

Elder Robert LeGrand Backman

March 22, 1922 ~ June 3, 2022

Elder Robert LeGrand Backman passed away peacefully, surrounded by family, on June 3, 2022, in Murray, Utah. He was 100 years old.

He was born March 22, 1922, to LeGrand Pollard and Edith Price Backman, the oldest of five children. At the age of twelve, he went with his family to Cape Town, South Africa, where his father was called to preside over the South African Mission. During his four years there, he fell in love with the land and people of Africa.

Upon returning home, Elder Backman attended East High School for his senior year, then the University of Utah. At the U, he joined the Army ROTC to earn an officer's commission in the event of war. However, in 1941, he gave up that potential commission when he accepted the call to serve as a missionary in the Northern States Mission headquartered in Chicago, Illinois.

Elder Backman was drafted as a private into the Army on June 10, 1944—four days after D-Day—and upon arriving in the Pacific theater was promoted to staff sergeant and message center chief in the Signal Company of the 43rd Division. He was stationed in New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan.

He married Virginia Pickett on July 5, 1941, later solemnized in the Salt Lake Temple. Together they had seven daughters, whom he described as "the lights of his life." In 1957, they were named the Utah representatives in the national search for the "All-American Family."

Elder Backman graduated from the University of Utah Law School in 1949, then joined his father and uncle in the family law firm founded by his grandfather, Gustav H. Backman. He looked forward to seeing and working with his father nearly every day.

He served two terms as a member of the Utah House of Representatives, from 1971–1975. He was the President of the Salt Lake City Executives Association, President of the Utah Land Title Association, and a member of both the Utah and American Bar Associations.

Elder Backman loved the Lord with all his heart. He served Him in numerous callings, including Deacon's Quorum Advisor, Stake Young Men's President, Bishop's Counselor, High Councilor, Counselor to the Stake President, Regional Representative, and as a Temple Sealer (he married nearly 2,000 couples). In 1966, he was called to serve as the President of the Northwestern States Mission, based in Portland, Oregon.

From 1972 until 1974, he served as the President of the Aaronic Priesthood–MIA. In 1978, he was called as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, and in 1979 was again asked to serve as the General President of the Church's Young Men's organization. He traveled more than a million miles around the world to minister to members of the church.

Elder Backman was an inspiring, energetic speaker. During his time as a General Authority, he hosted the radio program, You and Your World—an assignment that lasted three and a half years. His talks from those radio shows were later compiled into two books, Take Charge of Your Life and Be Master of Yourself.

In 1985, he was called to the Presidency of the Quorum of the Seventy, where he served as the Executive Director of the Missionary Department and President of the International Mission, among other assignments. He was honorably released from the Quorum in October of 1992. Later, he served five years as the Vice-Chairman of the Church Sesquicentennial Committee and played a critical role in organizing that year-long event.

His wife Virginia passed away on June 4, 1999. On September 21, 2001, he married Janet Woodbury Rigby in the Salt Lake Temple. In 2005, he and Janet were called to serve as the President and Matron of the Jordan River Temple, where they served faithfully until their release in 2008. Elder Backman also served as the Coordinator of the Handcart Pioneer Trek program from 2009 until 2011.

He was an avid scouter. He earned his Eagle award alongside his young men when he served in the Bishopric of the Parley's Ward. He served for 27 years on the National Executive Board of The Boy Scouts of America, BSA International Committee, and BSA's National Advisory Council. He represented the scouts in Russia, India, Senegal, Germany, England, Indonesia, Australia, France, and many other countries. He was honored with the Silver Beaver, the Silver Antelope, the Silver Buffalo, and the Distinguished Eagle awards for his decades of service to the scouts.

Elder Backman was a voracious reader. He enjoyed traveling. But more than anything, he loved spending what little free time he had with his family, whether it was on the golf course at Bear Lake—where his errant drives were often accompanied by a "Bug juice!" or "Good night, nurse!"—or in his backyard for family barbecues and holiday get-togethers. Referring to his family, he said, "I'm not rich, but I am one of the wealthiest men in the world."

He is survived by his wife Janet; sister Beverly Davis; brother James (Lynn); five daughters and seven sons-in-law: (Ralph Marsh (Dorothy)), Louise (Preston) Checketts, (Carl Zabriskie), Virginia (William) Knaub, Bonnie (Kerry) Price, Patricia (Gary) Cox, and Barbara (Rodney) Rasmussen; four step-children: Linda (Todd) Zenger, Catherine (Jeffrey) Ipsen, Todd (Tiffany) Rigby, and Eric (Stephanie) Rigby; 53 grandchildren; 96 great-grandchildren; and 3 great-great grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents, first wife Virginia, sister Mary Jean Alley, brother Richard, daughters Judith Marsh and Rebecca Zabriskie, and a grandson, Nathan Champneys.

A funeral celebrating his life will be held at 11:00 AM on Saturday, June 11, at the Salt Lake Olympus Stake Center, located at 2675 East 4420 South in Salt Lake City. A viewing will be held Friday June 10, from 6:00 PM until 8:00 PM at the Larkin Mortuary at 260 E South Temple in Salt Lake City, and at the Stake Center from 9:00 AM until 10:30 AM, immediately preceding the funeral. Interment at Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park.