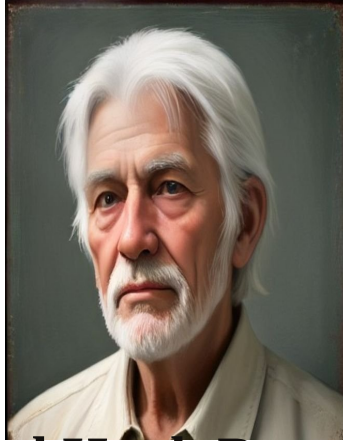




Willard Hugh Pennington

December 7, 1943 - September 6, 2026

Knoxville, Tennessee

Willard Hugh Pennington died in Knoxville on September 6, 2026. He was eighty-two. Born in a hollow that later got a prettier name, on December 7, 1943, he grew up knowing a power line as a weekday neighbor, and he learned a climb before he learned a highway. A correct splice, he said, is a form of respect when a ridge already has enough dark.

He spent thirty-four years as a lineman, first as a groundman, later as the calm voice that sent a truck toward a break when the wind turned. He did not shout. He repeated a pole number until the person on the other end had it. Crews trusted him because he would tell them when he did not know, which is rarer than bravery. After a bad afternoon he sat in the truck with the windows down until his hands were quiet.

He married Ruth Pennington in 1965. They raised a daughter and a son in a house with a view of the ridge and a freezer that friends had shared. Ruth taught second grade. Willard packed lunches that could survive a fourteen-hour shift and still taste like home. He walked the river before dawn because that was when the water looked like work instead of recreation.

Neighbors remember a man who brought coffee to a shed without staying for thanks, who knew which intern needed a second explanation, and who could hear a weather radio without making it a personality. He loved a late-summer tomato, a clean map, and the particular silence after a line is live. He died in Knoxville, the river city that had always been enough map. The channel is still open. Someone else will say the poles.

Services

A gathering in Knoxville at evening. A gift to a linemen's fund or a volunteer fire company suits him.

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