

Billy Joe James Obituary (from Ebensberger Fischer Funeral Home web page)

Billy Joe James was born April 21, 1941, in Lockett, Texas, the youngest of nine children born to Alfred L. and Ethel James and passed away January 28, 2026, in Wichita Falls, Texas. Most recently of Bowie, Texas, he was raised in Lockett where he learned the enduring values of faith, hard work, and perseverance that would guide his entire life. He spent significant portions of his life in Denton, Shoreacres, and Kendalia, Texas. He passed away surrounded by the love of his family and faith.

He is survived by his devoted wife of 61 years, Jane Sparks James; his three children, Sondra Torzewski and husband Damian, Marci Benavidez and husband Marcelo "Ben", and Billy James and wife Karen; along with five grandchildren Michael (Megan) Torzewski, Sarah (Oliver Brooks), Jami (Josh) Slanina, Will (Kaylee), Kendall James and five great-grandchildren Bradley, Connor, Charlotte, Suzi, and Callen, all of whom were a source of great joy and pride in his life. He was preceded in death by his parents, his eight siblings, and one beloved grandson.

Growing up with limited means, Billy spent long days picking cotton in the fields of North Texas. He often said that the hardship of that work shaped his character, teaching him perseverance and motivating him to pursue business and entrepreneurship so that he could build a better life for his family.

He graduated from Lockett High School, where he excelled in sports. At only sixteen years old, he was entrusted by the local school board to drive a school bus, an early reflection of the responsibility and leadership that would mark his life.

He proudly served his country in the United States Army following the Korean Conflict and later rose to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the U.S. National Guard. As a young man, he became active in the Methodist Church, where he accepted Christ as his Savior and considered entering the ministry.

Gifted in both mind and hands, he excelled in woodworking, construction, electronics, hydraulics, business, and stock trading. He attended the University of North Texas under the G.I. Bill, pursuing a business degree. His professional life included holding a real estate license, stock trading, and founding several successful business enterprises, including an office cleaning company and an injection-molding company that became one of the largest in Houston. He later retired into the ranching life he loved.

His dedication to service extended beyond business into civic leadership. He served as an alderman for the City of Shoreacres and was later elected Mayor, where he led major improvements including building roads, repairing vital water systems, and overseeing the construction of a new city hall and police department. Even after leaving office, he continued to serve, building Little League fencing and backstops, donating automated defibrillators to the local fire department, and sponsoring community events.

Those who knew him will remember him as a man with the heart of a teacher; patient, thoughtful, and committed to passing knowledge to the next generation. Whether teaching construction, ranching, business, or civic responsibility, he believed deeply in helping others grow, providing opportunities, and encouraging stewardship.

Though deeply missed, his family finds peace in knowing that he lived fully engaged, not as a spectator, but as one who ran his race faithfully. In his office hung Theodore Roosevelt's "Man in the Arena" speech, a daily reminder that what mattered most was not criticism from the sidelines but the courage to step forward, strive, fail, and try again. In that spirit, he lived boldly, with purpose, and has now gone home to be with his Lord and Savior, whom he loved and served throughout his life.