



Sara Bess Dudley (1934-2007)

Funeral for Sara Bess (Brookshire) Dudley of Nacogdoches will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 16 at First United Methodist Church with Dr. William Gandin, pastor, and Dr. Bill Parsons, associate pastor, officiating. Burial will follow at Sunset Memorial Park.

Sara Bess died Tuesday, Sept. 11, the day after her 73rd birthday, at Nacogdoches Memorial Hospital following a long illness. She was born Sept. 10, 1934 to Bryan "Jack" Brookshire and Bessie McKay Brookshire.

Sara's father was one of 16 children and was born in Lufkin. He and his brothers founded the Brookshire Bros. and Brookshire's grocery store chains in East Texas, after their father had come to Angelina County in 1856 and taught all of his children to work hard. Her maternal grandfather, W.E. McKay, was a member of the first graduating class at Sam Houston State University. He served as postmaster of Walker County before becoming a state game warden, a capacity in which he served for many years. McKay was a poet and a writer, and Sara inherited his love for the written word. Reading was one of her favorite pastimes. When her parents married on Dec. 25, 1925, they were school teachers. They both gave up their teaching jobs at that time to open the first Brookshire Bros. store in Nacogdoches.

From her mother, Sara Bess inherited a love for animals. When Bessie McKay Brookshire died in 1966, her menagerie included a crippled cow, 40 ducks, three deer, five peacocks, 12 dogs, 15 cats and two jay birds that lived in a cage in the kitchen for two decades. The first baby deer were brought to Mr. Brookshire by Charles Bright. The family still has photographs of a baby fawn playing in the front yard with a Border Collie named "Gypsy." The fawn had free roam of the house both inside and outside and would respond to Jack Brookshire calling him. This deer was known as "Honey Boy." This is the deer that many people saw following Mr. Brookshire home in his 1951 Buick, from an excursion for freedom that "Honey Boy" had, to explore Old Tyler Road near the Summers Sawmill.

Sara's own collection of animals included stray and abandoned dogs and cats that she rescued, tropical fish, Persian cats, rabbits, raccoons and three possums that she raised from the time they were hours old. She got her first horse when she was 5, and continued to have horses into the early 2000s when her 35-year-old horse, "Bando's Fool," died. This horse was the son of Bandelero, born 1946 on the King Ranch.

Though a horse fell on her in 1993 and broke her pelvis, she continued riding for another seven years as long as she was physically able.

Sara married Roger Dudley in March 1981, and they shared a common love of horses, hunting, fishing and the outdoors. Sara always accompanied Roger as he patrolled Nacogdoches County as constable of Precinct 3.

Sara Bess graduated from the Nacogdoches Demonstration School on the SFA Campus when she was 15, completed her degree at SFA by the time she was 17, and became a teacher before she reached the "legal" age of 18.

As a first grade teacher for Henderson ISD, Sara caught scarlet fever from one of her students her first year in the classroom. She spent three months in Methodist Hospital with endocarditis. She had been born with a heart murmur, and she suffered heart trouble throughout her life along with other health issues. She had a stroke at age 18, due to the endocarditis, was diagnosed with diabetes at age 42, and battled breast cancer at age 64. In 2005 she fell and fractured her back. In spite of her health problems, her eyes never lost their sparkle, her smile never lost its warmth and her indomitable spirit endured to the end. When asked the day before she died if she needed anything, Sara answered "a new heart."

She loved life, and she lived it to the fullest.

As an educator, Sara Bess made a difference in the lives of her students and maintained relationships with many of them through the years. Some of her former students will speak at her funeral in remembrance of a woman who was appreciated not only for her abilities in the classroom, but also for her beauty, grace and her 1950 Buick convertible and her blue 1965 Buick Wildcat.

As a member of the National Speech Association, Sara Bess traveled across the United States to destinations including New York, Seattle and Chicago. She accompanied the debate team on trips across the state, with the girls¹ team winning state under her guidance. With her experience in debate, Sara could hold her own in even the liveliest discussions related to politics and current events.

Sara started her career as an educator at Henderson ISD where she taught from 1952 to 1953. She taught speech, debate and English at Nacogdoches High School from 1954 to 1975, and served as a school counselor from 1976 to 1981. She then taught part-time five more years at SFA and Angelina College.

Sara's awards included: the Valley Forge Teacher's Medal (1972); the Dedicated Services Award presented by the Nacogdoches Regional Day School for the Deaf (1981); the Outstanding Service Award, local, district and state presented by the Texas State Teachers Association (1971); the Special Merit Award presented by the Texas State Teachers Association (1971); the Texas Classroom Teachers Association (1962); Outstanding Young Women of America (1966); the National Education Association's Project 64 membership award and five Voice of Democracy Awards, presented by Post 3893 (1986).

Her activities included: Serving as a delegate to Washington for the National Education Association's congressional contact team; being named "Teacher of the Year" for 1964 by the Nacogdoches Classroom Teacher's Association; serving as past editor and historian for the Texas Speech Association; serving as president of the District VII Texas State Teacher's Association (1968-1969); membership on the executive committee for the Texas Classroom Teachers Association (1962 -1964); executive board membership and district chairwoman for the Texas Speech Association (1964 -1966); president of the Nacogdoches Classroom Teachers Association (1961-1963); serving as a Mental Health and Mental Retardation advisory board member (1981 to 1988) and chairwoman of the board (1986-1988); membership in Piney Woods Guidance Counselor's Association and the Texas Personnel and Guidance Association; chairwoman of the Texas State Teachers Association Centennial Celebration in Mexia; chairwoman of the Texas State Teachers Association Bicentennial Celebration; chairwoman of the Texas State Teachers Association Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee (state and district level); state finalist for the essay, "I Watch the Lotus Bloom;" commencement speaker for the graduating class of San Augustine High School (1969) "The Dawn of a Brave New Generation;" serving as a delegate for the Speech Association of America National

Convention in New York City and serving as a representative for the Texas University Interscholastic League, helping to formulate UIL National Debate Topics.

Organizations and affiliations include past membership in the Texas Speech Association; Southern Speech Association; and the Speech Association of America; the American Association of University Women; serving as a delegate to National Convocation of Kappa Delta Pi Chicago (1962); the Nacogdoches Symphony Club; vice president for Kappa Delta Pi, SFA (1962); Nacogdoches Safety Council; Secretary for Precinct 2, Democrats, (1966-1967); county convention delegate, district delegate and alternate for Precinct 39, (1982); National Education Association delegate and credentials committee member for six national conventions; Parent Teachers Association; Chi Omega Sorority; Sponsor of Washington Square Player's and Speaker's Bureau (1963-1966) and sponsor of TJR Jr. High School cheerleaders (1956-1959). In college she was treasurer for the Pine Burr Social Club; a member of the Wesley Foundation; the Theater Guild; the A Capella Choir of SFA; and the Future Teachers of America.

She was a member of Business & Professional Women's Association; Nacogdoches County Retired Teachers Association, University Womens Club, and a life member of Texas Retired Teachers Association and the National Education Association.

She was a member of the First United Methodist Church from 1945 to present; taught ninth grade classes for the church; served on the worship committee from 1975-1976 and was a Circle VI member and a member of the educational committee. She marked her favorite scripture in her Bible kept a clipping of II Timothy 4:68 close to her: "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing."

Visitation will be from 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday, at the funeral home. Pallbearers will be Paul Gluck, State Game Warden, Doug Spivey, State Game Warden, Ken Jackson, retired State Game Warden, David Fischer, retired Texas Highway Patrol, Joe Evans, retired Sheriff & Texas Highway Patrol, Bryan Holt Davis, retired County Attorney, Billy M. Willis, long-time family friend, and Charles Hamilton, another long-time family friend who retired from International Paper Company. Honorary pallbearers will be Dr. Carl Davis, Dr. Robert A. Smith, Charles Bright, retired District Judge Jack Pierce, Country Judge Joe English, Retired County Judge Ocie Westmoreland, Judge Mike Worsham, Dr. B. W. Henderson, MD, Billy J. Earley, attorney, Jared Bishop and Jimmy Cosby. In addition to her husband, Roger, Sara Bess is survived by her two devoted caregivers, Leah Vest and Samantha Birdwell. Memorials may be made to the American Heart Association at P.O. Box 15186, Austin, TX 78761; to the American Diabetic Association at 1016 LaPosada Drive, Suite 130, Austin, TX 78752 or First United Methodist Church at 201 E Hospital St., Nacogdoches, TX 75961.

As her friend Nelda Dyes said, "Sara lived every minute that God gave her."

Sarah's husband Roger offered these parting words...

"About my Princess"

One would have had to have known her to realize the appreciation she had for mankind and all God's creation. She absolutely never met a stranger and those with sickness or problems would always get comfort and ease by listening to her wonderful, sweet and knowledgeable voice.

From political office in Washington DC to TSTA and NEA policy making board rooms to small boat on a lake, to hard riding in four-wheel drives on a deer lease, she was always the most striking figure of a person.

From rescuing animals of all kinds, to saying “Hi! Mr. Rabbit” when a rabbit ran across the road, her compassion for life was immeasurable. She would say to me, “You say ‘Mr. Rabbit,’ too.”

She was precise, gentle and firm all the way from helping or judging public speaking to being my “back up” on those thousands of miles ridden in the 1980s and ‘90s protecting our wildlife from people who would illegally harm our animals.

It should be noted that her compassion extended to majestic white-tail deer to quail, ducks and doves, to the land turtle that needed help getting across the road and the coyote caught in a steel trap laced near the road...She said “You’ve got to get him out,” and I did.....

One night in the ‘80s, after a game warden had been fired on near Goodman Bridge, I left Sara and her dog “Wiggles” alone at 1 a.m. at our camp near the Durst Lake that was beginning to flood with water from the swollen Angelina River while I drove several miles to help in the search for the offender.

Before I got back at daylight, game warden Jimmy Wood heard Sara calling me on the radio. Jimmy asked what was wrong, and Sara Bess said, “The water from the river is coming up under the floor of the camp, and I don’t know if I can get out.”

He said, “Don’t worry Sara Bess. We will come after you, even if we have to come by boat.”

I got her out after daylight.

Sara Bess Brookshire Dudley will be missed by many, but by one more than I. “Princess, your smile, your grace, your hair and eyes, your positive attitude through so many illnesses, to your support of me, your presence, spirit and footprint will never, never be forgotten...”

For those who knew Sara, her spirit and zest for life is best described in the following poem by William Randolph Hearst:

The Song of the River

The snow melts on the mountain.
And the water runs down to the spring,
And the spring in a turbulent fountain,
With a song of youth to sing,
Runs down to the riotous river,
And the river flows to the sea,
And the water again
Goes back in rain
To the hills where it used to be.
And I wonder if life's deep mystery
Isn't much like the rain and the snow
Returning through all eternity

To the places it used to know.
For life was born on the lofty heights
And flows in a laughing stream,
To the river below
Whose onward flow
Ends in a peaceful dream.
And so at last,
When our life has passed
And the river has run its course,
It again goes back,
O'er the selfsame track,
To the mountain which was its source.
So why prize life
Or why fear death,
Or dread what is to be?
The river ran
Its allotted span
Till it reached the silent sea.
Then the water harked back
To the mountain-top
To begin its course once more.
So we shall run
The course begun
Till we reach the silent shore.
Then revisit earth
In a pure rebirth
From the heart of the virgin snow.
So don't ask why
We live or die,
Or whither, or when we go,
Or wonder about the mysteries
That only God may know.