

James Robert "Bob" Van Orman

April 15, 1941 ~ August 11, 2023

James Robert (Bob) Van Orman returned to his heavenly parents on August 11, 2023, after a long, valiant battle with Alzheimer's disease. He was born to Lyle C. and Carolyn Gibb Van Orman in Salt Lake City on April 15, 1941, thirteen minutes before his identical twin brother, Bill. Bob loved and respected his parents, twin, and sisters—Marie, Margaret, and Kathleen. Although he was born in Utah, he spent most of his childhood in Jerome, Idaho.

Bob loved floating down the canal near his home on an inner tube, switching places with his twin to trick people, and going to the movies every Saturday. For only fifty cents, he could buy a ticket to the matinee, a comic book, a Sugar Daddy, a package of Necco Wafers, and some sunflower seeds. Bob had a twinkle in his eye and sometimes got into mischief. One day when he was still quite young, he noticed a little box next to his seat at the movie theater that was held in place with screws. He was intrigued by that little box, so the next Saturday, he brought a screwdriver to the matinee. He opened the box and stuck his screwdriver inside. There were sparks, and then everything in the theater went black—no lights, no movie, no sound, nothing. He said he learned that day not to try to fix what isn't broken.

Bob and Bill were great friends. They were also very competitive and loved playing tennis together—both as partners and opponents. Bob learned the importance of hard work, honesty, and fairness from his dad as they worked together at Van Orman Hardware, their family business. His mother taught him to strive for excellence in everything he did.

After graduating from Jerome High School, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from the University of Utah. Right before finishing his master's degree, he reluctantly agreed to go on a blind date with Ellen Ashton, who was also quite hesitant. The date went much better than either of them expected, and they had a magical evening gazing at the stars at the Hansen Planetarium (Bob said he was mostly gazing at Ellen) and eating ice cream parfaits. That night marked the beginning of their fifty-seven-year love story. On August 25, 1966, six months after their blind date, they were married in the Salt Lake Temple. On their wedding day, Bob received an unexpected wedding gift: he swung by his apartment to pick up some things and found a military draft notice in the mailbox. Six months later, he went to Officer Training School in San Antonio, where he was a distinguished military graduate.

His first assignment was at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Bob and Ellen's first three kids were born there: Sara, Jim, and Amy. After finishing active duty four years later, Bob worked as a civilian for the air force in Norfolk, Virginia, and Panama City, Florida, where the younger three kids were born: Jonny, Thurop, and Lisa.

Bob served as technical director of the Air Force Civil Engineering Center at Tyndall Air Force Base. The family lived in Panama City for seventeen years before moving to Cottonwood Heights, Utah. He ended his civilian military career as the directorate of environmental management at Hill Air Force Base. After retiring from the air force, Bob served as vice president and Utah area manager for Holmes and Narver, a global engineering company. While there, he engineered the ski jump for the 2002 Winter Olympics, the Park City Skatepark, and the communication towers on Farnsworth Peak. In 1995, he was the recipient of the Utah Engineer of the Year Award.

His proudest accomplishment, though, was his family. Bob loved and was delighted by his six children. He taught them—through his example—integrity, faith, service, hard work, humor, scholarship, endurance, excellence, optimism, and efficiency. When the children were sick, Bob made them little toast houses to help them feel better. If they fell and got a cut, he was the one who hoisted them onto the counter and tenderly applied a thick slab of bacitracin and a bandage. His children always knew there would be a maroon mechanical pencil in his shirt pocket and a package of Certs mints for them in his pants pocket. When grandchildren came along, he took them on imaginary airplane rides and bounced them around like kangaroos. He loved spending time with his family—playing games, camping, hiking, white water rafting, and taking them on cross-country trips in their Big Blue Van.

He spent many hours researching his family tree and visiting the places his ancestors lived in Pennsylvania, Washington, Massachusetts, Scotland, Denmark, and the Netherlands. As his memory began to fade, he was most intent on remembering his parents, siblings, wife, children, and grandchildren. He also worked hard to remember the gospel he loved, the tender mercies in this life, and his favorite scripture: Doctrine & Covenants 90:24.

Bob deeply loved the Savior and gave countless hours of service to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Daily prayer and scripture study were very important to him, as was attending the temple. He was involved in scouting throughout his life and earned a Silver Beaver Award. He influenced the lives of many as he served as a scoutmaster, branch president, bishop, stake president, and full-time missionary with Ellen in the Philippines Manila Mission, the Philippines Quezon City Mission, and the Utah West Jordan Mission. He loved the people he associated with as a missionary. While in the Philippines, at the request of the Manila Rotary Club, he designed and engineered a water system, a school, and bridges for Mindoro's indigenous people, dramatically changing their lives. He also served as district president for the church in Mindoro.

He ate the same thing for breakfast every morning: raisin bran, granola, and skim milk, with an ice cube at the bottom of the bowl to keep it cold. He played tennis at least once a week throughout his adulthood and relied on his muscle memory to continue playing for several years after he got Alzheimer's. He enjoyed woodworking, and he built the girls a Barbie house that was much more structurally sound and interesting than any of the plastic ones sold in stores. His Barbie house had a working elevator and carpet that matched the carpet in the family home on Marywood Drive in Panama City, which he also designed and built.

His favorite sayings were: "If it's important, do it now"; "Remember who you are"; and "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well." He was known to say, "Dagnabbit!" and "Heavens to Betsy!" when he was frustrated. He was an early riser, often jumping out of bed in the morning and enthusiastically exclaiming, "We have things to do, places to go, people to meet!" We like to think he left this earth with that same sense of anticipation.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Lyle C. and Carolyn Van Orman, and a brother-in-law, Ralph Meyer. He is survived by his wife—Ellen Ashton Van Orman; his children and their spouses—Sara (Daniel) Millett, Jim (Beverly) Van Orman, Amy (Brad) Hansen, Jonny (Kristen) Van Orman, Thurop (Sherri) Van Orman, and Lisa (Daniel) Van Orman Hadley; and his siblings—Marie (Ralph) Meyer, Bill (Nancy) Van Orman, Margaret (Max) Mueller, and Kathleen (Kevon) Balls. He has nineteen beloved grandchildren and four adored great-grandchildren, as well as many dear nieces, nephews, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law.

The family wishes to thank the William E. Christoffersen Veterans Home for their loving and exceptional care of Bob for the last seven years of his life.

A viewing will be held at Larkin Sunset Lawn (2350 E 1300 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84108) on Wednesday, August 16, 2023, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

The funeral service will be held on Thursday, August 17, 2023, at 11:00 a.m. at the Valley View 11th Ward building (1925 E Gundersen Lane, Holladay, UT 84124). A viewing will be held immediately before the service, from 10:00

a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The service will be streamed live through Zoom, and a recording will be available after the funeral through the same link. The burial will be at the Memorial Holladay Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Humanitarian Aid Fund or the Alzheimer’s Association.