



Ronald Rudger Willey, Jr., whose life journey spanned from November 12, 1936, to January 21, 2025, was a remarkable individual whose endeavors and achievements leave a lasting legacy. Born in Denver, Colorado, Ron was a person of deep faith and commitment, navigating life with his Christian principles as his steadfast guide. He transitioned into eternity at 88 years of age in Melbourne, Florida, where he had spent his later years.

His early years were spent in West Hartford, Connecticut, where he displayed a keen intellect and athletic prowess. Ron thrived both as a medal-winning track star and a talented singer in the Hall High School chorus. His academic excellence earned him a place in the National Honor Society and the distinguished rank of Eagle Scout with the Boy Scouts of America.

A dreamer with a grand vision to establish the first astronomical telescope on the moon, Ron pursued his studies rigorously. His path led him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he majored in optics and launched a prolific career in thin-film optical coating. This passion culminated in the publication of several books and over 100 papers that continue to serve as foundational texts in universities across the globe.

Throughout his professional journey, Ron's contributions to science were immense and recognized by various professional bodies. He was an esteemed Fellow of both the Optical Society of America and the Society of Photo-optical Instrumentation Engineers, where he once served as President of the Florida Section. His leadership and expertise were further acknowledged through his role as a Director of the Society of Vacuum Coaters and as the original organizer of its expanded optical coating programs. In 2019, Ron was honored with the Mentor Award from the SVC, a testament to his dedication not just to science but to the nurturing of new generations of scientists. His numerous accomplishments never overshadowed his humble nature and willingness to share his knowledge generously with others.

Complementary to his professional endeavors was Ron's undeniable generosity. Known for being humble and gentle, he shared his time and talents widely, whether through volunteering at Indian River Players or supporting educational institutions such as Hillsdale College. His consistent participation in church activities underscored his deep, lifelong faith and dedication to his spiritual and community obligations.

Despite an exceptional professional legacy, Ron forever prioritized his family, deriving great joy and pride from raising nine accomplished children: Elizabeth Head, Caroline Osborne, Susan Wentworth, Michael Holtzinger, Kimberly Christenberry, Allene Ward, Diana Marchand, Jonathan Willey, and Christopher Willey. He now joins his cherished wife, Judith Pappas Willey, in the peace that follows a well-lived life. He leaves behind a legacy with 22 grandchildren, 30 great grandchildren, and 3 great-great-grandchildren, each of whom is inspired by his life's work and philosophical teachings.

A Celebration of Life service will honor Ron's memory on Saturday, February 15, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. at the Prince of Peace Church located at 6895 Murrell Road, Melbourne, FL 32940. Attendees are encouraged to wear their happiest colors in honor of Ron's joyous spirit. In lieu of flowers, the family invites donations to Prince of Peace Church, continuing his legacy of giving.

The Willey family embraces Ron's favorite motto: "Quo Facit, Bene Fac," meaning "Whatever you do, do it well," a fitting tribute to a man who exemplified this throughout his life.