



Patsy J. Blackwell

October 13, 1927 - January 14, 2026

Pat Blackwell was a jazz singer. "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing," she often said, and she meant it.

She sang for the Jerry Ford Combo and Jerry Ford Orchestra for more than 35 years. They performed at governors' balls, on Mississippi River boats and at countless country club dances. Her husband Joe played bass in the band.

Pat died Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026, at the age of 98. She could still sing almost to the end of her life.

She told some members of her family she hoped she didn't die during the Covid pandemic. "I need an audience," she explained.

Practicing was part of her makeup. When she cleaned songs like "Misty" and "Mack the Knife" reverberated around the house.

Pat's evolution as a singer began in the 1950s when she was a member of the Cape Choraliers, a choir headed by Jack and Susie Palsgrove. They performed at the World's Fair in Seattle. Pat and friends Virginia Boren and Virginia Hill then formed a trio modeled after the McGuire Sisters. They performed on the KFVS Breakfast Show and in an annual show called the Jaycee Follies. Then she began singing with a group headed by Bob Sisco

before joining up with Jerry Ford. It was a rare weekend when they weren't playing music somewhere.

She always wore fancy dresses when she performed. She made each one herself.

Pat was an early working mom. She was in charge of the music selection at the Hobby Horse, a store in the Town Plaza. Later she sold women's clothing at Seifert's in the West Park Mall. Seifert's gave her an award for selling \$1 million worth of clothing.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Joe Blackwell, and by her son, Scott Blackwell, by her sister Nona Smith and their brother Larry Erwin. She is survived by her brother David Erwin of Utah; her son Sam Blackwell and his wife Danna Cotner, her daughter Sally Bethea and her husband Doug; grandchildren Kyle Bethea, Carly Bethea and her husband Chris, Kim Bethea and her husband Trevor, and Casey Blackwell and wife Courtney; and five great-grandchildren, Cole, Dak, McCoy, Merrick and Miller Kate.

A highpoint of her life was going on a jazz cruise in the Caribbean. She and Joe had their picture taken with jazz great Oscar Peterson. She never missed the university jazz concerts at the Bedell.

Pat was her grandchildren's biggest cheerleader. Her granddaughter Carly shared her love of singing. Pat prodded her to audition for the only female solo in her school's seventh-grade concert, something she never would have done without her grandmother's encouragement. Carly didn't get the part but her comfort zone expanded.

"I will never forget the way she made me feel so special, asking about my interests, calling me on each and every birthday, serenading me through

voicemail if I'd missed a call, and asking about the kids while laughing endlessly together about all things motherhood," Carly said.

She had a way of making things special. Granddaughter Casey said "some of my earliest and fondest memories of my grandma are "eating 'wa-melon' by candlelight on the family's screened-in porch. "She would warn me not to eat the seeds of a melon would grow in my belly. When we were done we would move to the porch swing and she would tell me nursery rhymes."

Pat was supremely innocent. She loved her son-in-law Doug's humor, even if it sometimes was at her expense. He called her and, disguising his voice, told her she'd won the Publishers Clearing House \$1million drawing. "Joe get in here, we have won the PCH grand prize," she screamed. Doug did let her in on the joke.

"And there were countless renditions of me acting like a deep southern Baptist preacher with my southern accent that she laughed at every time."

Sometimes Doug hummed a song for her he called the "blue-haired waltz," "Moonlight Serenade" by Glen Miller. "It ends with a pause in the music, a crash of a cymbal, followed by me telling her that was the moment Joe would dip her on the dance floor. She smiled every time."

If you were her grandchild Pat was going to come to your rescue even if you didn't need rescuing.

One afternoon Kyle got a call from his Grandma. "Wylie..." she said, short for "Kylie Wylie" - "her nickname for me since I was a toddler. Wylie...where are you?" She sounded worried. He told her he was at home in Chicago and asked if everything was okay.

She wanted to know if he had been arrested, and if he was currently in jail in Canada. She'd been targeted by a scam, someone calling and pretending to be her grandson in need of help and needing her to wire money. It had to be kept secret from his mom and dad.

Thankfully a Western Union employee recognized the scam and urged her to return home and call her grandson directly before sending the money. After some skepticism and questions to ensure he was the real Kylie Wylie, she eventually believed him.

"...I was happy to know that if I ever did get arrested and needed a secret bribe wired internationally to get myself out of trouble, Grandma Pat wouldn't think twice," Kyle said.

One tradition Grandma Pat began was to make brownies with her grandchildren when they came to visit. "She would always let us lick the bowl of brownie batter afterwards," Kim said. "I would look forward to it for weeks leading up to the trip."

Grandma Pat always had a surprise waiting in the hall closet when they arrived at Bessie Street. Sometimes candy, sometimes a toy, sometimes something to wear. "I would think about it the entire 6.5-hour car ride from Cincinnati. It didn't matter what it was. It wasn't about the gift. It was about her making our arrival feel highly anticipated and special."

She thinks of music when she thinks of her grandma. "I remember her waking me up in the mornings singing. I sing those same songs to my two boys now," Kim said. I chuckle a little inside whenever I rock them to sleep to the sounds of "Mack the Knife" -- an interesting choice for a bedtime lullaby, I admit. But if you know who my grandma was, you understand that it feels right."

Kim's boys (3 years old and 18 months old) are too young to have their own

memories of Pat. "But they will still know her. When they hear a good jazz lick. When I surprise them with a little something special I've hidden in the coat closet, just because. And when, against my better judgment, I let them lick the bowl of brownie batter at the end."

A visitation will be held from 10 a.m.-noon Tuesday Jan. 20, 2026, at Ford and Sons Mt. Auburn Funeral Home. She will be buried with her husband at the Veterans Cemetery in Bloomfield.

Donations may be made to the Southeast Missouri State UNIV. FDTN, One University Plaza, MS 7300, Cape Girardeau, Mo. 63701. On the memo line please write: Studio Jazz Ensemble.

Online condolences may be made at www.fordandsonsfuneralhome.com

Cemetery Details

Missouri Veterans Cemetery

17357 Stars & Stripes Way
Bloomfield, MO 63825

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 20. 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Ford and Sons Mt. Auburn Chapel
1001 N. Mt. Auburn Rd.
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Tribute Wall

DC

“ I’m so sorry for your loss. I’m old enough to remember hearing Pat sing. She is a legend in Cape Girardeau. I read all of her obituary. It was a beautiful obituary. She sounds like a wonderful woman who had a very happy life. I’ve come to believe that people who have music in their soul live very happy lives. Prayers for all her family and friends.

Deborah K Clifton - January 21 at 07:09 PM

PB

“ Sally I am so very sorry for your loss. I met her years ago and she was very active at that time. It seems from reading the obituary that she had a wonderful and fulfilling life.

Peggy Bentlage - January 20 at 12:48 PM

BB

“ Sally and family, sorry to hear of the passing of your mother. I read her obituary. She was a precious and wonderful lady. Prayers to all of you !

Barbara Bage - January 20 at 09:00 AM

DL

“ A very sweet person. A beautiful lady, both inside and out.

Doug Lewis - January 19 at 01:35 PM

CL

“ Pat was the sweetest aunt. She will be missed❤️

Christine Lewis - January 19 at 01:16 PM