



Willard John Harder

JUN 19, 1938 - MAR 25, 2026



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SKYWAY MEMORIAL
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Willard John Harder was born on June 19th, 1938, in Butterfield, MN, to Peter and Mary Harder and passed away on March 25th, 2026, in Bradenton, FL. He was the third son in a family of six brothers. The family moved to northern Minnesota when he was two. There was plenty of work to keep the boys busy on a dairy farm, what with milking cows by hand, bringing in the hay, cutting trees for firewood, and keeping a big garden. Willy graduated from Warroad Highschool in 1956, and then followed his brother, Gary, to Bethany Missionary Training Center in Minneapolis, MN.

Bible classes were scheduled in the morning; work around the campus or in the shops filled the afternoon; and study took up the evenings. Willy had ample opportunity to learn new skills while working under Harold and Norman Carlson in the work program. He even worked with Grandpa Carlson in fiberglass tops for the camping trailers. He watched those huge beams go up in the construction for Bethany Church. What he saw he might need to use later. He loved learning new skills.

He married Judy Fosholm on July 7, 1960, and a year later they were on their way to Brazil by ship with Rich and Karen Craven. After prayer and discussion, the two couples helped launch Bethany Missions. He helped lay out plans for the housing, shops, small dairy barn, church, Bible school buildings and ten-bed maternity hospital. Judy and Willy's three children were born during those years: Bonnie, Wayne and Stan. With time, the Bethany Mission began its own grade school and then K-12 in Altonia, Parana, Brazil. By then, there were 8-10 couples on campus.

It is not often that five members of one family serve as missionaries, but the five brothers studied at Bethany College of Missions and then chose to serve overseas. Gary, Willy, Clayton and Arlin served in Brazil and Stan worked at Bethany's bookstore in Mexico City. Their mother often said she was raising soldiers for the Lord's Army. Gary, Willy and Clayton kept the Altonia campus looking great for years and the students learned how to "study to show themselves approved", as well as do a good afternoon's work.



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After sixteen years in Brazil, Willy and family moved back to the US. For several years he worked on product development at the Mission headquarters. The school was supported through the sale of Norwegian Lefse grills, camping trailers, book printing and publishing. Willy assisted in improving the various products. He was also involved in repairs to the printing presses in the Bethany printing division.

Because of his love for Brazilian soccer and volleyball, he began to help with coaching at the Bethany Academy where his children went to school. That added much joyful activity to the household and sports continued to be a highlight of most family times, even after the kids married and moved on.

In 1985 Willy went to work for Ternes Register Systems in the printing industry. He gloried in the challenging innovations and helped advance the product quality during more than a decade.

At age 64 he began Deck solutions, creating a new system of rails for decks on new home construction and remodels. His patented design for powder-coated rails vastly improved on the common wooden rail construction used on most decks. After the children married and moved on, Willy and Judy began to travel in their RV, visiting Montana's mountains where their daughter Bonnie and family lived. Wayne, their second son, married a girl he met at WYAM, and they moved to Spain. The youngest son, Stan, and his wife, Tonya, moved to Ft. Myers, FL, along with a quartet of girls.

Wherever they went, Willy and Judy found places to plug in and put their skills to work with various mission groups. Some were retreat centers, others were Bible camps, or just friends who had projects needing help. Judy joined in as well, and they lived in the RV on many summer trips. Health issues then led them to settle in Florida near family, where Judy passed away in 2013.

Willy was a good friend of Pastor Charles Shepson, who lived in Ft. Myers, FL, and ended up assisting with construction projects at his Tennessee Retreat Center on several occasions. Pastor Shepson was a man of specific and consistent prayer and when Willy presented his need for a new companion in life, the advice was, "ask God to do something so different, so extraordinary, that you will know it is God speaking." So, they prayed, and sometime later Willy received a phone call from Brazil from a former student in the Bible School.

The former student also believed in very specific prayer and had this word for Willy, "I think you should get in touch with Joan McLeod in Minneapolis." That phone call turned out to be the



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unusual word from God. Willy and Joan had been in the same Bible School class in Minneapolis and worked and lived as neighbors during the years in Brazil. Joan's late husband, Allan, had been Pastor and Bible School director at the Altonia Mission and had also been a good friend of Willy's during that time. You can probably guess what happened.

Willy and Joan got married and moved to Il Villagio in Bradenton, FL, enjoying the fellowship and opportunities to serve in the retirement community. Willy came up with his last useful innovation by making a "platform rig" that facilitated the task of keeping the rain gutters clean and operational. He LOVED making the rounds with the golf cart and "rig" towed behind.

How sad he was when it was no longer possible to go up that ladder. But we will all be going "up the ladder" one of these days. May God help us live well until then.



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Diane Dahlen posted:

I will never forget the summer of 2009 when Willy, along with his friend Dave Sluka, put in a new deck for our home...labor free of charge, of course. He actually rolled the gazebo onto the lawn to work on the deck underneath. I think he used logs, but I wasn't home when he did it! He then installed his unique railing system, his own invention, also free of charge. The deck is now older, but the railing is holding its own and looks great after all these years. Steve passed away the following Fall, but had a chance to enjoy the deck for a few months. We were beyond grateful. It was truly a labor of love. May God bless his memory! Diane (Steve) Dahlen

April 8 at 4:34 PM



Sara posted:

Willy was a wonderful Roofmate-neighbor! Always ready to give a compliment and take time to talk! If he was cleaning his carport, without a word, he'd clean mine also. One very fond memory was on Valentine's Day (when my 1st husband was unable to go out and about), Willy showed up at my door with a single rose and wanted to see my husband and told him, "Here's a rose for you to give to your lovely wife for Valentines." Willy was one of a kind and will be missed for now, but will see him in Heaven some day!

April 6 at 9:49 AM



Filipe Azevedo shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

I had the pleasure of meeting Willy in 2019, in Bradenton. I knew him only through the stories told by Nedra Dugan in the book "With Eternal Values in View," which I had read a few months before traveling with my wife to the United States and being able to visit Joan and Willy. It was such a pleasant visit! We felt so welcomed by Willy and Joana. I vividly remember Willy showing me blueprints of his projects and solutions to a wide variety of problems. He kindly took us to visit the beaches in Tampa. It is always an honor to meet people who have dedicated so much of their lives to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. Willy was one of those people to me, even though I only had the privilege of spending two days with him. A faithful servant.



April 3 at 11:26 PM



Wayne Harder shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.



April 3 at 3:38 PM



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Wayne Harder shared 5 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

March 28 at 1:03 PM



Wayne Harder shared an album called **wayne**.

April 3 at 3:25 PM



Sara posted:

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March 28 at 1:03 PM



Media

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Wayne Harder shared 5 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

April 3 at 3:35 PM





Media

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Wayne Harder shared 2 photos to the **wayne** album.

April 3 at 3:25 PM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Willard by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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