

HUCKABY: Walker Harris a giant among men

By [Darrell Huckaby](#) (274)

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#The preacher said that a lot of tall timber has been falling in Newton County lately. I think that was a brilliant analogy. If human beings can be compared to trees, I would have to say that Walker Harris was a giant redwood.

#I was a very impressionable young man. I paid attention to my surroundings. Some people impressed me tremendously -- so much so that I was convinced that they were people to be respected and emulated. Some men in the Newton County community were larger than life in my eyes. Walker Harris was such a man.

#I first became aware of Mr. Harris when he ran a used car lot at the corner of Washington Street and Emory Street. It wasn't a very big place at all, and when we would ride by Mr. Harris' car lot on the way "to town," I would often wonder aloud how someone could run a successful business on such a small plot of real estate. I remember my daddy telling me that most people couldn't -- but that Walker Harris wasn't most people.

#You can say that again.

#I was mainly aware that Walker Harris was Stanley's daddy -- and Stanley, or Stan as he became better known, was one of my boyhood heroes. He was an all-state guard on the Newton Rams state championship basketball team. I never missed a game back in those days, and I would watch Mr. Harris and the other fathers and think how proud they must have been of their sons.

#Later, I got to be a small part of that great Ram program and became friends with Stan's brother, Tony -- an all-state player in his own right -- and got to know Mr. Harris on a more personal level. When the Rams traveled back in those days, we went in style. No yellow school buses for Bradley's boys. We rode charters. And during tournament time -- which meant overnight stays in the finest hotels places like Gainesville and Elberton had to offer -- we rode in cars, cars donated by Mr. Harris -- and I was usually one of the drivers.

#Yes, times have really changed.

#Later, I would buy most of my family cars at Walker Harris Autos and even sold a few for him at one time. I am in my sixth Dodge Caravan, and although "Ginn" is the name on the dealership, I was happy to be able to buy my most recent vehicle from Walker's grandson, Matt.

#My life has become intertwined with the Harris family in many ways over the past 40 years. I have known Dawn, Tony and Stan's sister, and her husband, Marshal, since high school. I remain Marshal's favorite author -- I am certain of it -- and I have had the

privilege of knowing and interacting with their children.

#We lost Stan a while back, but he and his wife, Becky, were two of my favorite people, and extended me the great honor of being able to coach their daughter Trudy in basketball. We spent a memorable summer together and she has remained one of my favorites.

#I have never known a better person or had a better friend than Tony. His and Donna's three daughters are all beautiful, talented, intelligent and kind. What a great family!

#And that's the thing I will always remember most about Walker Harris. He was a family man, with an emphasis on "family."

#I will never forget what an astute businessman he was. I will never forget how generous he was. I will never forget how impeccably dressed he always was -- I am quite certain I never saw him without a necktie and I am pretty sure I never saw him when he wasn't wearing a suit -- and I saw him a lot, understand.

#But what I will always remember most about him was his family -- the Harris family. They are and have been very special.

#As I walked up the steps of the First Baptist Church to attend Mr. Walker's funeral Tuesday, I was impressed by the police honor guard that had been sent to honor his service as mayor of Covington. I was also intrigued by a memory book that had been left on a small podium beside the guest registry. The family wanted to give people an opportunity to share a memory about their patriarch. I had no trouble coming up with what I wanted to share.

#Every Sunday -- and I mean every Sunday -- as well as a lot of other times -- Mr. Harris would take his entire family out to eat. When I say entire family I mean the entire family. All the children and their spouses and, of course, all the grandchildren. I dearly loved walking into a restaurant -- often Henderson's, of course -- and seeing the Harris family assembled -- laughing, talking, enjoying one another's company. They exuded love and togetherness.

#I told myself, many times, that if God ever blessed me with a family of my own, I wanted them to be as close as the Harris family. My family is very close, and his example is part of the reason why. His life will continue to influence mine as long as I live.

#Tall timber has been falling in Covington indeed, and Walker Harris is as tall as they come.

#Darrell Huckaby will be signing copies of his books at Evans Market on Ga. Highway 20 S. in the Magnet community of Conyers from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday.