



John R. Ackerman

November 24, 1940 - April 8, 2025

John R. Ackerman, 84, died in the early morning hours of April 8, 2025, at his home in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas after a hard-fought battle with cancer.

John was born on November 24, 1940, to Henry and Pauline (Kramer) Ackerman in a farmhouse east of Decatur, Arkansas. He spent his childhood years milking cows, herding goats, riding horses, and making mischief with his eight siblings on the family farm.

In 1958, John joined the US Navy. He served aboard the USS San Marcos supporting the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and was honorably discharged as a Boilerman's Technician, Second Class.

Back home in Arkansas, John found work with the Army Corps of Engineers surveying land east of Rogers for the Beaver Lake Dam project.

His next chapter began with signing on as a lineman with the Rock Island Railroad, leading to a 20+ years career maintaining communication lines and crisscrossing the Midwest.

While working in Norton, Kansas, he met his first wife, Marilyn Lesh, and together they raised three children: Lisa, Mandy, and John. As a father, he taught his children the value of hard work and honesty. He involved the kids in

his side gig breaking and trading horses, and took the family on an epic journey on the 1976 Bicentennial Wagon Train.

After weathering some difficult life challenges, including a divorce, John returned to Arkansas. He met Tonia Heston, the woman who would become his best friend, life partner, and wife. Together for 37 years, they raised Aaron (Tonia's son), ran a cattle farm, and took care of each other and Tonia's mother, Anna Marie ("Grandma") Heston. They opened their hearts and home to many family and friends through the years, drinking coffee with the neighbors, taking in young people who needed a place to stay, reminiscing about the old days, and making new memories.

John will be remembered as a great storyteller, a generous friend, a thoughtful neighbor, a winning little league coach, and above all, a real cowboy. He will truly be missed.

John was preceded in death by his parents Henry and Pauline Ackerman; mother-in-law Anna Marie Heston; daughter Mary Lisa Smith; and siblings Mary Tipton, Elaine Tillman, Rolla Ackerman, Irene Owens, Edward Ackerman, Wayne Ackerman, and Buddy Ackerman.

John leaves behind his loving wife, Tonia Ackerman; children Mandy Ackerman, John Ackerman (Rachel), Heather Edmondson (Roy), and Aaron Stewart (Ashley); sisters, Frances Milliken and Catherine Pettus (Glenn); and many loving grandchildren, cousins, nieces, nephews, friends, and neighbors to remember his charms, witticisms, and unmatched stubbornness.

There will be no services at this time.