



Mary Nell Isbell

April 30, 1932 - November 26, 2025

Mary Nell Isbell, 93, of Fort Payne died at her home Wednesday, November 26, 2025. Born April 30, 1932, to Horace Blakely and Viola Turner Norwood of the Pleasant Hill community, she attended Plainview School, then graduated from DeKalb County High School in 1950. She married her high school sweetheart Dr. John B. Isbell, III, in February of 1952, after his return from the Korean War. The next eight years saw her managing a household, giving birth to their three children, and working at a variety of jobs as she and Dr. John negotiated the early years of their marriage. She spoke fondly and often of her early married life and was particularly proud of her job in Birmingham at the national headquarters of Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union, serving as secretary to Alma Hunt, its Executive Director.

Moving back to Fort Payne in 1960, Mary Nell supported the fledgling Isbell Clinic as its first manager. She became a very active member of First Baptist Church, serving in various roles over the next several decades, including singing in the Sanctuary Choir for close to sixty years, hosting summertime Youth Camp and leading the Youth Department, being active in Women's Missionary Union, and serving in other leadership and support positions. She practiced her gift of hospitality at First Baptist, with an uncanny ability to spot and connect with newcomers both at her front door greeting post, and in fellowship situations, whether worship service or social occasions; many have attested to her being their first personal contact as they came to church. She also practiced the gift of encouragement to anyone who needed it, often and effectively. She personified the Proverbs 31 woman with grace and humility.

Mary Nell had a notable presence in the Fort Payne community, including a variety of civic groups and campaigns aimed at promoting the welfare of the community at large. For many years, she was active with Silvertones, the senior adult singing group. In 1968, she became the first woman to run for a Fort Payne City Council seat, campaigning door to door with her cheering section of some or all of her young children. She was appointed to the City School Board shortly after that campaign, becoming its Chairman for several years. She was the recipient of the Rotary Rose award from the Fort Payne Rotary Club.

Mary Nell was preceded in death by her husband of sixty eight years, Dr. John B. Isbell, III, brother Gus Norwood, and sister Jewell Suttles. She is survived by her children Blake (Bonnie) Isbell, Steve (Merle) Isbell, Nancy (Allen) Meisler; nine grandchildren, and sixteen great grandchildren. To all these children, she was their loving "Gaga", so dubbed in 1981 with the birth of the first grandchild.

Visitation and funeral will be held at First Baptist Church of Fort Payne on Thursday, December 4, 2025. Visitation 11:00 A.M. to 1 P.M., with service at 1 P.M., Dr. R. Pat McFadden and Dr. Marshall Henderson officiating. Due to COVID restrictions in 2020 at the time of Dr. John B. Isbell's death, a memorial service was never held. This service will include a proper tribute and memorial to him. Honorary pallbearers will be all former and current First Baptist Sanctuary Choir members, who, along with any other singing friends, are invited to join the funeral service choir to honor Mary Nell and Dr. John with some of their favorite choral music. Rehearsal at noon the day of the service, second floor choir suite.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Mitchell's Place, 4778 Overton Road, Birmingham, AL 35210 https://crm.bloomerang.co/HostedDonation?ApiKey=pub_d8aeaca-c-d7f-11ec-84cc-06feca334f0f&WidgetId=1969152 or First Baptist Church, 106 Grand Avenue NW, Fort Payne, AL 35967.

Wilson Funeral Home and Crematory of Fort Payne is in charge of services.

Cemetery Details

Glenwood Cemetery

1002 Grand Avenue SW
Fort Payne, AL 35967

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 4. 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church - Fort Payne
106 Grand Avenue NW
Fort Payne, AL 35967

Funeral Service

DEC 4. 1:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church - Fort Payne
106 Grand Avenue NW
Fort Payne, AL 35967

Tribute Wall

CL

“ Cheryl Little sent a virtual gift in memory of Mary Nell Isbell



Cheryl Little - December 02, 2025 at 02:19 PM

CL

A very good soul

Cheryl Little - December 02, 2025 at 02:18 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mary Nell Isbell.



December 02, 2025 at 11:47 AM

VD

“ Vicki Denaburg purchased the Magnificent Life Spray for the family of Mary Nell Isbell.



Vicki Denaburg - December 01, 2025 at 06:28 PM

VD

“ Vicki Denaburg planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mary Nell Isbell.

Vicki Denaburg - December 01, 2025 at 06:28 PM

-M

“ -The Mitchells purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of Mary Nell Isbell.



-The Mitchells - December 01, 2025 at 09:07 AM

SG

“ Our hearts ache with yours in this time of loss.
Your mother was a radiant soul, a light whose warmth and kindness left an indelible mark on all who knew her.
We carry her memory in our thoughts and lift you up in our prayers, now and always. Stephen and Denise Griswold

Stephen Griswold - December 01, 2025 at 08:43 AM

DC

“ Blak, Bonnie, & children.
My thoughts and prayers go out to you in this time of sorrow, also rejoicing.
Heaven gained another beautiful angel.
Deborah Carpenter

Deborah Carpenter - November 30, 2025 at 03:07 PM

DA

“ Dekalb Anesthesia planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mary Nell Isbell.

Dekalb Anesthesia - November 29, 2025 at 03:08 PM

DA

“ Dekalb Anesthesia purchased the Lavender Reflections Spray for the family of Mary Nell Isbell.



Dekalb Anesthesia - November 29, 2025 at 03:08 PM

LG

“ Dear Dr Steve n Merle and family :
Our thoughts and prayers are with you.
Your Mother was a beautiful soul.
We think of you often.
Linda Gundros
Kristin Staton Hall

Linda Gundros - November 29, 2025 at 02:02 PM

LW

Dear Isbell family: We are so sorry for your loss. Mary Nell was a gracious Southern Christian lady. We loved both her & Dr John. Randy enjoyed talking local history with Dr John. He was very knowledgeable. Their both together again in heaven. God bless. Love Laura & Randy Weldon

Laura Weldon - November 29, 2025 at 03:37 PM