

CELEBRATING THE LIFE & MEMORY OF
John Lee Chavis

DATE, TIME & PLACE OF SERVICE
Wednesday, September 11, 2024 - 2:00 P.M.
Riverwood Memorial Gardens
Maumelle, Arkansas

ORDER OF SERVICE

Prelude Music

Obituary Steve Sunwall

Remarks and Memories Carol Meadows

“I Will Rise” Sherry Humphres

Remarks and Scripture Grandson Jack Lanford
Deuteronomy 4:9
Psalm 71: 17-18

Words of Comfort Pastor David O’Brien

Closing Prayer

Postlude Music

FINAL RESTING PLACE
Riverwood Memorial Gardens
Maumelle, Arkansas

MEMORIALS

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to charities that serve the poor, homeless, and underprivileged, which reflected John’s heart.



APPRECIATION

On behalf of the family, we wish to express their gratitude for your many acts of kindness, and for your attendance at the funeral service.

Luginbuel Funeral Home
Prairie Grove, Arkansas
online guest book, visit www.luginbuel.com

Celebrating
THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF



John Lee Chavis

November 18, 1948

September 6, 2024

John Lee Chavis was born on November 18, 1948, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and he went home to walk with his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on September 6, 2024, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Through and through, John was an engineer. HUA! Engineers Carry the Load! He took fashion cues from absolutely no one, he built load-bearing structures without instruction because he could "make it work" with whatever he could find in his parts-laden garage (and work it did!), and he could diagnose and fix any problem over the phone while working with statements (mostly from his daughters) such as, "I cranked it but forgot to flip that switch thingy like you said, and it had fire coming from it—can you fix it?" Yes. Yes, he could.

It is questionable whether John chose engineering, or whether engineering chose him. He had an IQ of 155 in the 6th grade, and the school district offered to send him ahead three grades in mathematics. When his parents, Miller and Annie Mae Chavis, declined the offer, he spent his time disassembling and reassembling engines, circuits, and anything he could find with moving parts—something that he never ceased doing. Indeed, his love of "curb junk," i.e., discarded mechanical items with untapped potential, kept the family running. However, it was understood between Janet and the girls that John was not to be told about a garage sale or "free" items on the curb around the corner.

Before heading to the engineering program at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville fifty-seven years ago, he married his main squeeze, Janet Wilson, who he affectionately called "Juanita." Although they were just kids themselves—John 18, and Janet 16—within four years, they had two kids of their own, both daughters: Lori Ellen and Leah Beth. While raising babies, John graduated with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering, and the family moved to Washington D.C., where John began working for the Department of the Navy as a civilian engineer, designing electrical systems for naval ships. Sometime later, he and Janet moved the family to Ft. Walton Beach, Florida, where John began working for the Department of the Air Force at Eglin Air Force Base. This is where John's love of engineering paved the way to a robust and life-long career as an engineer with the Air Force. Then, while the girls were still small, John transitioned to the Little Rock Air Force Base where he planted the roots of his career.

At the air base, he spent three years as a Programmer for the 314 Civil Engineers before becoming the Chief Electrical Depot Engineer of the Titan II Missile complex, Strategic Missile Division. He was the youngest missile engineer in the Missile Division. During the famous Damascus Titan II Missile Crisis of 1980, at just 31 years old, John was one of the few engineers summoned to the site as well as the control center, where he and the others worked all night to contain a fuel leak in the silo before it ignited, threatening the Titan II missile that carried a nuclear warhead. At 3:00 a.m., the silo exploded, and John walked through the door of his house in the wee hours of the morning

with tears in his eyes, and said to Janet, "we lost it."

After the missile program ceased operations shortly thereafter, John remained at the Little Rock Air Force Base, taking a position as the Chief of Engineering, Contracts, Design, and Construction Management in the 314 Combat Engineers Squadron. In 2004, he was promoted to Deputy Commander/Deputy Base Civil Engineer, where he led and directed 1,860 military and civilian personnel in six squadrons at strategic levels, and had senior oversight at the squadron commander level for the Base Civil Engineer Squadron, Base Contracting Squadron, Base Logistics Squadron, and general executive program management. He proudly served the Department of Defense until his retirement in 2013.

After retiring, he continued to work as a government consultant, but his primary role was that of "Pawpaw" to his two grands, Jack (14) and Harper (11). John waited (im)patiently at the hospital for Jack's birth, and from the moment of Jack's arrival in 2010, and then Harper's two years later, John and his grands were inseparable. From week one, he and Janet kept a crib, swing, playpen, and all of the items necessary to tend to the grands so their parents could catch up on work and sleep. John treated Jack and Harper as if they were his own, changing diapers and bottle feeding, getting up during the night and stumbling to the kitchen for more milk, scratching backs in bed at night, and giving up all but 10 inches of space so that the grands could sleep between him and Janet. Over the years, cribs and bottles morphed into trucks, mud pits, blow-up unicorn pools, drivable Barbie Jeeps, boosts up high to see the eggs in the yearly bird nest, throwing flowers into the backyard fountain, morning "pancakes" (French Toast we still refer to as Pawpaw's pancakes), Xboxes, forts, trips to Chuck E. Cheese and the beach, shooting guns at the range, and geometry tutoring. In fact, just hours before John suffered the stroke that placed him in the hospital, he sent a text to Jack asking for the daily geometry homework. John wanted nothing more than for Jack and Harper to succeed, and to be a part of that success.

Like most grandparents, John had his own ideas about the parenting rules—handing out Oreos and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups at dinner, and slipping phones connected to YouTube and games under the dinner table or in the bed late at night. He loved the kids fiercely, and wanted to spend his days with them. After the grands moved to Fayetteville in 2022, he and Janet soon followed, moving permanently in the fall of the same year. During his two years there, he was at every school play, every birthday, and every event, including Jack's regatta in Kansas City. He spent many trips running the kids to and from school or to youth group on Wednesday night, buying drive-thru dinners and shakes, and sitting for hours at the homework table—all while feeding the kids Oreos and Fruit Gushers right before sending them home for dinner. When they weren't at his house, he would text them, usually in the "Family Entertainment" texting group, to tell them a corny joke, to share a scripture, or to ask them about their day. John's family started a tradition several years ago, ending texts

with "love you, proud of you." John never failed to say those five words to Jack and Harper, or to all of us in Family Entertainment.

Proverbs 13 tells us that a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children. Jack and Harper are blessed by the inheritance he has left to them—to all of us: the example and memory of a man who loved selflessly, gave generously, and served quietly. We don't know why John could not live to see Jack and Harper grow up, or to spend ten or fifteen more years being the girls' daddy, or the consummate partner to Janet that he had been for 57 years. But we know that death is not the end of the story for those who know the Lord, and we find peace and comfort in John's relationship with the Lord.

John also had peace in the days before his death, even during the chaos and physical deficits that the stroke brought. In fact, in what can only be described as an hour of divine clarity, in the midst of all the mental confusion that came on Tuesday night, John told Janet that he knew God was calling him home to live with the Lord. He was calm, clear, and spoke to Janet as if they were planning their Wednesday. He was able to ask Janet if there was anything they needed to discuss, and to tell her that while her life would change with him gone, she would be okay, and that he was ready to walk with the Lord. He added that he had work to do in Heaven. Perhaps John knew even two weeks ago, when he made his last Facebook post from Northwest Church, his Sunday morning happy place where he was with Janet. His post contained the lyrics of Living Hope by Phil Wickham. John's post read: "Hallelujah Hallelujah praise the One who set me free; Death has lost its grip on me; Hallelujah Hallelujah; Jesus rose in victory; He's alive, alive in me!!" Jesus certainly was alive in John, and we look forward to the day that we will reunite with him again. But for now, John's work here is finished.

To our Honey, Daddy, and Pawpaw, thank you for the legacy you leave with us. Love you, proud of you.

Left to cherish John's memory are his wife of 57 years, Janet Wilson Chavis; two daughters, Lori Lorenzino (Jon) of Springfield, Missouri, and Leah Lanford (special friend, Beau Brown) of Farmington, Arkansas; two grands, John "Jack" Dean Lanford (14) and Eliza "Harper" Lanford (11) of Farmington, Arkansas; two sisters, Judy Chavis and Sherry Thompson of Benton, Arkansas; special church friends of 45 years, Stan (recently deceased) and Rose Hicks, Steve and Linda Sunwall, Tommy and Ann Evants, Thom and Polly Walker, Roy Picket and special friend Betty McKnight, Sherry Humphres, and Nick and Shelba Avants; special friends of the last few years, Duane and Linda Edwards; and many special nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Miller and Annie Mae Chavis of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and one sister, Peggy Brandon of Redfield, Arkansas.