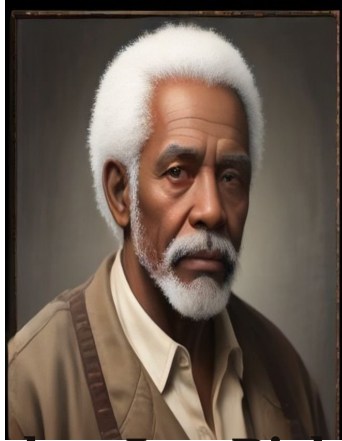




Walter Lee Pickens

February 11, 1947 - August 28, 2026
Birmingham, Alabama

Walter Lee Pickens died in Birmingham on August 28, 2026. He was seventy-nine. Born there on February 11, 1947, he grew up knowing the mill as a clock and a weather report. His father came home red. Walter learned a wrench before he learned a necktie. He became a millwright because a line that stops is a kind of insult, and because he liked a job whose mistakes were immediately visible.

For thirty-eight years he kept machines alive that other men only blamed. He arrived early. He did not advertise. Foremen called him because he would tell the truth about a bearing even when the truth postponed a shift. He charged a fair hour and a smaller one when a church van needed a lift kit more than a sermon. He kept a notebook of machines, not clients. The notebook had grease on the edges.

He married Inez Pickens in 1969. They raised three children in a brick house that needed a new porch every twenty years. Inez taught Sunday school. Walter grilled on Sundays and considered a plate of smoked chicken a seasonal obligation. After his knees quit the worst catwalks he still came out for a favorite press, moving slower, swearing less, doing the same honest work.

Friends remember a man who wiped his hands before he shook yours, who could stand in a noise without making it a personality, and who left a floor cleaner than he found it. He loved a quiet porch at dusk, a glass of tea he did not finish, and the sound of a motor that had decided to live. He died in Birmingham, in the city whose iron had written his calendar. The line still starts. Someone else will hear the sound that means trouble.

Services

Visitation in Birmingham, then a simple service. A gift to a trade-school scholarship or a mill-town food pantry

is welcome.

NN-OBIT-2026-C022

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