



James Owen Stanley Baughn

December 30, 1980 - December 6, 2020

James Baughn was born Dec. 30, 1980 in Sacramento, California, the son of an Air Force officer and home maker mother. He grew up around the world - and loved living wherever his family was, which, above all, was Cape Girardeau County. An accomplished computer programmer, he was offered jobs at some of the top tech companies in the world, but preferred to stay in Cape Girardeau and Jackson to be in charge of his own projects and pursue his own interests, while staying close to family. His job, nominally, was webmaster for Rust Communications, where he created an architecture of websites and mobile systems for more than 40 newspapers in 8 states, including the Southeast Missourian. But his interests and influence were much greater.

James was a fixture at Cape Girardeau history events, especially at the Red House and Cape Girardeau County History Center, initially helping his mother, father and grandmother, who were docents, before taking leadership on his own. He wrote a popular blog about local history for semissourian.com and was known as a resource to his colleagues about odd facts of Cape Girardeau's past. At the time of his death, Baughn was vice-president of the Cape County Historical Society and a board member of Missouri Preservation, a state organization that advocates for preserving historic architecture and landmarks in Missouri.

James was recognized throughout the United States as one of the leading experts on historic and notable bridges, particularly through his website, bridgehunter.com, which he created to chronicle and potentially rehabilitate historic bridges. Initially founded as a way for him to record interesting bridges he came across while traveling the area to find good hikes, the website has grown to include photos of more than 7,000 bridges, submitted by several hundred contributing editors from around the United States. The site integrates data from the Federal Highway Administration's list of every bridge in the country, making it one of the most comprehensive bridge data sites in the world and an important resource for government officials and others in prioritizing structures for the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, private developers have used the site as background in finding bridges for "re-use," which is a federal program where historic bridges scheduled for demolition are made available free of charge to those who can use them elsewhere. James organized periodic conferences about bridge history, which drew attendees from

multiple states, and led to the direct saving of several bridges.

An interest in bridges and history converged with James' love of hiking. There was rarely a weekend he did not travel to discover and chronicle a hike, which he used as material for his semissourian.com blog, "Pavement ends." Even if the place was somewhere he'd visited before, he looked for changes in water flow, rock formation or vegetation, turning even frequent favorites into something new. He was always curious - and open to others - about what he saw. Helping others to plan their hikes was part of his good nature.

Indeed, helping others is what James was known for in whatever he did, not least via his computer programming. James joined Rust Communications in 2000, even before he graduated from Southeast Missouri State University with a computer science degree in 2002, and quickly rose to lead its Internet efforts. Using open source code, he built platforms that were noteworthy for their speed and eloquence. He was involved in the launch of several of the Associated Press's most important technology projects in the past 15 years, and was a frequent collaborator with Google, most recently on its Jigsaw Perspective API project, Google News Initiative Digital Subscriptions project and News Consumer Insights Designer Playbook. In 2020, his work with the Southeast Missourian was a finalist for a Digiday Award, one of the world's most prestigious tech competitions. Throughout, James also had the patience and good nature to explain the simplest of directions to anyone who needed support.

James was famous for having the ability to listen to a problem - computer-related or not - and determine a solution without needing much guidance. He also anticipated problems before they happened and constantly sought to improve everything around him. He had a tremendous sense of perspective and an absolutely pleasant demeanor in all that he did. All those who worked with him loved and respected him.

James was also a huge fan of the St. Louis Cardinals, and it was among his joys to attend games with family. He is survived by his father Stan, mother Debra both of Jackson, and grandmother Faye Schreiner of Pevely, Missouri. He was an only child.

James died Sunday afternoon, Dec. 6, 2020, while doing one of the things he most loved, hiking a trail in Cape Girardeau County.

A Celebration of Life will be held Sunday, June 6, 2021 at Bollinger Mill State Park in Burfordsville, Missouri. Picnic starting at 1:00 pm with a memorial service starting at 2:00 pm with the Rev. Dr. Frank Passamonte officiating. Please bring a lawn chair..

Memorial contributions may be given to The Red House Interpretive Center, c/o Cape Girardeau Parks and Rec, 410 Kiwanis Dr., Cape Girardeau, MO 63701 or Cape County Historical Society, 102 S. High St., Jackson, MO 63755.

Online condolences may be shared at <http://www.fordandsonsfuneralhome.com>.

Comments



“ Bridgehunter has brought me so much joy - connecting with others who share the same niche interest and learning about bridges around the country. I'm so sad to hear of this great loss. James touched so many lives and I wish his family and friends comfort and love. - Claire, WA state

Claire - July 01 at 06:54 PM



“ My young cousin, who went on to be a civil engineer got me involved on Bridgehunter. I thought James was a wonderful man who encouraged my young cousin and I really thought a lot of him for it.
James is singing with the angels now, and probably taking pictures too.
He is greatly missed.
C Conkle Omaha, Illinois.



C Conkle - February 07 at 02:08 AM



“ I am sorry for the loss . May he rest in peace !



Amy Davis Davidson - January 23 at 02:33 PM



“ Stan and Debra. You are both in my thoughts and prayers. I am so very sorry for the loss of Stan. He was a wonderful young man.

Lisa Helms

Lisa Helms - January 04 at 06:05 PM



“ I vividly remember Deb being pregnant with Little Stan while we were next door neighbors at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, and having a baby shower in his honor. It was so hard to be away from family, so we made our own “family” on the base. What a wonderful time in our lives, being young moms and dads together while watching our children grow. We built memories to last a lifetime raising our children together in Sacramento, and again years later in Spokane.

I remember Stan as being intelligent, shy, and studious, even as a little guy. He loved your dog, Winston, and playing legos with Shawn. Although we haven't seen you in years, I'm sure our children remember having fun playing with Little Stan (when did he become all grown up and change his name to James?). They have fond memories of our years together in Spokane. They will be devastated to hear of his passing.

I wish I could be there to hug you, cry with you, pray with you, scream at God with you, whatever you need to do to get through this time of anguish and grief. It's awful being so far away from people we care for, especially at a time like this.

Please know you are in our thoughts and prayers as you grieve.

Fondly, Pam and Dirk

Pam Reith - December 27, 2020 at 03:31 PM



“ Deb and Stan.

I'm heartbroken by your devastating letter. I know I haven't seen you and Young Stan since you left England in the 1980s but because of our continuing contact you have always been close to my heart. I will never understand the loss you are feeling at this time. My thoughts and prayers are with you now and will continue in the future. My love to you both.xx

Gillian Rawlins. Chelveston and Rushden. England.

Gillian Rawlins - December 24, 2020 at 10:05 AM



“ James was one of the kindest people I have ever met, and I enjoyed so much getting to talk about traveling and other places with him. He is greatly missed at our office; his kindness and care in both his presence and absence makes us all better people, more attuned to each other and each others' needs. Thank you--I am grateful.
--Mia Pohlman

Mia Pohlman - December 14, 2020 at 11:03 AM



“ James and I were classmates at Jackson High School, where I fondly recall the classes we shared together--his warm smile, obvious brilliance, and utter humility. His prodigious mind was matched only by his kind heart. What a rare gift! After I moved away from the area, I cheered his work from a distance, so happy to know that he was using his gifts and abilities so fully in the service to the local community and beyond. My deepest sympathies to his parents and grandmother, as well as his friends, coworkers, and the wider community. May you find a measure of solace knowing that his good work and generous spirit will continue to touch many. Peace be with him and you.

Lynn Casteel Harper

Lynn Casteel Harper - December 13, 2020 at 09:48 PM



“ I have known “Little Stan” for many years and I am truly heartbroken by the news of his sudden and tragic passing. My heart and love goes out “across” the pond” to my dear friends Deb & Big Stan. How I wish I had one of Little Stans’ bridges so I could be closer to you at this sad time. Our deepest condolences to you and the family. Rest in peace “Little Stan”.
Kim & Valerie Holland, England

Kim Holland - December 13, 2020 at 03:49 PM



“ I know of James because of his website Bridgehunters which I use all the time. It sounds like James and I have so much in common, specifically sharing a love for Bridges and Hiking. He has gone too soon, my thoughts are with his family and loved ones.

Neil Ferguson - December 13, 2020 at 12:41 PM



“ James was my student many years ago at Jackson High. He had a wonderful wit, superior descriptive writing skills, and a pure exuberance for life. It sounds like he did much to build upon his wonderful attributes and skills during his lifetime, and I'm deeply saddened to hear about his passing. My condolences to his dear family and friends: peace and God bless.

Tracy (Fisher) Bouslog

Tracy Fisher Bouslog - December 11, 2020 at 09:38 PM



“ James was my mentor in the web world. If I called with a "nerd" question no matter how many times before, he would still be patient and tell me the answer again. Most of our conversations started as web related and ended with him giving me a history lesson! I will miss you James and my condolences to your family. Thank you for all you did in this world and hope to see you in the next!

Joy Martinez

Mountain Home News, Idaho

Joy Martinez - December 10, 2020 at 04:41 PM



“ I did not know James; I wish I did. I use the Bridgehunter site all the time; most recently for a “tour” of many of the noted bridges. Invaluable, as I'm sure he was.

Peter Chase - December 10, 2020 at 12:48 PM



“ James and I shared passions for web design and bridges, and I always had a great time visiting bridges with him during the Historic Bridge Weekends. I loved his laugh we always had a good time laughing together on the bridge trips. My heart goes out to his parents, I have fond memories of being welcomed into their home to spend the night on one of my bridge trips. I was always struck by how friendly and outgoing James was, he always had a smile on his face. James truly changed the world of historic bridges through the creation of BridgeHunter.com, no other country in the world has such a complete and accurate listing of all historic bridges within its borders.



Nathan Holth - December 10, 2020 at 12:07 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Fred Lynch - December 09, 2020 at 08:44 PM



“ James loved sharing his knowledge with others. Here he presents a photography show, "Nature Exploration," on Sept. 20, 2017 at the TBY Active Living Expo in the Isle Casino Cape Girardeau Event Center. (Fred Lynch//Southeast Missourian)

Fred Lynch - December 09, 2020 at 08:49 PM



“ As part of the BridgeHunter community I am shocked and saddened. James created a gathering place for people with a passion for bridges and exploring, and a resource unlike any other for ordinary folks seeking information on a bridge remembered from childhood or wanting to know about one they have seen recently. The community he created will long remember him. I have lost a friend.

cvance - December 09, 2020 at 07:30 PM



“ I have known Stan since he was a little kid. No matter how old he got I still kLittle Stan. I'm just absolutely lost for words. By heart breaks for his family. I love them and they have always been such good people and family to me. I will never forget Little Stan coming to my fish fry's and enjoying them so much. I thank God for what time we did have with him. He was always so smart especially on the computers. Gonna miss him dearly and I pray for strength for his family.

Shannan Pogue - December 09, 2020 at 04:36 PM



“ I still remember "young Stan" always working with computers as a kid. We are so sorry to hear of his passing! We are praying for you, Deb & Stan, at this time. Our love to you, Leslie & Jim Murphy

Leslie Murphy - December 09, 2020 at 12:06 PM



“ I'm so sorry to learn of your loss. I'm praying that God provides the peace, comfort, and understanding at this difficult time.

Ken Pemberton, Jr.

Kenneth C Pemberton Jr - December 09, 2020 at 09:17 AM



“ I knew James for almost 20 years, from the start of his bridge website until I met him in person in 2010. He was a walking librarian when it came to bridges but he also a very helpful person. Herd to believe that he is gone, especially just days after I wrote about him in the Bridgehunter's Chronicles. I have a personal eulogy for him here: An Eulogy remembering James Baughn:
<https://bridgehunterschronicles.wordpress.com/2020/12/09/remember-james-baughn-webmaster-at-bridgehunter-com/>

My love and support to his family, friends and colleagues who knew him through the years. He will be missed by many in the bridgehunting community.

Jason Smith
Glauchau (Saxony), Germany



Jason Smith - December 09, 2020 at 09:15 AM



“ We were stunned to hear this tragic news - our condolences to James's parents. I worked with James for a short time, but my husband and I remained friends with him over the years after we moved away from Cape, and we were happy to be able to visit with him several times since.
He was generous with a helping hand when I first started working at the newspaper, and as I got to know him better, was most impressed by his remarkable knowledge and capabilities. I always enjoyed a conversation with him, and came to value his friendship greatly.
I am sure all of us who knew him feel the greatest esteem for all his achievements and contributions to his many areas of interest. Most of all, he will be remembered as a good friend, and a kind and generous human being, and he will be missed.

Lisha and Lalith Jayasinghe

Lisha Jayasinghe - December 08, 2020 at 08:27 PM



“ I only knew James through his bridgehunter website and I am stunned to hear of his passing. My heart is heavy with the knowledge and send sympathy and condolences to his family. He is known nationally by his historic preservation efforts and he will truly be missed.

Sincerely,
Art Suckewer”

Art Suckewer - December 08, 2020 at 07:43 PM



“ James and I have been acquaintances and work colleagues for the entire time he has worked for Rust Communications having only started myself a couple of years prior to him at the Southeast Missourian. It's hard to imagine he is no longer going to be only a phone call, e-mail or message away when a question comes up regarding one of the newspaper's websites we worked with. He truly was a guru of all things internet related and always so willing to help solve any issues we came across. My thoughts, prayers and condolences go out his family. James will certainly be missed and always remembered.

Todd Nolen - December 08, 2020 at 06:14 PM



“ Hike on forever

joe horn - December 08, 2020 at 07:01 PM



“ My condolences to the Baughn family. I worked with James for many years. He sat right behind me for many of those years. We were "pod partners" with his many St. Louis Cardinal Bobble Heads he had collected over the years. James always made time to help you out with anything you needed. He will be missed.

Greg Dowdy - December 08, 2020 at 05:13 PM



“ One of my best finds when I moved here in 2000 was Jeff's "When Pavement Ends". It taught me so much about this area of the US. Truly, this is a soul who will be missed.

Marlene cloude - December 08, 2020 at 04:55 PM



“ James sent me down many, many rabbit holes with his databases of bridges and landmarks. I would go there to search for one thing, then realize that I had been online for an hour.

For such a young man, he had an old man's love and knowledge of the area's history. It's going to be hard, if not impossible, to grow another James to fill the void.

Ken Steinhoff - December 08, 2020 at 04:41 PM



“ I loved his stories of hiking various trails throughout the area.. His ability to share the story made you feel like you were on the trail with him. Good good person and very talented writer..

Jim Litzelfelner - December 08, 2020 at 03:39 PM



“ Our community has lost an advocate, a kind and generous person who was always happy to share what he knew. He helped me with a question I had on a historic home we renovated, graciously and happily, for the pure love of local history. He had such a heart for our area.

Stacy Dohogne Lane - December 08, 2020 at 03:23 PM



“ Lisa Boswell lit a candle in memory of James Owen Stanley Baughn



Lisa Boswell - December 08, 2020 at 03:17 PM



“ My condolences to James' family, on his untimely passing. He never met a stranger and was always so professional & friendly on assignments, etc. He will be missed.

Lisa Boswell - December 08, 2020 at 03:20 PM



“ What a tragedy to lose James. He was an outstanding resource for all of us interested in local and regional history. It will be hard for anyone to fill his shoes. He was a splendid fellow and was indeed a blessing to our community. Condolences to his fine family.
Stephen N. Limbaugh, Jr.

Stephen N. Limbaugh, Jr. - December 08, 2020 at 03:15 PM



“ Stan and Deb I was stunned and greatly saddened to hear this terrible news . Please know our thoughts and prayers are with you. He will be greatly missed on so many fronts. What an amazing guy with so much knowledge and love of life and fellow mankind. I for one will never forget him and the pleasure I enjoyed when working with him. May he go rest high on the Lord's mountain his work here on earth is done.
Don and Carol Koehler

Don Koehler - December 09, 2020 at 12:09 PM



“ I am at a complete loss at such a sudden and tragic event. My deepest condolences to my friends Stan and Deb. James' passing leaves a big gap in the ranks of those who love local history, but he will live on in his writings and the hearts of those who knew him.

Bill Eddleman - December 08, 2020 at 03:09 PM