

Stephen Allen Vanderpool

March 26, 1963 ~ July 5, 2025

Stephen Allen “don’t call me Steven” Vanderpool, 62, passed away from complications related to pancreatitis on July 5, 2025 at the University of Utah Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah. Steve was born in Rock Springs, Wyoming on March 26, 1963 to Wilbur Dale “Jim” Vanderpool and Virginia Lee Ager. He experienced the typical free range American childhood of the 1960s & 70’s in Hiawatha Station, Rock Springs & primarily Green River, Wyoming where the family moved when he was five.

In his teens Steve was cast as an extra in the Clint Eastwood movie *Any Which Way You Can* during a family trip to Jackson Hole. This ignited a life-long love affair with films of all genres, especially Clint Eastwood movies and westerns. He was also a huge Star Trek fan, especially of the series Star Trek: The Next Generation starring Patrick Stewart.

Those who followed Steve on social media know how firm and passionate he was in his views; especially when it came to politics. He relished a good debate going back to his days on the Green River High School Debate Team. Steve enjoyed public speaking and would actually volunteer to speak in church. It was one more reason he pursued a degree in Political Science at the University of Utah, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in 2003.

Steve briefly considered a career in the Navy because of his father’s service, but their basic training cured him of that idea. Instead, he opted to join the United States Army which afforded him the opportunity to see the world with adventures thrown in for free. Steve was assigned the MOS (Military Operational Specialty) of track vehicle mechanic. He served in Desert Storm in 1990 receiving a bronze star with his unit for capturing a group of Iraqi soldiers in what he described as an almost comical series of events. He was stationed twice in Korea, once serving as the driver for his colonel, so he was able to tour the country extensively. During a visit to the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) he was shot at by someone on the North Korean side of the border. Steve shot back & it always bothered him that he might have killed that soldier. At one point Steve and a couple of buddies named Scott & Stu were due a large amount of leave so they terrorized their way up and down the Asian coast. They bought coffee for the Chinese agent who was tailing them in Beijing and in Australia Steve woke up in the infirmary of a British destroyer anchored in the harbor off Melbourne. One of his buddies had insulted the Queen while they were drinking in a pub surrounded by British sailors on leave and the fight was on!

Steve loved to tell people he’d visited six of the seven continents. He especially enjoyed their surprised looks when he announced how much he looked forward to seeing South America. That trip to Australia was how Steve was able to set foot for 10 seconds on Antarctica while wearing shorts & a t shirt. He and his buddies who had driven “Outback”, were invited to fly to McDonald Island in a supply plane & from there it was a hop, skip & a jump to the frozen continent. Somehow, they managed to avoid more trouble in Bangkok, Tokyo and other stops on their way

back to Korea.

Steve enjoyed army life, especially his days as a drill sergeant. He was proud to serve his country and planned to make the army his career but a Private with a hair trigger finger decided otherwise. The soldier pushed a button he shouldn't have while Steve was standing on a tank. The swivel of the turret sent him flying and broke his back leading to an honorable discharge. His first marriage to Norene Parker ended in divorce soon after.

Moving back home to Wyoming Steve went to school at Western Wyoming Community College to get his Associate of Arts degree. His psychology teacher, Lisa Malmstrom Lisota, reintroduced him to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints which he had briefly been a member of during his teen years. Steve delighted in telling people that he originally joined the Church because his father hated carnivals.

After being rebaptized in his thirties, Steve moved to Salt Lake to live with his brother and sister-in-law and look for better employment opportunities. He started attending the Monument Park Singles Ward where he met Sammie Tollestrup. They bonded during a road show so he asked her out on a date. Despite the fact he was a huge Miami Dolphins fan that despised her Dallas Cowboys, and didn't like basketball, they were married in the Salt Lake Temple on October 2, 1998.

Steve loved children so he was heartbroken when their baby boy Morgan died several days after birth. Several miscarriages later he was over the moon to welcome his beautiful baby daughter Alexandra to this world. He never tired of telling people the many sevens associated with her and her birth.

Steve was a hard worker at his many jobs. He was a summer lifeguard at Lava Hot Springs, worked construction in Wyoming and Portland, Oregon; managed an exotic bar in Green River and a staffing agency in Salt Lake; was a board operator for KUER Radio and a security officer for Crossroads Mall. He supervised and even threw newspapers for Newspaper Agency Corp. when he was first married and during his college years. The job was demanding, with awful hours, but he did get to meet the most interesting people. Steve drank lemonade with Kay Malone in Karl's kitchen; received freshly baked cookies from Sister Faust when Elder Faust's paper wasn't delivered & got to personally hand President Hinckley his newspaper despite the best efforts of his "Dannites", as Steve called the security detail, to deter him.

One of his favorite jobs was as a DJ during the 1980s spinning tunes and putting together playlists of '80s rock at KRKK & KSIT in Rock Springs. Much to Sammie's chagrin, when he became active in the Church again recently, he enjoyed waking the household on Sunday mornings to Casey Kasem's Top 40 while he got dressed in one of his snazzy, colorful, three-piece suits with coordinating shirts, ties & cuff links.

Not everyone realized there was a very spiritual side to Steve. His family was active in the Masonic Order and Steve actively enjoyed his lodge days in Green River, Wyoming, Ft. Riley, Kansas and Salt Lake City, Utah where he was recently invested as Senior Steward for Salt Lake Lodge #17. He had also recently returned to full activity in the LDS Church and treasured the friendships and relationships he developed with his Ward Family.

In typical Steve fashion he threw himself into his recent calling as Ward Historian 110%. Brother VP, as he was known around the Ward, was able to employ his photographic and people skills plus flex some newly discovered creative muscles in this assignment.

Pancreatitis first reared its ugly head around 2008, a chronic condition Steve would battle for the rest of his life. When it forced him into an early medical retirement from the United States Postal Service he at least found time for his favorite hobbies when health permitted: pistol shooting, experimenting with new dinner recipes, Utah football games with Sammie, family history, temple work, and especially photography. He built his own dark room in the basement when film photography made a comeback and developed his own pictures. His most recent goal was to photograph every LDS temple in Utah and do a temple session while he was there. And, of course, the inflatables. Steve became famous for bringing joy to neighborhood kids of all ages with his front yard flags and blow ups for every holiday at "The Festive House".

Steve is survived by his wife Sammie, daughter Alexandra and Pepper "the Wonder Dog", brother Clifford Vanderpool (Tara) and many nieces and nephews whom he dearly loved. Predeceased by his baby son Morgan, parents Jim and Virginia Vanderpool, brother David and sister Joanne Conroy (Charles).

Funeral services will be held Friday, July 18th at 11am with a viewing at 9:30am at the LDS Wasatch 6th Ward, 1930 S. 2100 E., Salt Lake City, Utah. Interment will take place at the Salt Lake City Cemetery with Masonic and Military honors.

Dogs were constant companions in Steve’s life. He raised and trained so many dogs over the years that he lost count. But his two favorites were Odie and Pepper. In lieu of flowers the family suggests a donation to Pets for Patriots which partners with Salt Lake County Animal Services to help veterans adopt a dog or cat.