



## Betty Jean Neel Spears

February 26, 1931 - July 16, 2025

### In Loving Memory of Betty Jean Neel Spears

Betty Jean Neel Spears, age 94, passed away peacefully on the morning of July 16, 2025, at Lynnwood Senior Care Home in Laurel, Mississippi, after a long illness.

Born on February 26, 1931, in Martin, Tennessee, Betty was the eldest child of Mattie Lee

Greer Neel and William Franklin Neel. She grew up in Martin and graduated from Martin High School before continuing her education at The University of Tennessee Junior College in Martin. During her time there, the college became part of the University of Tennessee system, and Betty proudly earned her bachelor's degree in Home Economics. She later received a degree in Social Work in Memphis, Tennessee.

Betty dedicated much of her early career to helping vulnerable children. She worked for the

Weakley County Human Services Department in Dresden, TN, and later for Obion and Lake Counties, serving as a supervisor with deep compassion and quiet strength. Though the situations she encountered were often heartbreaking, she brought dignity, kindness, and hope to the children and families she served.

On December 23, 1961 , she married Joe H. Spears of Greenfield, Tennessee, and together they built a life marked by devotion, quiet resilience, and shared purpose. As Joe's engineering career took them from Nashville to Pittsburgh, PA; Syracuse, NY; Columbia, SC; Union City, TN; and finally, Greenwood, SC—they raised their daughter Jeannine along the way. After Joe's retirement, they settled in Laurel, Mississippi, where they found their forever home and a close-knit community among family, friends, neighbors, and their beloved church, First Baptist Church of Laurel.

Betty had a rare gift for connection. She was a people person in the truest sense—genuine, thoughtful, and fiercely loyal. She maintained lifelong friendships long before social media made it easy. One touching example: in her early years in social work, Betty helped place two teenage brothers with extended family. One of the boys made her a lamp in his high school shop class and gave it to her as a thank-you. Decades later, Betty still had the lamp. When she saw his name in a retirement announcement in her hometown newspaper, she brought the lamp with her on a visit to Union City. After tracking him down, they shared a heartfelt reunion. She returned the lamp to him, and he planned to pass it on to his grandchildren—along with the story of how his life had been touched by Betty's compassion. It's just one example of her lasting impact and the way she held people in her heart.

Betty was preceded in death by her loving husband of 51 years, Joe Spears; her parents, Mattie Lee and Bill Neel; her brother, Tommy Neel; her sister and brother-in-law, Shirley and T.H. Roberson; and her beloved nephews, Shawn, Chris, and Brent Roberson.

She is survived by her daughter, Jeannine Howell (Lowell); her grandson, Mason Howell (Rachael); her granddaughter, Haven Howell (and her boyfriend, Dan Salvador); her nephew, Landon Roberson (Pam); and Lowell's

mother, Mary Nell Howell.

The family extends heartfelt thanks to their devoted caregiver, Belinda Wade, for her unwavering love and compassion; to her neighbors, David and Peggy Wolgamott, for their kindness and support; and to Nila Conn, RN, and the dedicated staff at Lynnwood Senior Care Home. We are also deeply grateful to Dr. Jack Evans and the team at Comfort Care Hospice for their expert and compassionate care.

Services will be held at the Chapel of First Baptist Church of Laurel on Sunday, July 20, 2025. Visitation will be held at 1:30 p.m. until service time of 2:30 p.m. Interment will follow at Hickory Grove Cemetery. Brother Shannon Slover will officiate.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to a charity of your choice.

#### Reflections from Her Daughter

As her daughter, I want to thank the friends, neighbors, and church family who were such a meaningful part of my mother's life in recent years. Many of you knew her as someone steady, kind, and quietly strong—a woman who valued her independence but also cherished the relationships that brought comfort and connection.

One of the roles she loved most was being "Grammy" to her grandchildren. Some of their most lasting memories are the simple, special moments they shared with her—watching old movies together, working on puzzles at the kitchen table, and sharing bowls of ice cream. She gave them her full attention and created a space where they felt seen, heard, and loved. That time together was deeply important to her.

Though she lived a quiet life, she found joy in the everyday-and those small routines became part of the legacy she leaves behind. To those of you who knew her, checked in on her, or shared a moment of friendship or prayer with her-thank you. Your care made a difference.

To sign the online guest book, visit [www.memorychapellaurel.com](http://www.memorychapellaurel.com).

# Cemetery Details

## Hickory Grove Cemetery

Intersection of 15th Street and Old Bay  
Springs Rd  
Laurel, MS 39440

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JUL 20. 1:30 PM (CT)

Chapel of First Baptist Church of Laurel  
607 W 5th Street  
Laurel, MS 39440

## Service

JUL 20. 2:30 PM (CT)

Chapel of First Baptist Church of Laurel  
607 W 5th Street  
Laurel, MS 39440

# Tribute Wall

LP

“ *Deepest Sympathy Extended to the Family.  
Many Prayers for Comfort and Peace.  
She was such a dear person.*

*Linda Patterson*

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**Linda Patterson** - July 21, 2025 at 06:40 PM

JN

“ *Betty is my cousin. She was 15 years older than me. Therefore, we didn't have much of a relationship until I was much older. Due to my many moves in the military and her moves with Joe's job, we didn't have much in-person contact. Our relationship was a telephonic one. We loved our infrequent calls. I will miss her. Betty, I love you.*  
*Larry Neel*

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**James Neel** - July 20, 2025 at 12:30 AM

SB

“ *Beautiful tribute to a beautiful life.  
After finding out, her grandmother's was Grammy, I was pleased my  
grands call me the same!*

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**SHARON BARham** - July 19, 2025 at 09:08 PM

MV

“ *Betty was my cousin and we kept in touch every Christmas I would send her a card and she would call me. I will miss her. Praying for her family*

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**MARJORIE VINSON** - July 18, 2025 at 11:08 AM