

James "JAY" C. Hale Jr.
 Friday, March 17th, 1939 - Thursday, May 30th, 2024

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Bursting onto the scene in 1939 on lucky St. Patrick's Day, James Crafton "Jay" Hale, Jr. in many ways exemplified the mythical leprechaun - incredibly clever with a mischievous streak - and nearly impossible to capture. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas to proud parents Mary Ellen Peters Hale and James C. Hale, young Jay displayed a twinkle in his eye and a sense of adventure that were inextinguishable throughout his life.

A child of Arkansas' largest city, the great outdoors was where Jay actually found his greatest happiness. He was an active and talented Boy Scout who loved to set up camp in the nearby forested areas of the once-wilder Pulaski County, soaking up the sounds and bounty of nature while cultivating lifelong friendships. This appreciation and respect of nature, tirelessly observing and learning about every kind of flora and fauna, was foundational to his worldview, passions and many special alliances later in life.

Jay's curiosity extended into other pursuits at a very young age, evidenced by his unquenchable interest for understanding how things were made and functioned. Gifted with an extraordinarily bright mind, Jay spent countless hours developing an understanding of mechanics - always building, rebuilding, adapting and experimenting. Motorcycles eventually stole his teenage heart, and remained a part of his life even after he had to give up enduro riding and long trips to the mountains.

Following graduation from Little Rock Central High School in 1957, Jay's chosen path to study mechanical engineering was obvious - though his initial choice of colleges was a bit less clear. Told that Texas A&M offered the best engineering program, he headed off to College Station, learning a bit too late that the "M" for "military" came with an expectation that he would have to participate in training drills that were the antithesis of his free-spirited, pacifistic sensibilities. The University of Arkansas in Fayetteville became his college home, where he received bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering and was on a path to earning a doctorate before tiring of theory and deciding it was time to apply his knowledge to actually creating things.

It was in college that Jay's extracurricular learning led him to pursue the fine art of brewing his own beer, a skill that served him well (and the hundreds of others who enjoyed his excellent batches). Having enjoyed hunting with his father, Jay continued this activity while in college. He supplemented his diet with game and developed a love for target shooting and gunsmithing.

Also, while attending the University of Arkansas, Jay met and wooed his intellectual match and lifelong partner in all things, Joyce Elaine Herr. They married November 30, 1963 in Little Rock - and soon after moved to the tiny community of Wallstreet, located in rugged Four Mile Canyon outside of Boulder, Colorado. They managed for a time without electricity or running water before purchasing a small house and shop. Jay's first post-graduate job was with Beech Aircraft in Boulder, where he had the remarkable opportunity to design and develop cryogenic hydrogen tanks for one of the Apollo space missions. He later accepted a position conducting ultrasonic research for Engineering Development of Colorado, and received two patents for improvements in copper mining.

Between professional activities and mountain adventures, Jay earned his pilot's license and purchased a Piper Clipper airplane. Then, despite an undying love for the Rocky Mountains and collection of deep friendships, the time came for Jay and Joyce to pack up and return in 1970 to their beloved Arkansas with their wee toddler daughter, Kelly. Daisy Manufacturing in Rogers, Arkansas offered Jay a position and a new home was established on lushly wooded acreage in nearby Pea Ridge, which the couple affectionally dubbed "Hale Holler."

As a design engineer at Daisy Manufacturing, Jay was given a project to create a gun that could deliver a ball of paint to help foresters mark selected trees at a distance for forest management. In addition to prompting a secondary use of safely labeling livestock with identifying color markers, his successful patent for the company ultimately birthed an entirely unanticipated entertainment subculture of paintball gun enthusiasts - an outcome that somewhat amused and baffled Jay. He never felt the desire to visit a paintball course or shoot a single round at a human target.

Eventually, Jay's wish to embrace a more nonconformist life led him to leave his corporate manufacturing role and "live by his wits." He established Hale Engineering with Joyce, and together they ran a custom machining, design development, prototyping and manufacturing business for more than 30 years. When a neighbor with a helicopter service conceived of a way to trim trees with an airborne saw, Jay joined forces to design a multi-bladed hydraulic device to be flown vertically along power lines to clear away large tree limbs. This innovative method gave birth to a fledgling company, Aerial

Solutions, and Hale Engineering continued to improve and manufacture their equipment. The patented invention is responsible for a highly successful, innovative East Coast operation today.

Jay always found ways to ensure life was not limited to his office or shop, and he was glad to share his energies and skills wherever it could make a difference. He helped form the Pea Ridge Planning Commission, and enjoyed the responsibility enough to serve as its chairman for 30 years. The Pea Ridge Volunteer Fire Department prompted many sleepless nights and emergency calls over multiple decades, but Jay proudly served as assistant fire chief, alongside other treasured members of the community. He was instrumental in helping establish the Highlands Chapter of the Sierra Club of Arkansas, and the priceless reward for his efforts was a group of friends dear enough to call family.

Along the way, Jay embraced his "political era," during which he was successfully elected to two terms as a Justice of the Peace for the Benton County Quorum Court. For him, the joy of the role had very little to do with county budgets and policy – it was the opportunity to perform weddings. He relished the chance to solemnize marriages, and would go to such great lengths in conducting his official capacity according to the wishes of the couple, there was once a fear he might plummet backward off a bluff at the Pea Ridge National Military Park. He did not.

In the 1990s Jay turned his attention to a new passion, sponsoring and mentoring Pea Ridge gifted and talented students through the BEST Robotics program. The spark between Jay and the young people he guided was enormous – and the students not only took a winning robotic design to competition in Texas, they took to heart his belief that even an inexperienced group of small-town kids could achieve great and difficult things.

As much as Jay loved and cultivated his immediate environment, he also pursued a view of a larger world. He was selected to be part of a LeadAR class, a statewide program designed to offer leadership training that would make a local impact. Joining a delegation of other inspired Arkansans, he visited multiple European Common Market countries and Poland. Jay also seized the chance to embark upon science-related travel opportunities, helping to build and set up precision systems to photograph solar eclipses during totality in the nations of Guadeloupe, Syria and Australia.

Jay and Joyce returned to Fayetteville following their retirement, coming back full circle to the town where they first met. Leaving behind the engineering shop he spent decades building didn't mean Jay left his machines, however – he moved them into their new home with plenty of space for his cherished Monarch lathe and a multitude of other specialized machines. There, he enjoyed many creative hours of his newly available free time, even working to build a kit plane in his large garage. When not occupying his days in his downsized shop, Jay poured energy into helping establish the Illinois River Watershed Partnership and became one of its original board members.

Jay piloted his final peaceful flight from this realm on the sunny morning of May 30, 2024. In physical presence only, Jay leaves behind his wife of more than 60 years, Joyce Herr Hale, still by his side at home at the time of his passing; daughter Kelly (Scott) Syer; granddaughter Haley Zega, all of Fayetteville, as well as foreign exchange student daughter Valéria "Lela" Paganí of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is survived by each of his three younger siblings: Ellen Fitzgerald of Little Rock, Arkansas; Nancy (Mike) Liles of Searcy, Arkansas and Charley "Pete" (Leigh) Hale of Longmont, Colorado. He is also survived by multiple nieces and nephews: Jim Gross, Rod Gross, Brook Plumlee Botsch, Isaac Plumlee, Mary Elizabeth Liles McKinley, Benjamin Hale, John Hale, James Hale, Jim Nelson, Teresa Holland Odom, Lisa Holland Hannah and Linda Holland – in addition to a truly remarkable collection of friends gathered, nurtured and fiercely loved over every decade of his life. Jay has made his joyful reunion with his parents who preceded him in death, father James "Jim" Hale and mother Mary Hale of Horseshoe Bend, Arkansas. Without a doubt, he has now been welcomed back into a circle of cherished friends who went before him, reveling in an eternity of fireside storytelling and laughter with his beloved Siberian husky dogs, Suki One and Suki Two, sitting loyally at his knees – all while shaking and passing around one of the huge brown grocery bags of popcorn he would regularly make on the stovetop.

To honor Jay's memory, the family asks that donations be directed to the Illinois River Watershed Partnership, the Sierra Club of Arkansas, the Pea Ridge Volunteer Fire Department, the scholarship fund for the University of Arkansas Mechanical Engineering Department or Circle of Life Hospice. It was said by someone who knew him very well that Jay Hale was unquestionably the smartest person in any room he entered, but the basis of his magic was that he never made anybody else feel that way. He was unfailingly curious, joyous and occasionally impish in a wonderful way usually reserved for energetic little boys. To carry those qualities forward in his honor and memory would be the greatest gift and tribute anyone could offer to Jay and those who loved him.

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Service Details

There are no events scheduled. You can still show your support by sending flowers directly to the family, or planting a memorial tree in memory of James "JAY" C. Hale Jr..



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