



William Melton "Mel" Saunders

December 3, 1951 - November 16, 2025

Bluefield, WV- William Melton "Mel" Saunders, age 73, of Bluefield, WV, died peacefully at home on November 16, 2025. He was born on December 3, 1951 in Roanoke, VA to the late William Ray Saunders and Louise Rebecca Overstreet Saunders. Mel is survived by his loving and devoted wife of nearly 49 years, Holly Jenene Stafford Saunders, son Stephen (Paige) Saunders of Bluefield, WV, daughter Jenene (Brian) Ferguson of Youngsville, NC, daughter Emily (Nicholas) Saunders Hooie of Knoxville, TN, grandchildren Piper and Elijah Saunders, Bethany and William Ferguson, and Luke Saunders Hooie, and brother, Carlton (Valentine) Saunders of Salem, VA.

Mel was a 1970 graduate of Jefferson High School in Roanoke, VA, a 1974 graduate of Concord College in Athens, WV, and a 1997 master's graduate of Shenandoah University, in Winchester, Virginia. He was a follower of Jesus, a husband, a father, a grandfather (Pops), a band director, a local recycling coordinator, and a Christmas enthusiast of the highest order.

His family, faith, music, and servant's heart were the foundations of his life. He and his wife, Holly, made Bluefield their home in 1977 and he loved his chosen hometown and state ever since. He mentored countless students throughout 37 years of teaching. He was happy to pass on a love and knowledge of music to anyone wishing to learn. After earning his masters, he founded the East River Mountain Town Band in 1997 to share music

throughout southern WV. Once he retired from teaching in 2007, Mel started his second career as the city of Bluefield's recycling program director. He enjoyed being outdoors and getting to talk to so many members of the community.

Mel was a member of First Baptist Church of Bluefield, WV. He played his tuba and organized musical ensembles at numerous churches in the area for decades. He loved sharing his musical talent in his community and making worship services even more meaningful. Mel was known for some catchphrases such as, "On the line, one mo' time!" and would wish everyone a jovial, "Ho Ho Ho! Merry Christmas!"

We know that Mel is restored in Christ. In keeping with his wishes, he will be cremated and his ashes dispersed by his children. A celebration of life service will be held at a later date.

The family would love to share in memories and stories of Mel. Those wishing to share memories or messages with the Saunders family may do so by visiting www.MercerFuneralHome.com.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the American Red Cross.

Tribute Wall

RM

“ I just recently heard of Mel's passing. I was very saddened by this and I send my condolences to his family. I knew Mel when he was a student teacher in high school. We loved him and thought he was the coolest teacher of all time. Though he wasn't much older than us, we looked up to him. We enjoyed his sense of humor and great personality, not to mention his knowledge of music. I don't remember any other high school student teachers but I will never forget Mel. RIP, man. You are special.

Ron Mckenzie - April 15 at 11:57 AM

DS

“ To all my fellow band nerds...REMEMBER...8-5 is the key to life and loose lips, sink ships. If you know...you know! Mr. Saunders was an inspiration to so many! He always made you believe that you could do anything you set your mind to. I know I'll always hold a special place in my heart for him. Thanks for always believing in me (even when I didn't believe in myself). I just know your up there directing the most beautiful choir! Rest easy now...

Daphne Shupe - November 26, 2025 at 09:04 AM

AP

“It's difficult to put into words how much Mr. Saunders impacted my life. Band was more than just a class; it was the foundation for so many life lessons about discipline, teamwork, and connecting with others. Even indirectly, Mr. Saunders fostered each of these through his beliefs and leadership.

Mel didn't just teach music; he taught us to strive for excellence and to believe in our own potential. I owe so much of my confidence and work ethic to his guidance during my years at Bluefield High. His passion was contagious, and I still hear his voice, and encouragement, whenever I don't feel like doing something, saying "If you don't use it, you lose it!" And all the memories he gave us—just too many to recount, but they fill me with joy whenever I think of them.

My deepest condolences to his family. The world has lost a truly dedicated educator and a wonderful soul. He will be profoundly missed, but his legacy will continue to play on in the hearts of every student he ever taught.



Anthony Parsons - November 23, 2025 at 10:54 AM

SL

“ Dear Holly, Stephen, Jenene, Emily, and families,
Mel was such a great friend ever since college. I loved driving by your home and seeing the 33 meaningful stars in your yard every Christmas. One year your Dad was the voice of Santa, on the phone, for one of your Mom and my rather rumbunctious Kindergarten student. It worked!! Your Dad was great. He also brought new meaning to recycling to my classes, which I hope helps the Earth on his behalf. Your Mom and Dad showed love for each other always and for all of you children and grandchildren. Such a lovely couple and family. I pray you feel the love of the Lord holding you up and giving you strength during this time and in all of the times ahead. Love to you all and God Bless.
Sue Luterick

Susan Luterick - November 22, 2025 at 11:30 AM

KD

“ Mr. Saunders you were the best band director ever! Thank you for taking time with me while I learned to play the clarinet! I learned it and then moved to bass clarinet! I would march beside you in the parades! You taught my brother and sister Tony and Kim! You were family! You will be so missed! Rest in !

Karen Dye - November 22, 2025 at 07:35 AM

LG

“ Larry Gentry purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of William Melton "Mel" Saunders.



Larry Gentry - November 21, 2025 at 12:58 PM

LG

“ Larry Gentry planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William Melton "Mel" Saunders.

Larry Gentry - November 21, 2025 at 12:58 PM

LG

“ I was very sad to learn of the loss of Melton. His heart and compassion for those around him was beyond any I had ever witnessed. I know he will be missed. My condolences go out to his family. I was a roommate during his undergraduate time at Concord.

Larry Gentry - November 21, 2025 at 12:39 PM

BB

“ My band teacher all through high school - and the author of so many of my BHS memories. I owe my love of music to him, and a debt of gratitude to the kindness of him and his family for the many, many hours I spent at their house hanging out with his daughter!

Brandy Bagar-Fraley - November 20, 2025 at 09:19 PM

CP

“ Mr. Saunders!!!! My band teacher in Elementary & High School. Always had admiration of you as my band teacher. I remember when I quit the band in High School and of course, you were not pleased! Lol! When I came to you to be a flag girl..... I remember your grin.....you told me that I could if I rejoined the band! Lol! I never did rejoin the band but you were always my band teacher. You taught my brother and sister, as well.....you were a part of our lives. May you rest in peace, Mr. Saunders! You will be truly missed by many & loved by many more. My condolences & prayers to your family in this most difficult time.

Cyndi Price - November 20, 2025 at 08:03 PM

LH

“ We are so very sorry to hear about the loss of Mr. Saunders. It is astounding to think about how many musical events he was at the helm of. He never settled until he got the absolute best! Our condolences to the Saunders family. Sincerely, Lydia, Adam, and Beth Hash.

Lydia Hash - November 20, 2025 at 04:48 PM

GS

“ Oh my, heaven has received a great man. Mr. Saunders was my band director at Bluefield High School from 1985-1988. I pray for his family as I know they are missing him greatly. His passing reminds us of the temporal nature of this life. It goes by quickly. Like Mr. Saunders, may we all follow Christ.

Greg Shrewsbury - November 20, 2025 at 01:02 PM



“ Mr Saunders was not just a great band director. He was a great person and family man. I remember things like 8 to 5 or give me a lap in band camp. Most of us by the time band camp was over either lost 15 lbs or had to run so many laps our feet hurt. thats how he made us such a great band. I remember thats hows I learned the lord's prayer. We would say that prayer before we would go on the field. He will always be in my heart. He made me into the person that I am now. prayers an thoughts to all you. RIP Mr Saunders. THANK YOU for everything you have taught me through the years.

Tonya Johnson - November 19, 2025 at 04:59 PM

AP

“ *Mr. Saunders was such a great band director and musician! Thank you so much for sharing him with us! May the best memories of him distract you when your heart is overwhelmed! Praying for all family and friends!*

A Carter Powell - November 19, 2025 at 02:57 PM

NR

“ *I'm Neil Randolph, band director at Oak Glen HS in the far north of WV. I had this story relayed to me by Pat Garrett, BD at Wheeling Park. They had combined bands for the National Anthem before a playoff game. The crowd was getting quiet enough for Mel's liking, so he turned around and yelled at the crowd, "Our National Anthem!!". They stopped making noise and he proceeded to play! He was a great gentleman and musician. A great loss to the band world in West Virginia.*

Neil Randolph - November 19, 2025 at 02:34 PM

NR

I should say BD at Oak Glen HS in the 80s and 90s

Neil Randolph - November 19, 2025 at 02:35 PM

JN

“*Mr. Saunders - and he will always be that to me - was the only music teacher I ever had during my youth, starting at Ramsey Elementary and then going through Central Junior High and Bluefield High. After graduation, I joined the Marine Corps, playing in and leading several Marine Field Bands throughout my 20+ career, and I can truthfully say that not a performance went by that I didn't think of him. His impact on my life - both musically and personally - was immeasurable.*

Two memories of Mr. Saunders come to mind. In Elementary School during the 1970s, we always use to joke that he looked like Grizzly Adams with his bushy beard and that he sounded like John Denver, exclaiming "Far Out!" whenever we did something right.

The second memory involves something he said while I was in high school. One day - and I don't remember what prompted this - Mr. Saunders told a group of us that we shouldn't be praying to God to pass a test; instead, we should be praying to God to help us prepare ourselves to pass the test. That bit of divine wisdom has stayed with me ever since.

My condolences to the family. His was a life well-lived. Thank you Mr. Saunders.

Jeff Neale - November 19, 2025 at 12:56 PM

CP

“ Holly and family,

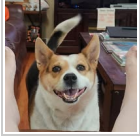
Mel was such a shaping force in my life—just as he was in the lives of so many others. He had a remarkable way of drawing out the very best in people, no matter their age. As students, we grew under his wisdom, his guidance, and his sincere involvement in both our personal and academic lives.

For me, he was like a father. I always felt that he looked out for us, that he truly wanted what was best for each of us. I carry countless memories of him—from his early years at Central, to BHS, and later with the Town Band. My respect for him runs deep.

His passing leaves a real void in all our lives... but I know that loss is felt most profoundly in your hearts. My thoughts and prayers are with you.

*With much love,
Cindy Powell*

Cindy Powell - November 19, 2025 at 12:50 PM



“ I had the great privilege of being in his first class when he began his career at Central Junior High. Then, he came to Beaver my senior year...what a great way to finish! He instilled in me the value of excellence, as he expected nothing less. He made us a cohesive unit that kicked other bands' proverbial rears at every competition. And he taught us military-style precision, not the corps style of strolling around the field! I remember his hesitancy to add dance teams or flag girls because they weren't musicians. It was all about the music for him...and for me. My band friends still laugh about our objective for trips being to get on a bus with none of the "fluff" people!

Mel dealt with people using a combination of accountability and compassion, something that I have tried to emulate throughout my career. His teaching set in motion a lifetime of musicianship for me. First, in band, then I switched to singing in college. I remember when I auditioned for my college's acapella choir, the director handed me a piece to sight read and sing on the spot. When I finished, he asked me, "How long have you played an instrument?" I told him and asked why he posed that question. He said, "Only an instrumentalist who has been taught well can sight read that perfectly." I went on to tour with the choir, then be selected to tour every summer in an ensemble. When I moved to Tennessee, I joined a contemporary Christian group that I sang with for over 20 years. My fellow group members said that I could sing the complicated harmony parts...all due to the ear I developed playing in Mel's bands.

If not for Mel Saunders, the greatest joy of my life and a purpose for which God called me would never have happened. What a legacy!
Eva McHaffa Pierce

Eva Pierce - November 19, 2025 at 11:04 AM

BJ

“ Bobby, Emily, Meredith and David Jenks purchased the *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* for the family of William Melton "Mel" Saunders.



Bobby, Emily, Meredith and David Jenks - November 19, 2025
at 10:10 AM

CW

“ Charles Ward planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William Melton "Mel" Saunders.

Charles Ward - November 19, 2025 at 09:26 AM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet* was purchased for the family of William Melton "Mel" Saunders.



November 19, 2025 at 09:26 AM

PM

“ *Mr. Saunders will be greatly missed. As a former band member, he taught us discipline, lessons in believing in ourselves and how to build confidence. Who would have known that band camps and competitions would be the foundations for many life lessons and future endeavors for many of us. Condolences and prayers to his family and Mr. Saunders, take your final bow, rest well and direct Heaven's band with a smile.*

Pam Morton - November 19, 2025 at 09:22 AM

SD

“ In high school, band was my whole life. But, my high school never had a great band program. Mr. Saunders gave me the opportunity to play in an ensemble that challenged me and that I was proud to be in by including me in the East River Mountain Town Band. I am sorry I never told him how much this experience meant to me, but I hope his family can know how important he and Town Band were to me and ultimately to the course of my life. I continued to study music in college and now work as a music therapist, where I use music to serve clients in a hospital setting. He was truly a special person, the kind of person you never forget. I am so sorry to his loved ones and am sending peace and comfort.

Shey Dillon - November 19, 2025 at 04:10 AM



“ Mr. Saunders (always Mr. Saunders even when I was in my 60s) became a very important part of our lives when Andrew joined the band! We loved and respected Mr. Saunders because he deserved it. His kind of discipline wasn't for everyone but it was for Andrew! I still have a shirt with “8 to 5, on the line one mo' time” and I will wear it to honor him. Oh yeah, he called me and Sharon, Andrew's mom, out at a ballgame for being too loud, AT A FOOTBALL GAME!! He couldn't hear the band for us! We laughed for weeks over that and we deserved it. The world's a little darker now than it was a few days ago. Our family is thinking of y'all and praying for some peace for you all.



Beverly Riffe - November 19, 2025 at 02:17 AM

JH

“ Fly high and I’m sure you are making a beautiful noise in heaven you will never be forgotten. You made my high school years so great and taught me so many things not just about band but about life and just what the world should look like I’m forever grateful that I got to opportunity to have you as my band director I’m sure everyone remembers so much I do remember a story about a certain toilet paper shortage and that you could only get one square.. if you know you know!!! Never a dull moment so many laughs but what will ring on for years to come is on the line one mo time!!!!



Jayme Hawkins - November 19, 2025 at 12:59 AM

SB

“ I remember Mel practicing for his senior recital while the band was staying overnight in preparation for a parade. I honestly don’t remember the details of the event, I just remember him keeping everyone awake practicing that damn tuba. Mel Was a great friend and an outstanding musician. I was very close to Holly during our college years at Concord. My heart and prayers go out to Holly and the family.

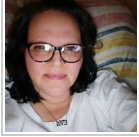
Scott Belcher - November 19, 2025 at 12:24 AM

BH

“ He was my band teacher at Brushfork Elementary School. He taught me how to play the organ guitar and clarinet he was such an inspiration to all



Becky Hampton Harris - November 18, 2025 at 11:22 PM



“ I remember he used to tell us facts like: "Did you know why we yawn? It's because of lack of oxygen to the brain." Loved having him as a band director. He was so colorful and happy. Me and my whole class will greatly miss him. We were in 5th/6th grade in Bluefield back in the day when he was our instructor. May he rest in peace.

Stephanie Looney - November 18, 2025 at 10:19 PM



“ I am deeply saddened to hear of the passing of one of the most influential teachers in my life. As my band director through junior high and high school, he shaped not only my love of music but my character. He believed in his students, pushed us to reach higher, and taught us the value of discipline, teamwork, and pride in what we created together.

The lessons he shared stayed with me long after graduation, and I will always be grateful for the impact he had on my life. He was a wonderful teacher, a steady mentor, and someone who truly cared about the kids he guided.

My heartfelt condolences to his family. May you find comfort in knowing the lasting legacy he leaves behind through countless students whose lives he touched. May he rest in peace.

*Faith Sadler Woodrum
Bluefield High School
Class of 1983*

Faith Woodrum - November 18, 2025 at 09:37 PM

SW

“ Mel. Mr Saunders was a great band teacher At Bluefield High School. Being a school bus driver we had many trips with football and band competitions. He kept his band in line and what he said they listen. He was well respected and loved. He always included the bus operators in everything he planned. From start to finish his stops where to eat and arrangements where to stay. His Band was the best and so was he. I respected him and loved to travel with him leading the way where ever they went. Number one rule don't pass Mel in that old band truck. RIP. KATIE WILLIAMS

Sis Williams - November 18, 2025 at 08:37 PM

CW

“ My condolences to the family. My daughter was in the high school band under his direction and I taught with him at Bluefield High School for many years. He was a wonderful teacher and colleague.

Carolyn Williams - November 18, 2025 at 07:53 PM

CP

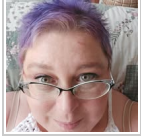
“ MEL was a wonderful person and great band teacher.He taught our son and while at Bluefield High School we traveled with the band.My husband drove the instrument band truck for 3 years and we loved traveling with Mel and the band.Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family.Love The Poe Family

Cathy and Roger Poe - November 18, 2025 at 07:47 PM

AW

“ What a lovely written tribute to a great teacher and family man. I still remember how he instructed me to sit up tall in middle school when I was playing my flute. Good teachers leave lasting impressions and lessons on students and Mr. Saunders surely did.

Alyson Walls - November 18, 2025 at 07:46 PM



“ *Mr. Saunders' love of music was one of the main reasons I almost became a music major in college. I've never seen a more dedicated and loving teacher before or since (and I'm in my 23rd years of being a teacher myself). That 8 to 5; such good shows. He believed in us, so we believed in each other. He loved us and made us family.*

Kristy Spivey-Mitchell - November 18, 2025 at 06:46 PM

DW

“ *Mel was my Biology class partner. Because he did the directing, our teacher Col. Wilson use to tease us mercilessly. Melton was a super nice guy. He loved music and I bet he was a wonderful teacher.*

Deborah Stanley Widener - November 18, 2025 at 06:45 PM

EM

“ *Mr Saunders was my band teacher so thru high school. He was such a good teacher and kind to everyone. I'll never forget his encouragement at all the football games, band competitions and of course band camp. Striving us to do our best. He will be terribly missed 🥹 prayers to his family and close friends*

Erica (haden) Morrison - November 18, 2025 at 06:00 PM

TB

A GREAT man and he was loved you many people

Tina buford - November 18, 2025 at 07:00 PM

CW

Holly and family, it is with sadness that Melton has passed. I have never met you abut I grew up with Melton on Patterson Ave SW in Roanoke, His mom Louise was the den Mother of the neighborhood Cub Scouts and I and other kids from the neighborhood spent many hours with Melton and his brother Carlton. I will forever remember all the times we spent together in that neighborhood and his home on the corner of 8th street and Patterson. He was a good friend and had a good upbringing. prayers to you and family for a man who gave a lot of himself to others,
The Reverend C.A. Ward
Roanoke, Va.

Charles Ward - November 19, 2025 at 09:25 AM

JQ

“ *He went to Concord with my husband Michael Quick also majored in Music but then went to work on railroad. Mike passed October 11 2025. I'm sure they are making music in heaven.*

JoAn Quick - November 18, 2025 at 05:37 PM