



Jim Vandergriff

August 14, 1942 - May 2, 2025

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Husband, educator, father, folklorist, grandfather, poet, great-grandfather, linguist, brother, veteran,

handy person, academic, friend, neighbor, and cat lover

Jim enjoyed his life to the fullest.

Jim (James Harley) was born August 14, 1942, on the little Vandergriff farm near Stoutland, Missouri. His parents were Oliver Wyatt Vandergriff and Mary Ella Vandergriff neé Perkins. Jim had four siblings: Robert Lee (Bobby, died 1962), Jerry, John (died 2020), and Beverly (Bev).

Jim dropped out of high school after the 11th grade and joined the Navy in 1959. He served honorably for four years. Jim enjoyed his Navy years, serving as an ordnanceman, and traveling to Hawaii, the Philippines, and Japan. Trained to work with bombs and missiles, Jim left the Navy when he was told to attend courses on nuclear weapons. Jim wanted nothing to do with nuclear weapons.

After completing correspondence courses while in the Navy, Jim received his high school diploma and started college at Central Missouri State College. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1968 with a teaching certificate.

Then, in 1972, he received a Master of Arts. While completing his Masters of Arts, he taught college English for a year beginning his career as a college professor.

Jim continued to teach for another 38 years in various places - Missouri, Kansas, Oregon, Illinois and Arizona. While he taught in middle and high schools, for the majority of his career he taught in higher education. His courses included English, Latin, folklore, science fiction, and teacher preparation.

Jim earned a doctorate in Teaching and Teacher Education with a focus on secondary English teacher preparation and professional development in 2001. During that time, he met and married the love of his life, Donna Jurich.

Jim had one daughter, Amy (Vandergriff), by his first wife (Judy Weitkemper); four grandchildren (Jacob Albin; Gabriella Albin; Emma Belcher; Allison Belcher); two great grandchildren (Bryer Spender; Tatum Spencer) and two nieces he raised for a time (Nita McGraw; Debbie Penn, with whom he shared a special relationship). He loved them all deeply. Jim is also survived by numerous nephews, nieces, great nephews, great nieces, and second cousins whom he enjoyed being in contact with and sharing their lives and family history.

For most of his adult life, Jim was an active member of the Missouri Folklore Society (MFS), serving as President one year, journal editor for about 15 years, book review editor for about 10 years, and organizer of the book and exhibits room for many years. He was a member of the MFS board for about 50 years. Jim, also, published several articles for the MFS journal and presented at the annual meeting often - in-person, streaming, and asynchronously.

In November of 2015, Jim suffered a massive stroke, and in July of 2016, he

broke his left hip. Both left him unable to do many things he used to and loved to do. He did find a new avenue to express himself – albeit somewhat reticently - cooking and breadmaking. Many friends and family enjoyed his delicious meals.

Jim was able to spend his last days at home, often sitting on the porch appreciating all the dessert creatures that visited the garden – round tail squirrels, antelope squirrels, a rock squirrel, quail, sparrows, cardinals, cactus wrens, doves, hawks, and the neighborhood owl – all with one of the cats on his lap and blue grass playing in the background. Jim's motto – live simply, love generously, care deeply, speak kindly, leave the rest up to chance.

Jim loved national parks. In lieu of flowers, please donate in Jim's memory to Saguaro National Park (<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/friendsofsaguaro>) or the Missouri Folklore Society (contact Adam Davis: adavis@truman.edu.)

Written by Jim, undated, prior to 2019, and edited by Donna October 2025.

A Celebration of Life with Military Honors will be held on Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. at the American Legion Hall, 1100 North Pine, Richland, Missouri, Jim's hometown.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV 8. 3:00 PM.

American Legion Hall

Tribute Wall

MS

“ Marge Scott sent a virtual gift in memory of Jim Vandergriff



Marge Scott - November 02, 2025 at 08:13 AM



“ 6 files added to the album Memories Album



Memorial Chapels and Crematory - November 01, 2025 at 01:58 PM