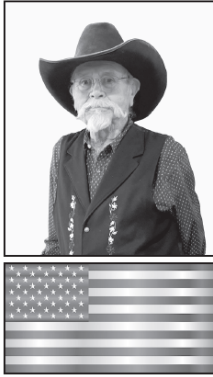


James Everett Martens
November 18, 1946 — September 30, 2025



On September 30, 2025, James Everett Martens, our beloved husband and father, and adored grandfather, saddled up one last time and rode on to greener pastures. His humor stayed with him up until the bitter end. When the nurses asked what he had done that day, he'd say, "Oh, just punching dogies."

James Everett Martens, 78, was born on November 18, 1946, in Newcastle, to Henry Lee and Thelma (Slagle) Martens. He was their first child and only son. He was the first grandchild on both sides of the family, which he said made him "kind of a big deal," and he was pretty spoiled. In August of 1948 he was joined by his younger sister, Judy Lee (Martens) Bartels. The two of them would grow up in a loving,

hard-working ranching family. He spent his early years living at the family ranch, working and hunting. His dad would buy the ranch from his father and move them to the Ammerman place, an old dairy they purchased about five miles east of Upton. James would call this home until they sold that house while Jim was away during Vietnam.

He graduated from Upton High School in 1965 and always talked about how his class was one of the biggest first-grade classes to ever come through Upton, all being baby boomers. In high school he was an average student but excelled in fun and fast cars. His favorite activities were music and track—he always bragged about how fast he was. After high school he attended the University of Wyoming and early on majored in what we will call "trouble." He took a couple of years away from the University to enlist in the Navy, following in his father's footsteps. This would land him in the Vietnam conflict. The Navy had a Wyoming ranch kid—too smart for his own good—that was part hippie. He was trained to be a weatherman near Carmel, California. Eventually deployed to the Gulf of Tonkin, he was on a ship that launched weather balloons and sent data to aid in the war efforts.

After his service, he returned to Laramie and the University of Wyoming. It was there that he met Katharine Dunn, and the couple married in September of 1971 in a very pastel ceremony at the Methodist Church in Laramie. The couple moved to Upton in 1972. Jim worked for Gerald Bullard at Goodwell for a few years. He always talked so fondly of this job. He would tell us, after logging in southeastern Montana, there was more coal there than you can imagine.

During this time in Upton, his two daughters were born. Megan Danielle was born in June of 1975, and Myla Deanne joined her in December of 1976. With two new girls, it was around 1977 he was wooed away by the offer of better money by becoming a coal miner at the newly opened Black Thunder Mine. He started working there in the late '70s and was one of the first locals out there. He even hung the picture of the first crew in the outhouse out at cow camp. It was around this time that James and Kathy divorced. James then married Kathleen (Baker) Turner in 1979. To this union he gained two children that he loved like his own, Jason and Alysha Turner. James and Kathy worked at the coal mine and traveled all over the United States and Canada working as surface mine rescue trainers with good friend Dave Stradly. They were a good team and enjoyed this stage of their lives. James, better known as "Marty Martens" at the mine, stayed at the coal mine for about 35 years. He had many jobs while out there: he was a trainer, crew boss, and eventually became a "safety man," following a leave to battle colon cancer in 1995. He pressed on at the coal mine, eventually retiring in 2002.

Jim and Kathy also started the process of buying the X-Ring Ranch from his dad in the early eighties. He continued to work at Black Thunder, and she was the school nurse, trying to pay it off. It took them 30 years, but through many trials—high interest rates, droughts, long and laborious winters that almost cost him and friend Jimmy Millet their lives—penny pinching, and what we called "doing it on Dad's seven days off," they accomplished that goal around 2010. It was one of their biggest accomplishments. They are delighted to still hold it in the family, and in 2014 the X-Ring Ranch became a Wyoming Centennial Ranch, celebrating being in the Martens family for 100 years. They had done it. Some of Jim's favorite things to do on the ranch were riding and training horses, tinkering in the mule business a time or two, working cows with kids and neighbors, and showing mine friends the cowboy lifestyle. Boy, did he ever embrace this lifestyle.

After retirement from the coal mine, he became enthralled with wind energy. He landed a job with a wind-farm company and helped put up wind farms in Idaho, Texas, and New York. His ranching background helped him become the liaison with the landowners. He was in charge of the roads, fences, rights-of-way, and keeping the landowner happy. He always had a story to tell and was a pretty good "people guy." The family often joked about his embellishments of stories, saying divide any number he told you by half and it was probably more accurate.

Our dad worked hard to provide for us; as kids of a coal miner, we always feared waking him up. He would lecture us about how it was "life or death" out there. We believed him. He was a good dad, but where he truly shined and redeemed himself was as a grandpa, simply "Pa". Somehow, he convinced all of his grandkids that he was the "king" and that they should salute him when they saw him. He also would pay them a buck if they could remember his cell phone number, training them in case of an emergency. He was never short on cash for concessions when he attended their sporting events. He would say, "I'll tell you what, if you get me popcorn, you can get yourself something." That became a common motto in his last few years for grandkids visiting. He would send them to Remy's with a, "If you'll fly, I'll buy." They always took him up on it. He also promised them all kinds of things but delivered on most. He took most of them on a special trip to some of his favorite historical places—mainly Ft. Laramie and the Buffalo Bill Museum. He had collections of all kinds of things—fine things and oddities—to keep our kids in awe for years.

Jim was only 48 when he had his first run-in with cancer. He battled colon cancer bravely and beat it, but he felt it was always lurking at his door. He watched both of his parents and sister succumb to cancer. In the last few months he started giving away these treasures, knowing he was terminal. After battling melanoma two years ago on his neck, it came back in full force. We were finally told, in disbelief, that it was everywhere. Nothing could be done. So we started living more intentionally. Family time became a priority, and conversations became more meaningful and to the heart. We all have so many treasured memories, and we will miss him forever and always. The grandkids will probably feel like they were his favorite at any given time—and some for all time—and they are all right! Things we know he loved: his family—wife, kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids. While in hospice, we would joke about all the other things he loved, in no particular order: hundred-dollar bills, guns, knives, swords, Pendleton coats and blankets, flashy boots, hats, rings, fountain pens, saddles, a good horse, a nice black car, driving fast, playing cards at cow camp, and telling a good story or joke. But most of all, he truly loved his grandkids. They were his redemption, if you will, and he would tell you as much if you asked. He did night by all of them. He made them all feel so special and loved, giving them all nicknames.

Pa didn't do anything plainly, quietly, or with simplicity. To know Jim was to know he was boisterous, extravagant, eccentric, funny, and always had the strangest fashion choices.

The family is especially thankful to those who came and visited him in his last months. He so appreciated the visits, calls, and reconnecting with old classmates, having just celebrated his 60th class reunion. We would also like to thank the caring staff at Weston County Health Services over the last 39 days.

Those left behind are his wife of 48 years, Kathy Martens, and their three special dogs—Bud, the brilliant Barlow, and his loyal and devoted Oddie; his four extra special children: Jason Turner of Upton; Alysha and Ryan Engle of Newcastle; Megan and Malcolm Martens-Haworth of Spokane, Washington; and Myla and Justin Mills of Upton. His passing leaves an emptiness and irreplaceable void for his 14 grandchildren: Bailey (George) Case, Trenton (Lexus) Engle, Triston (Ashten) Roberson, Sawyer (Jacque) Roberson, Nolan Turner, Ethan (Madisen Dale) Mills, Slade (Mercedes Volker) Roberson, Hailey Turner, Taten Engle, Chase Mills, Madelynn Mills, Paige Mills, Olivia Mills, and Elise Haworth; two great-grandchildren, Ledger Roberson and Everett Roberson; and one more on the way. He also leaves Brother-in-law, Don Bartels; and sisters-in-law, Cindy (Jeff) Gardner and Angela "Doc" Baker, and nephews, the "Bartels boys".

He is preceded in death by his parents, Lee and Thelma; his sister, Judy; in-laws, Jim and Fern Baker; and brother-in-law, George Baker.

Please join the family in celebrating his life and sharing stories with the family on Saturday, October 11, at 10:30 a.m. at the Upton Community Center. Following the service, please join us for a luncheon.