



James Ashbrooke McMahon

April 16, 2023

James Ashbrooke (“Jim”) McMahon, age 74, of Fuquay Varina, NC, passed away peacefully on April 16, 2023 in Chapel Hill, NC due to complications from a lung surgery, with his wife and son by his side.

Jim was born November 24, 1948 to James John and Doris Drysdale McMahon in Port Washington, NY. He graduated from Freedom High School in Bethlehem, PA where he excelled on the wrestling team, earning not only his varsity letters, but a strong letter of recommendation from his wrestling coach to submit with his university application.

After graduating from high school, Jim attended East Carolina University (ECU) where he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Hospitality Management. At ECU, Jim was a member of the Theta Chi Fraternity. His fraternity brothers affectionately nicknamed him “Tool”, since he was frequently called upon to make repairs around the fraternity house. While at ECU he also met his college sweetheart, and the love of his life, Karen Marie Byrum, and they were married on May 27, 1972.

Upon graduating, Jim turned down a job offer in his field of study to fulfill his entrepreneurial spirit and pioneer his own path, opening the first delicatessen in eastern North Carolina. He expanded his business to include the management of corporate cafeterias and vending services as well as equipment repair. After earning his Refrigeration Contractor License, he started a business servicing commercial food equipment, which he successfully operated for the remainder of his career until he retired in 1998.

Throughout his life, Jim yearned for adventure... In his youth, he climbed the ranks through the Boy Scouts of America, achieving the prestigious rank of Eagle Scout. As an adult, his love for camping, boating, traveling and exploring continued. He obtained his pilot’s license and flew small planes as a hobby. Later in life he obtained his captain’s license to enhance his joy of boating. After retiring, he and Karen moved onto their boat full-time, living aboard for two and a half years while they frequented their favorite spots from Maine to the Dominican Republic, Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. When Jim learned of his lung disease, he and Karen took a ‘bucket list’ trip through Italy and Ireland, which was truly a trip of their lifetime! His avidness for boating and travel placed him in the paths of many people who quickly developed into, and remained his and Karen’s dear friends.

Jim loved to learn and tinker, and was dedicated to fixing, making or improving things... from small projects in the Boy Scouts, to designing and general contracting to build two houses, always doing his best to make things better for his family, friends and, in any way he possibly could, the world. He was always looking at the big picture and overall impact of what he did.

Jim was his happiest when he was with his family. Everywhere he went, and whatever he did, he and his wife, Karen, were inseparable; they shared genuine love, and he deeply appreciated having her by his side. Jim was extremely proud of and enjoyed watching his son, Dale, growing up, working hard in his career, beginning a family and using many lessons he learned from his dad to better his life. He admired, and loved spending time with his daughter-in-law, Liz, and appreciated how she balanced out Dale and kept him in check. He cherished hanging out with his oldest grandson, Liam, whether doing projects together around the house, gardening, cooking or playing board games such as Monopoly, or Parcheesi. He was thrilled to meet his newborn grandson, Owen, and embrace a brand-new addition to, and continuation of his family.

When Jim learned of his Pulmonary Fibrosis in 2016, he was determined to beat the odds, and to continue living. He and Karen moved near Duke University Hospital while he was being evaluated for a lung transplant. When he was rejected by Duke, Houston Methodist Hospital, among others, reached out to him offering their evaluation. He accepted their offer and he and Karen relocated from North Carolina to Houston, Texas where he was evaluated and placed on the transplant list and, in July of 2017 had a single lung transplant. After a difficult, but successful recovery, he made the absolute most out of his newly gifted years, continuing to boat, doing projects around the house, and spending every moment he could with family and friends.

Jim is survived by his wife of nearly 51 years, Karen Byrum McMahan of Fuquay Varina, NC, his son, James Drysdale ("Dale") and daughter-in-law, Elizabeth ("Liz") Vergara McMahan of Apex, NC, his two grandsons, Liam Dominic and Owen Miguel McMahan, his two brothers, John Forrest McMahan of Mobile, AL and David Rory McMahan of Herndon, VA, and his nephew, David Ryan McMahan of Ruckersville, VA.

Donations to Doctors Without Borders or a similar charity of your choice would be greatly appreciated in lieu of flowers. <https://donate.doctorswithoutborders.org>