

# John Virgil James

*October 6, 1975 ~ December 30, 2024*

John Virgil James was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on October 6, 1975, to Stephen and Vicki James. When his parents first carried him through the door as a newborn, his siblings Steve, Tammy and Wendy played the song “Johnny Angel” in the background. Johnny truly brought heaven to their home as he replaced his sister’s doll as the first live baby in the family’s nativity play at Christmastime. His family adored him, showering their new baby with attention. According to family lore, his first word spoken was “Batman”. When he was 1, the family moved to Southern California. His siblings loved teaching him new words and lyrics to songs, as if he were a parrot. This, however, backfired when he said “Hey Foxy” to the bishop’s wife. He loved living by his Grandpa Frank and Grandma Lorraine Adams, who often watched him while his mom taught at Fairmont Private school, where he eventually attended. He especially loved superheroes, “Chips” (the tv show) and cowboys, but his universe changed when he first saw a movie called, “Star Wars”. That galaxy far far away became John’s life-long theme and with every new movie, came a new chapter in his life.

Eventually, his family moved back to Utah, where he continued his elementary and secondary schooling. It was during these younger years that John discovered his love for sports, especially football. Number 55 became John’s other name and football became his life. This took him to many championships playing for Alta High School. He was forever grateful for the constant support of his Dad and Mom, who were always watching from the sidelines. They had a very special relationship. His incredible strength, discipline, and heart made him an exceptional athlete, developing what he called, “the eye of the tiger”. (Cue music.) This drive helped him overcome numerous health situations, teaching a level of resilience that lasted throughout his life. It was during this chapter of life that John found a love for creating memories with those he cared about. He loved fishing, traveling and cooking with his dad, especially barbecuing and making pizza. He welcomed the comfort of his mom’s chocolate chip cookies on rainy days and the tradition of peach cobbler on his birthdays. Some of his favorite childhood memories included making forts, acting out battles, and playing games with his friends, siblings and cousins. He loved family music-nights, singing together around the piano and listening to his relatives perform. He was especially excited when his Grandad Virgil and Grandmother Frances James moved to Utah and enjoyed many special times in their home with his cousins.

Unfortunately, due to health issues and injuries, John was not able to continue playing football beyond high school. His early training, however, helped to inspire him as a coach in his later years. John loved music and knew every genre and artist, with an amazing recall for trivia. He also loved going to the movies, especially the premiers. The movie theater became the new gathering spot where superheroes and beloved characters became part of the family. He had a gift of making life fun and always had a sense of adventure.

After marrying his first wife Andrea Pahnke, he was blessed with two beautiful daughters, Olivia and Alexandra. Over the years, his family, along with aunts, uncles and cousins built many wonderful memories together and a foundation for the future. During this chapter in his life, John started coaching little league football, continuing his passion for the game. He loved coaching with his Dad, Uncle Dennis and friends while mentoring youth and teaching the skills that he learned along the way. He also loved working in the world of business finance and helping others to succeed. John was heartbroken with the early passing of his father after a brief battle with cancer. While facing continued health issues himself and other difficult circumstances, John remembered the lessons learned in his early football days and following his father's example, he tried to rise each time he fell. With his mother's encouragement, he would rehearse the song, "I Can Go The Distance". His belief in his Savior was the center of his existence and kept him going through the hard times. During this season, after parting ways in his marriage he found lifetime friends and continued support at the Renaissance Ranch Addiction and Recovery Program. After successfully graduating, John became a new kind of coach, mentor and trainer, helping hundreds of brothers who were struggling. The gym became his second chapel, where he developed a physique that could rival the 80's action heroes and the Incredible Hulk that he idolized as a kid. Training in martial arts, he felt one step closer to becoming a Jedi Knight.

With newfound motivation and hope for the future, John continued his work in finance and addiction recovery. He also continued his love for sports, coaching youth and performing in a reputable gospel choir. It was there that he met and married his second wife, Danielle Townsend. He was honored to officially adopt her twin children Avienne and Evan, who brought so much joy to his life and family. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Management from the University of Pheonix and continued his work, helping to open the Affordable Care Act in Texas and create the outpatient program at Renaissance Ranch.

Eventually, his health once again declined, and he found himself in life-threatening circumstances, being cared for by his family. During these years of struggle, he wasn't expected to live and eventually went on home hospice. Even at his lowest point, he tried to rise above the darkness with the "eye of the tiger" and he started to bounce back. It was at this junction that he returned to Renaissance Ranch as a single man to recover and gain back his health.

Starting a new chapter, John returned to the gym and was blessed with prolonged life and better health for some time. The Force was with him, as he fatefully met Melody Guest and they quickly became inseparable. After many adventures while dating, they quickly realized John required life altering surgeries. They held each other's hands through countless health struggles and hospital visits and sadly, the passing of John's Mom. They continued holding tightly and were married on December 30, 2023. John was grateful for how Melody's parents and family accepted him with love and open arms. With the need for multiple surgeries and procedures, John's health once again declined. Spending many nights at home, they found so much fulfillment in the company of each other's love. One year later, on their 1st anniversary, John's big heart finally gave out. He passed away peacefully in his sleep, reuniting with his parents who had been watching over him from the sidelines. The love John has for his family and friends, as well as his belief in the Savior and His plan, is the legacy that lives on in our hearts.

John is survived by his wife Melody James, his children: Olivia Balsmeier, Alexandra Balsmeier, Avienne James and Evan James, his siblings Steve (Lisa) James, Tamera (Sam) Hull and Wendy (Doug) Warr and Hila Birmingham, his parents-in-law Travis and Melissa Guest, sisters-in-law Madison Guest (Terrance Jackson), Mary Guest, Mallory Guest and brothers-in-law Travis Guest, Zach (Monica) Diebel, in addition to nephews and nieces.

He is preceded in death by his parents Stephen and Vicki James, grandparents Frank and Lorraine Adams and Virgil and Frances James.

Funeral services will be held at 11:30 AM on Friday, January 10, 2025 at the South Jordan Stake Center located 2450 West 10400 South in South Jordan, Utah. Viewings will be held Thursday evening, January 9, 2024 from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at Larkin Sunset Gardens Mortuary, 1950 East 10600 South in Sandy, Utah as well as again Friday morning prior to services beginning at 10:30 AM. Interment will follow in the Larkin Sunset Gardens Cemetery. A Celebration of Life luncheon will follow the graveside services back at the South Jordan Stake Center.

Funeral services will be streamed via Zoom for those wishing to attend virtually.