons in our early childhood. By the time Don was apx 12 years old, he had also been exposed to taking lessons on both the trombone and the accordion. Although he didn't have sufficient interest in continuing to learn to play any of these instruments, he was developing a keen interest in music that broadened and expanded for the remainder of his life. By the time he was in high school he had joined record clubs and was regularly placing orders for LP albums. During his life his interest in music continued to expand and at some point, (I don't know when) it

seems that it began to really focus on blues music, and it took off in a variety of directions, which I won't try to focus on here.

However, I do recall the last place that my big brother Don took me to. In 2022 my wife Kay and I traveled from Atlanta to Detroit to visit Don and Maria. One night while we were there, Don wanted to take me to a bar where a blues band that he knew was playing. We went and at some point Don mentioned to the band leader that his harmonica playing brother was with him and just happened to have a harmonica with him. So, I got coaxed into getting up on the stage and playing with them.

So, 72 years later, my big brother was still taking me on new adventures. I enjoyed having him as a brother for 86 years and I really miss him.

Howard McGhee

Howard McGhee - July 08, 2025 at 11:07 PM