

Princeton Lee Ball Obt.

b. 5 December 1954, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN – d. 14 April 2020, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN, md on the 12th of June 1982, Cumberland Co., TN to **Debra Alice (Coward) Ball**, b. 7 January 1958. Princeton Lee Ball, s/o **Charles Edward Ball** (1936-2016) & **Mary Elizabeth (Leffew) Tallant**. Mary also md **Lillard Shefferd Tallant** (1937-2019), he is buried in Lewis Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN.

(Source: Tennessee State Marriage record, Cumberland Co., TN, pg. 315, #9769 – Princeton Lee Ball married Cumberland Co., TN, age 27, b. 5 December 1954, address: Rt. 11, Cookeville, TN to Debra A. Cowart, age 24, b. 7 January 1958, address: Rt. 12, Crossville, TN).

COOKEVILLE — Princeton Lee Ball, 65, of Cookeville, Tennessee, passed Monday, April 13, 2020, at his home,



Princeton was born Sunday, Dec. 5, 1954, in Cookeville, Tennessee. He was the son of the late Charles Edward Ball and Mary Elizabeth (Leffew) Tallant.

Princeton graduated from Cookeville High School in 1972 and he attended Tennessee Tech University earning his Bachelor's of Sociology, majoring in criminal justice in 1977. He worked in Juvenile Justice for more than 31 years and was proud of all the kids that he helped along the way.

He truly loved children and that legacy continued long after his retirement, as playing Santa to the Upper Cumberland Region. Anyone who knew him knew he was larger than life. He was a kind gentle giant who would go out of his way to help anyone and never met a stranger. He would say his greatest achievement in life was his family and was always the first to say "I Love You." To say he will be missed is an understatement, as we feel a part of us will be missing.

Princeton is survived by his wife, Debra Ball; two children, Sarah and Eugene Starkey, and Seth Ball; granddaughter, Nora Pineda; sister, Donna and Willard Denny; mother, Mary Elizabeth Tallant; and nephew, Leo Denny.

In addition to his father, Princeton was preceded in death by stepfather, Lillard Tallant.

Private graveside services for Princeton Lee Ball will be held at Cumberland Heights Church of Christ Cemetery with Bro. Mike Webb officiating.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that you find a way to make a child's Christmas special in his honor by either donating to your local angel tree or Toys for Tots.

To sign the online guestbook and to send the family a message please visit: www.crestlawnmemorial.com.

Arrangements entrusted to Crest Lawn Funeral Home, 526-6384.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 16 April 2020

'St. Nick' Princeton Ball passes away

By Kate Cook

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus."



Those famous words from the New York Sun newspaper in 1897 had new significance Tuesday

as Cookeville mourned the loss of our Santa Claus, Princeton Ball.

Princeton Ball and his wife Debra as Santa and Mrs. Claus in the 2015 Cookeville Christmas parade. Ball ascended to the eternal North Pole Monday at home with his wife, Debra. Debra said her husband had been in declining health for awhile before his passing.

Princeton and Debra were married for 37 years, though most folks didn't know them by their regular names. They were Santa and Mrs. Claus. The two embodied the Jolly Old Elf and his Missus at events all over the Upper Cumberland, including Cookeville's Christmas parade and Christmas in the Park.

"He loved it," Debra Ball said. "He did it for 35 years."

She said Princeton served as a juvenile probation officer for the state of Tennessee for 31 years before retirement. Debra said he loved helping "his kids" live better lives. In a way, they were all "his kids." Debra said it was not unusual for small children to run up to Santa in public, whether it was the Christmas season or not. Each year, from late October through January, if they were out, Princeton was wearing a Santa hat or his red suspenders. He'd tell children he was just visiting.

"He was Santa all year long," Debra said.

Princeton left an impression on everyone, young and old.

"Princeton was a very kind man and was great with kids," said Cookeville Leisure Services Director Rick Woods. "He was a real terrific person and we'll miss him." Putnam County Mayor Randy Porter echoed those sentiments. "Princeton was just an absolute great guy to be around," Porter said. "He was just a loving and kind individual that cared for his community and was always looking for ways to give back."

Cookeville Regional Medical Center CEO Paul Korth said Princeton and Debra had been the Clauses at the hospital for many years.

"He'd come in and spend a few hours with us on a Friday night, employees and their kids would get their picture taken with him," Korth said.

The event grew every year, he said, and some employees stood in line for an hour to get their pictures taken with Santa.

"It's very sad to hear of his passing and we're praying for his family during this time of hardship," Korth said.

Cookeville Mayor Ricky Shelton said he didn't think about Christmas without thinking of Princeton.

"He was a kind, giant of a man, who really embodied the spirit of Christmas," Shelton said. "I thought the world of him and am sorry about his passing. I will definitely miss him."

He said Princeton flipped the switch to light the Christmas tree in Dogwood Park each year. This past year, he appeared alongside the Grinch.

"He loved serving as Santa," Shelton said. "It was his calling. It was his favorite time of year."

Shelton said things seem dark now, between tornadoes, a worldwide pandemic, economic distress and now Princeton's loss, but there is always hope.

"I've seen our community get closer, friends and neighbors trying to help each other," Shelton said. "This is something sad again, our Santa passing, but we can't lose hope and lose sight that this hard trial and tribulation will pass ... We have to know things will get better and we'll get through this together."

Funeral arrangements for Princeton Ball are incomplete. The Herald-Citizen will have his obituary later this week.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 14 April 2020

*See more about the people & places in Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>