

RANDY RIGGS



Randy Riggs, beloved husband and father, a gentle and creative soul who loved well and whose universe of friends ranged from his many acquaintances in the Austin community to his bounty of colleagues in the field of journalism, passed from this life on Thursday, January 19, 2023 in Austin. He was 71.

Randy was a gentleman, born of West Virginia stock and brought to age as a Texan. He saw the good in everything and everyone. He lived by the Golden Rule and was an example to all who knew him to do the same.

His greatest enjoyment came in the adventures he shared with Patti, his wife of 42 years, and their two children, Adam and Katy. Randy was a connoisseur of simple pleasures: car rides in the Hill Country, walks around the neighborhood and time spent at home in the company of family. With Patti packing the checkbook, he obligingly patrolled Austin-area estate sales and perused the wares in antique shops. One of his favorite getaways was Corpus Christi, his second stop in the newspaper trade and the hometown of the former Patti Smith, who, back when disco was king and pet rocks were the thing, changed his life forever.

Randolph James Riggs was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, in 1951 to Helen Lou Scott Riggs and James Frederick Riggs. Randy and his sister, Susie, enjoyed an idyllic upbringing. Both sets of grandparents lived just down the road with numerous other relatives close by. Often, Randy would go with his maternal grandfather, “Poppu,” to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates play baseball. While Randy was still in elementary school, the family moved to Cleburne, where he managed a newspaper route with great reliability and played in the high school band. Along the way, Randy kept a watch on the world of sports and developed a keen interest in writing.

Those interests led to a long and rewarding career in sports journalism. For nearly 36 years, from 1978 to 2013, his stories appeared in the sports pages of the Austin American-Statesman. His objectivity and devotion to his craft put him at the forefront of the state’s sports writers.

Part of the “Watergate” generation of journalists, Randy earned his journalism degree from North Texas State (now the University of North Texas) and immediately went to work for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, first as a court reporter and then as a sports writer. After three years, he moved to Corpus Christi to join the staff of the Caller-Times. There, he teamed with other young writers to significantly enhance the paper’s sports profile. That led to a job offer from the American-Statesman. After a stint covering high-school sports, Randy moved on to other assignments and soon emerged as one of the most diverse writers on the Texas scene.

He handled game stories and features about the Dallas Cowboys, Houston Oilers and San Antonio Spurs. He traveled to Cuba for the Panama Games and to Spain for the 1992 Summer Olympics. But Randy’s calling card was the same as Austin’s – college sports. For years, he worked the University of Texas basketball beat and later took on the UT football assignment. He was a regular at the Texas Relays and was regarded as one of the best track writers in the country. Wherever his writing travels took him, he happily fell into the company of fellow writers and editors eager to resume friendships. For Randy, his job seemed like one continuous homecoming.

And, yet, he never allowed his heart to venture far from the family home in south Austin.

Without complaint, he set aside time for ball games, school assemblies and awards ceremonies. He was the ultimate date for father-daughter dances. He taught Adam and Katy to ride their bikes – and later to drive a car -- in a nearby parking lot at Burger Center. And his sense of humor was irrepressible. On one family car trip, he played a 1960s music hit, “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida,” on the CD player in repeat mode, joking that with just one more exposure to the 17-minute song, Adam and Katy would come to truly appreciate the drum solo. (Which they never did!) One summer, Katy asked her dad to drive her to Minnesota – just so she and a friend could shop at the Mall of America. He obliged.

Randy and Patti first met on a blind date set up by Mary Carter, Patti’s close friend at Mary Carroll High School in Corpus Christi, and Mary’s husband, Al, a Caller-Times sports writer. The date eventually led to a wedding in March, 1980, at Ward Memorial United (now Parker Lane) Methodist Church.

Later, Randy and Patti would become members of Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church, where Randy served as deacon. One of their most cherished experiences occurred in 2018 when they accompanied the Rev. Dr. Leon Bloder, pastor of SHPC, and other church members on a trip to the Holy Land.

Randy’s legacy also resides with a multitude of Austin sports fans, few of whom he ever met. Even in the highly partisan world of college athletics, he was known as a fair and unbiased writer, always capable of presenting the facts in an interesting manner. Often, when someone would recognize him by his name, they would offer a compliment on his writing. But if his readers liked Randy, his editors loved him! He routinely filed crisp, clean copy on the tightest of deadlines. He was the ultimate professional. Athletes, coaches and discreet sources trusted him with even the most confidential information.

Randy was preceded in death by his parents, Helen Lou Scott Riggs and James Frederick Riggs; his sister, Susan Riggs Garrett; parents-in-law Roy and Adele Smith and brother in-law, Roy Smith. He is survived by his wife, Patricia (Patti) Smith Riggs; his son, Adam Phillip Riggs; his daughter, Kathryn (Katy) Leigh Riggs; sisters-in-law Fran Steele (Jack) and Beckie Zientara; sister-in-law Nancy Smith; brother-in-law Joseph Garrett; and numerous nieces and nephews.

The family would like to acknowledge several special people who helped in this journey: Dr. Ashley Stiegler, our MDVIP concierge doctor, and Karla Sanchez, RN, who helped us navigate the health care system and lovingly supported us. Also: Dr. Punit Chadha and Pam McCarthy Garza, APN of Texas Oncology; Dr. Dejka M. Araujo and Dr. Christina Roland, Sarcoma Center doctors at MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston; and Randy’s Hospice Austin team led by Taylor Vernon, RN, a gifted caregiver.

We are grateful for our neighbors and friends who fed us, loved us and prayed for Randy and our family.

A service will be held Saturday, January 28, 2023, at 1 p.m. at Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church, 5226 W. William Cannon Dr., Austin.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be directed to:

Texas Search and Rescue, <https://www.texsar.org/donate/> and

Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church, <https://www.shpc.org/give/>

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Next page: Tribute by Kirk Bohls

Former American-Statesman sports writer Randy Riggs, 71, dies of cancer



Kirk Bohls

Austin American-Statesman

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Former American-Statesman sports writer Randy Riggs, who worked at the newspaper for more than 36 years until his retirement in 2013, died Thursday afternoon at his home in South Austin after a nearly two-year battle with liposarcoma cancer. He was 71.

Riggs was born in Vienna, W.Va., where he lived with his family until his parents moved to Cleburne when he was in elementary school.

He graduated from North Texas State University, now the University of North Texas, with a journalism degree before embarking on a distinguished professional career at the Lubbock Avalanche Journal, the Corpus Christi Caller-Times and the Statesman. Riggs covered a variety of sports, such as Texas Longhorns football, basketball, and track and field; Texas A&M football; the Southwest Conference; and professional sports from the Houston Oilers to the San Antonio Spurs.

Riggs is survived by his wife, Patti Smith Riggs; son, Adam Philli Riggs; daughter, Kathryn "Katy" Leigh Riggs; sisters-in-law, Fran Steele and Beckie Zientara; and brother-in-law, Joseph Garrett.



Randy Riggs worked for 36 years at the American-Statesman as a sports writer until his retirement in 2013. He died Thursday at 71. Alicia Mireles/American-Statesman File

A service will be held at 1 p.m. Jan. 28 at Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church, 5226 W. William Cannon Drive in Austin. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be directed to Texas Search and Rescue (<https://www.texasar.org/donate>) and Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church (<https://www.shpc.org/give>).

<https://www.statesman.com/story/sports/local/2023/01/20/former-statesman-sports-writer-randy-riggs-dies-of-cancer/69826272007/>