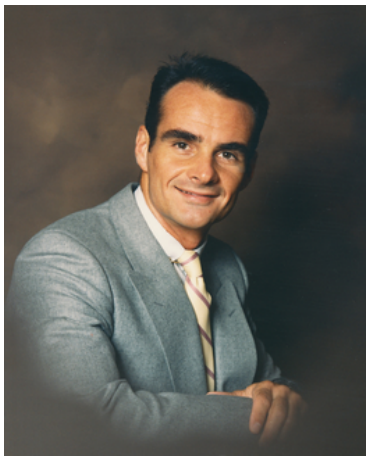

Melvin Clay Pendleton

January 6, 1954 ~ November 21, 2021

Melvin Clay Pendleton: January 06, 1954 — November 21, 2021

It’s not just a life; it’s an adventure!

It takes all hands on deck to honor such a tremendous soul in words, but Clay’s family members did their best. They look forward eagerly to hearing wonderful memories and stories about him from others.

Clay — our beloved brother, cousin, uncle, and friend — experienced a premature end to a cheerful shore leave when cancer, a most foul and thievish rapscallion, indiscriminately hoisted anchors aweigh on him, thus releasing the spirit from its striking vessel. Pulling from the reserves of his valiant character, remaining steadfast in his convictions, and basking in the love of his crew (family and friends) equipped Clay to batten down the hatches for the final rough waters he faced. "Semper Fortis"

Clay was born on January 06, 1954, in Salt Lake City to Melvin Keith Pendleton (Keith) and Ellie Dean Warren Pendleton. To keep tradition intact, Clay’s father, Keith, generously gifted Clay, the first-born son, the family first name of Melvin, which had a rich legacy of demotion to initialism (M. Clay) or veritable disregard (just Clay) long before it became a synonym for unspeakable underwear torment that bullies inflict upon nerds. With his 1954 new-year arrival, Clay made the Pendleton unit a family of four, which would eventually grow to six.

Clay was a curious child, with an adventurous spirit and a love for the outdoors. Clay and his family moved from Salt Lake City to Heber, Utah, when he was two years old. According to a personal account that he wrote in the eighth grade with guidance from his mother, he fell victim to peer pressure at the age of four when a three-year-old beatnik named Danny offered him his first cigarette and drink of whiskey (it’s a good thing that he got this rebellion out of his system early). With fervor, Clay and his best childhood friend, Jerry, played through cowboy and Zorro scenes together. Clay attended North Elementary School in Heber through the third grade. When the family moved back to Salt Lake City, he attended Wasatch and Longfellow until moving on to Bryant Middle School, where he was on the swim team. Clay was active in the Boy Scouts of America, enjoying hiking and camping. In his history, he mentioned going on a hiking trip where he had to carry a 60-lb backpack up the mountain, but prior to the hike, he was fooling around with other kids and fell out of a moving car that was going 30 MPH, skinning his back and making a gory scene that no one could believe. Clay recounted that he still went on the hike by carrying his heavy pack in the front with his hands (he didn’t let an injury ruin a good time). Clay mentioned how much he enjoyed a trip to Canada with his family when he was 12, where the family made their way back home by driving the Oregon coastline, marveling at the redwoods, and visiting Alcatraz Island.

Clay’s older teen and early adult years were filled with activities and learning experiences. He mentioned that everyone always thought that he was older than he was, which made him feel uncomfortable at times. For example,

by the time he was 15, he needed to shave every day and was the hairy-chested Burt Reynolds look-alike that some of us recall. Clay attended East High School, graduating in 1973. During high school, he participated in Acapella as well as track and cross country sports. After high school, Clay immediately embarked on his two-year Georgia-South Carolina mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, returning on August 25, 1975. He enjoyed meeting new people, sharing the gospel with them, and experiencing Southern foods. After his mission, Clay worked as a message and mail courier for Continental Bank and attended the University of Utah, where he completed general courses until he decided to start his military career.

When Clay enlisted with the U.S. Navy in September 1980, the following now-vintage Navy recruitment tagline was underway: “Navy. It’s not just a job, it’s an adventure.” He served in the Navy from 1980 to 1996, with the last three years in the Reserves. Clay had the opportunity to visit many amazing places — including Korea, the Philippines, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Israel — for which he earned an appreciation for the cultures and the food! During his active service, Clay was stationed in several places, such as California, Tennessee, and Washington; however, he spoke most fondly of his time on Diego Garcia, a tropical island that is located in the Indian Ocean, slightly south of the equator. It’s from that assignment that we can all benefit from a fun picture of a very fit and tan Clay holding a huge sea turtle. During his military career, Clay was assigned to the USS Kitty Hawk and USS America. He was an Aviation Electronics Technician Second Class. While on the USS America, the commanding officer recognized Clay with a letter of appreciation for his assuming additional security-related responsibilities in and around the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf in support of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

When Clay would return home for his leave time, he would maintain his physical activity by asking his nieces and nephews to climb on his back while he executed one-handed push-ups flawlessly, moving his pectoral muscles to his favorite music, and engaging in shirtless jump-roping cardio by the busy street, where female passersby would honk or catcall.

Impressively, Clay left the Navy without a single tattoo, not even of an anchor, compass, shellback, or mermaid — at least not that anyone in his family knows! Clay joked about being a salty dog, a seasoned sailor for whom the allure of the sea had waned. However, a few days before he died, Clay told a close friend that he wished he could be aboard a vessel on the water one last time.

After his active service, Clay returned to school to complete his degree, and then rejoined the civilian working world. He graduated from Salt Lake Community College in 1997 with his Associate of Science in Electronics and Avionics. He worked in that field until completing the Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office academy training, where his younger peer cadets would tease the very-fit-and-military-trained 45-year-old Clay by referring to him as Grandpa. One of his nieces, who fortunately had youth and litheness on her side, recalled that Clay, with her permission, of course, would practice his training moves on her by hurling her across the lawn or restraining her. In June 1999, Clay joined Salt Lake County as a Corrections Officer/Deputy, a role he filled with dedication for over 22 years until his death.

Clay was a character, one with diverse interests! Not only would he gift his family and friends homemade baked goods, such as his famous Key lime or pecan pies, or a handwritten cards with his ever-improving calligraphy skills, he would also treat them to unique gifts like Viking hats, yodeling pickles, cartoon watches, random coins, utility knives intended to supplement your “bug-out bag,” collectible figurines, or the best — and worst — of as-seen-on-TV contraptions (Flowbee anyone?). Of course, Clay got a huge kick out of these types of flotsam-and-jetsam items, and we extend our commiserations to the Amazon, eBay, and Wish companies, who might miss him almost as much as we all do. If you were truly lucky, though, you’d also benefit from his infectious laugh, one that made you smile and chuckle yourself just from hearing it.

Other interesting facts that you should know about Clay:

• He was a man of faith, studying Church history, reading and praying about the gospel, engaging in genealogy, and sharing his beliefs with interested parties.
• He adored going to the movies, particularly action movies. He had no problem going by himself to the premier showings, but took his sweet mother and sister when he had the chance.
• Western wear, including cowboy hats, boots, belt buckles, bolo ties, and fancy kerchiefs made his day, which was

likely fueled by his reading Louis L'Amour novels in his youth and enjoying country singers, such as Chris LeDeux and Jon Pardi.

• For nearly 20 years, Clay drove an awesome 1983 Jeep CJ-7 Renegade, which he said saved his life in at least once hairy snowstorm.

• Appreciating Irish and Celtic culture made Clay the perfect fanboy for Riverdance, Lord of the Dance, and others Irish singing or dancing groups.

• He was a physical fitness enthusiast, engaging in weightlifting, swimming, and tennis. He enjoyed gyms, having a membership at the old Deseret Gym in downtown SLC, where he met and spoke to Brooke Shields years ago, and joining other chains, such as 24-Hour Fitness.

• Lastly, Clay truly loved his family. For example, he gave up working out to ensure he could care for his parents and support his sister. He adjusted his schedule by working nights, so he could be present in the day to take his parents to appointments or help with emergencies. He never missed a family gathering, even if that meant that he would go to work on a less-than-ideal amount of rest in his system. Clay was exceptionally thoughtful with his gifts, spoiling the kids in his life with toys and trinkets that he knew they'd enjoy.

Clay was preceded in death by his parents, Melvin Keith Pendleton and Ellie Dean Warren Pendleton, his grandparents, aunts, uncles, other family members, friends, and let us know forget, Sir Sean Connery, his older doppelgänger (particularly true when Clay sported a beard or was acting extra 007-like). Clay is survived by his three siblings: Ida Pendleton of Salt Lake City, Utah, Adam (Brenda) Pendleton of Overton, Nevada, and Matthew Pendleton of Bradenton, Florida; many beloved cousins, nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, other family, friends, and some of his favorite female action stars, Angelina Jolie and Scarlett Johansson (if you know, you know).

Anchors Aweigh, my boys, Anchors Aweigh.
Farewell to foreign shores,
We sail at break of day-ay-ay-ay.
Through our last night ashore,
Drink to the foam,
Until we meet once more.
Here's wishing you a happy voyage home.

(Excerpt from "Anchors Aweigh," with revised lyrics of 1997 by MCPON John Hagen, USN [Ret])

The viewing and services will be held at the Salt Lake City Downtown location of Larkin Mortuary on Tuesday, November 30, 2021, with the viewing starting at 10:00 a.m. and the services starting at 11:00 a.m. If you plan to attend the services, the family members ask that you wear a mask. For those unable to attend in person, you may watch the services via zoom. A zoom account is required, https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89822611902

In lieu of flowers, Clay's wish was for you to donate to cancer research. But, if you're willing to lean into a full celebration in his honor, buy yourself a piece of Key lime pie to enjoy and watch Lara Croft: Tomb Raider.