



## Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr.

October 26, 1942 - September 17, 2023

Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr, also known as "Digger," age 80, died suddenly on Sunday, September 17, 2023 at home in Saline, MI. He was born on October 26, 1942, to Willard "Bud" and Agnes (Gregor) Robison of Perrysburg, OH. As a young boy, he had a lot of energy to burn, and preferred being outdoors to sitting at a desk. As a teenager, he combined these traits running with the track and field team, playing golf and tennis, and going fly-fishing.

Jim also became a skilled drummer, joining the million sellers Rock and Roll Hall of Fame band "Johnny and the Hurricanes." He graduated from Rossford High School in 1960 and stayed with the Hurricanes, touring "hot spots" in the US, the UK and Germany. In 1962, the band headlined at the Star Club in Hamburg where the Beatles were their opening act. Back in the US, the Hurricanes played backup instrumentals for artists including Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Del Shannon, Bobby Darin, Bill Haley and the Comets, and The Big Bopper. For two years, Jim also toured with Dick Clark Productions and American Bandstand.

Eventually, he left the band and shifted his focus to academics, attending Bowling Green University, Ohio University, and graduating from Toledo University with a B.S. degree. As an undergrad, Jim worked part time for a local funeral home, where his interest in mortuary science was inspired. But the call of the outdoors was still strong, so he began graduate courses in

landscape architecture at the University of Michigan.

Ultimately, Jim decided his science skills would be a better fit in the mortuary field, and landscaping became his avocation. He graduated with high honors from Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science (CCMS) in 1970, then became a licensed funeral director in MI. Jim joined the staff of Muehlig Chapel in Ann Arbor, beginning a career of more than 50 years as a funeral director.

Overlapping his studies, he served in the US Air Force 180th Tactical Group from 1966-1972.

In August 1976, he met Alison Reed, a public school teacher and musical theater actress. A whirlwind courtship ensued, and they were married in her parents' home on December 11th. Both enjoyed traveling, making frequent trips north to the Homestead in Glen Arbor, theater weekends in Stratford, Ontario, and to the Caribbean. These continued after starting a family. Their son Stephen was born in 1979 and daughter Emily in 1982. In April 1983, Jim, Alison, and their children took a leap of faith together and moved to Saline, in anticipation of becoming the next owners of BahnMiller Funeral Home.

Eight months later, the Bahnmillers closed on the sale of the business, and the Robison-BahnMiller Funeral Home was born. Jim did not come to Saline, solely to be in business. He came to serve this community. He and Alison assimilated themselves into the fabric of life here. Jim's delight was in new friendships, learning the history of his family's new hometown, exceeding people's expectations and earning people's trust by the way he worked. He had the uncanny ability to remember who was related to whom, where they lived and where all their family members were buried. He could name generations of a family tree, yet he struggled to recall what he had eaten for breakfast! Jim wanted to get to know you and your stories. He was an expert storyteller, himself. Most of his were true, some were slightly exaggerated, and some are still pending peer review. Humor was both his shield and sword. Jim was a tireless perfectionist and meticulous about detail in every service he

conducted, but without arrogance. He needed to balance long hours plus an unpredictable schedule plus emotionally charged work, with recreation . . . and even a bit of mischief. Away from work and community, Jim pursued a number of interests he relished. Doting on his two Boxers, Burton and Max - we have it on good authority Jim's got his arms around them both. Collecting and driving fine sports cars. Designing, planting and caring for beautiful landscapes. Sailing with his own "Rat Pack." Savoring a fine cigar. Feeding 'his' birds. Grilling lamb chops and filets. And always at a beach. When Jim was invited to play congas with local musicians at beach bars on Tortola, the singing and dancing ramped up. But at the end of the day, he needed the calm and peace of watching the sunset.

In the past 10 years, Jim experienced a new dimension of joy, the births of his grandchildren. Never were his eyes filled with more light nor did he have more spontaneous energy in his voice than when he saw them. They named him "PopPop." Jim claimed the name with his whole heart.

Jim is survived by his wife and their children Stephen (Jamie) Robison of Saline, Emily (Kyle) Travis of Ada, MI, four grandchildren, Lukas John and Ruby Ann Robison, and Madison Agnes and Keegan David Travis, sister-in-law Mollie (the late brother Denis), of Dexter, nephews Michael (Kiersten) Robison of Clinton Twp, Todd Robison of Belleville, niece Kelly (Kevin) English of Grosse Pointe Farms, MI, and a host of Alison's nieces and nephews who knew their "Uncle Jim" as generous and highly entertaining. Jim was preceded in death by his parents, brother Dr Denis Robison, cherished friends Rob Merchant, Frank Jarosi, and Ron Andryc, and his irreplaceable pets Burton and Max.

Jim was a member of Bethel United of Christ in Manchester, MI. All friends are invited to gather on Monday, September 25, 2023 from 2:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

at the Robison-Bahnmler Funeral Home in Saline. Visitation will continue at Bethel United Church of Christ in Manchester, MI on Tuesday, September 26 from 10:00 A.M. until the time of Funeral Service at 11:00 A.M. Pastor David Bucholtz will officiate. A luncheon will be held at the Church following the service. Burial will take place privately at a later date in Oakwood Cemetery in Saline, MI. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions in his name may be made to the Leelanau Conservancy or to Saline Area Social Service, and envelopes will be available at the funeral home and Church. To view a full obituary, to leave a memory you have of Jim, or for directions please visit [www.rbfhsaline.com](http://www.rbfhsaline.com).

# Cemetery Details

## Oakwood Cemetery

227 West Michigan Ave  
Saline, MI 48176

# Previous Events

## Visitation

SEP **25.** 2:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Robison-Bahnmler Funeral Home & Cremation Services  
301 E Michigan Ave  
Saline, MI 48176  
(734) 429-9760  
rbfhsaline@hotmail.com  
<https://www.rbfhsaline.com>

## Visitation

SEP **26.** 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Bethel United Church of Christ  
10425 Bethel Church Rd.  
Manchester, MI 48158  
<http://www.bethelonthehill.org/ContactUs/tabid/62104/Default.aspx>

## Funeral Service

SEP 26. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Bethel United Church of Christ

10425 Bethel Church Rd.

Manchester, MI 48158

<http://www.bethelonthehill.org/ContactUs/tabid/62104/Default.aspx>

## Luncheon

SEP 26. 12:15 PM (ET)

Bethel United Church of Christ

10425 Bethel Church Rd.

Manchester, MI 48158

<http://www.bethelonthehill.org/ContactUs/tabid/62104/Default.aspx>

# Tribute Wall

SR

“ Jim would frequently shop at the CVS Saline store and I would ring up his purchases. He was always friendly and courteous to me and he would know just about anyone in line. I loved reading his obituary and finding about his great life. My prayers go out to his family and friends. Shari Regner

Shari G Regner - November 11, 2023 at 05:32 PM



“ Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr.

October 23, 2023 at 01:07 PM

JM

“ Willard was always very kind and comforting to my family, and so many others throughout his many years of service to the community.

*My brother Rob (Rubble) Merchant and Willard would sail the high seas of the Caribbean taking raids on poor unsuspecting native Island populations and landlubbers alike.*

*I can neither confirm nor denied rummers the boys would fire the captain after the first day, leaving nothing but a wake of merriment and laughter behind!!!*

*When brother Rob passed, it was decided by family members I would perform the 60 's Byrds compositions, "Turn, Turn, Turn" at which time I rounded "Me old band mates" and Jim played the drums without a rehearsal.*

*Along with his many talents, he was a fine and accomplished musician.*

*"Long My You Run' Neil Young  
James (Wheel) Merchant*

James Merchant - September 25, 2023 at 09:33 PM

HW

“ *Sharing in your sorrow and remembering many happy times dear cousins.*

*Love to each of you, Helen*

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**Helen Worthen** - September 25, 2023 at 06:52 PM

RD

“ *I'm so sorry to hear about the passing of Jim. He was a great asset to the Saline community and he will be missed.*

*It was so nice to see him in March 2022 when he stopped to offer kind words to me for the loss of my Wife*

*My sincere condolences to his family.*

*Bob Dietrich*

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**Robert Dietrich** - September 25, 2023 at 05:59 PM

ST

“ *Dear Allison and family, I am so very sorry for this loss. My first acquaintance with the Robison family was my sons having Allison as their teacher, who they both loved. Unfortunately, after moving from Saline, my second acquaintance came with the death of my son and the assistance and service preparation for him that was handled by Jim and Stephen. The kindness, sympathy and understanding extended to me and our family from Jim, Allison and Stephen during that time was of the utmost comfort . May God hold the entire Robison family in his comforting arms at this time.*

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**Suella Tecco** - September 25, 2023 at 03:01 PM

JM

“ Jim became a special friend after the death of my daughter, Holly, in 2006. He said children shouldn't die and whenever I saw him after that he always gave me a hug and a comforting word. I will miss him terribly.

Jean Martin

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**Jean Martin** - September 24, 2023 at 03:01 PM

JJ

“ What an amazing man and what a beautifully written obituary, filled with love and admiration. He certainly lived a wonderful, adventure filled and meaningful life. We send our sincere condolences to you, his beloved family.

Joe and Jo Ellen Ivacko

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**Joe and Jo Ellen Ivacko** - September 23, 2023 at 09:04 AM

KG

“ I was privileged to get to know Jim during 27 years as a pastor in Saline. We worked together year after year providing funeral services for so many families. In all the years I knew him (which started in the Fall of 1994 when I worked part-time at the Drowsy Parrot where he was a regular visitor), I didn't find out his nickname "Digger" until May of 2012 when we were providing graveside services for a mutual friend's family. If I would have looked at his license plate, I would have discovered it sooner! Jim was a great man. He was also wonderful story-teller. When you get a pastor and a funeral director together, there are plenty of stories to tell. Not sure how many of them would survive a fact-check, but they were always a delight. Jim was detailed and professional in his work but also deeply cared for the families he served. It was honor to know him and serve alongside him. My prayers are with all of his family as they honor him at his final funeral.

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**Ken Gilmore** - September 23, 2023 at 01:38 AM

AB

“ *I called on Jim for decades. still processing. So sorry to hear the news. I really enjoyed our friendship.* ”

Andy Bolt - September 22, 2023 at 12:48 PM

AJ

“ *Andria Johnson lit a candle in memory of Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr.* ”



Andria Johnson - September 22, 2023 at 12:12 PM

LS

“ *Lynn Marie Suits lit a candle in memory of Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr.* ”

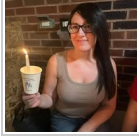


Lynn Marie Suits - September 21, 2023 at 09:34 PM

LS

*Alison I am so saddened to hear of your family's loss of Jim. He was so comforting to me during the saddest times of my life along with you, the notes and the care taken. I thank you Jim and send my condolences to you Alison, Steve and Emily.*

Lynn Marie Suits - September 21, 2023 at 09:38 PM



“ *Amber Wardia lit a candle in memory of Willard "Jim" J. Robison Jr.*



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**Amber Wardia** - September 21, 2023 at 08:23 PM



“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



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**Emily Travis (Robison)** - September 21, 2023 at 05:23 PM



“ *I became quite fond of Jim and the whole staff when I served as pastor at St Paul UCC. Jim was cheerful and funny and always had a story to share. He loved his vacations too. I am so sorry for the tragic accident that took his life. My thoughts and prayers are with all of you.*

*Rev Dr Patti Kenney*

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**Patti Kenney** - September 21, 2023 at 01:42 PM

JH

“ My deepest sympathy to the Robison family. I was employed for many years by the funeral home. Over this time, I learned to appreciate Jim's excellent business skills and our friendship grew. These times have become some of my most rewarding memories. Steven, you learned from the master and are doing an excellent job.

*James L. Hoeft*

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**James L Hoeft** - September 21, 2023 at 12:56 PM

RK

“ Emily, thank you for posting such a lovely photo of your mom and dad. My heart breaks for you, for Steve, for my wonderful cousin Alison and for your extended family members. Your dad was a wonderful man who will be greatly missed. Love, Cousin Betsy

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**Rebecca Kelly** - September 20, 2023 at 03:00 PM

RP

“ Dear Steve and Family,  
May the Good Lord look kindly on your Dad and say, "Welcome Home my good and faithful Servant, to the Place I prepared for you from the beginning of time. Welcome Home."

*God Bless You.*

*Fr. Mike Petroski*



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**Rev. Mike Petroski** - September 20, 2023 at 01:12 PM

MS

“ I am shocked and saddened to learn that Jim has left us. Randy and I have wonderful memories of Jim's infectious laugh and playful personality. Ever the dapper gentle and kind man, he will be missed by so many people. Alison - my heart breaks for you. You were indeed the Ying to his Yang. Sending you, Emily and Steven thoughts of sympathy, comfort and peace and prayers for Jim's journey home.

*Marianne Elser Smith.*

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**Marianne Elser Smith** - September 20, 2023 at 10:41 AM



“ We are all very saddened to hear we will no longer hear more of Jim's wonderful stories here at the Washtenaw County Vital Records office. To see him was a break from work, and always a laugh or two. Rest in Peace our friend, play the drums, pour yourself a beverage and watch the sunset. We will miss you.

*Michelle-Vital Records*



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**Michelle Cook** - September 20, 2023 at 09:04 AM

JM

“ There are many good memories to celebrate. Julie and I are touched by Jim’s tendency to add humor to circumstances. His sense of adventure led to memorable moments, mischief and funny stories. Occasionally, a bit of willfulness would show but never with malice. Julie and I send memories of you (Digger) being a good friend, facing the world with a sense of humor, always taking white glove care of those who have gone through this difficult time, and for us, a sense of thankfulness for knowing you. Much good lies ahead for you.

*And, please take your drums with you.*

*Play on*

*Alison..... for you....you have been a steady trooper. Blessings for you and know that there will be brighter days ahead.*

*Love*

*Jill and Julie Merchant*

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**Jill Merchant** - September 19, 2023 at 10:24 PM

JD

“ As a RBFH employee, I considered Jim to be not only an employer but, most importantly, a very good friend. He had a smile on his face and a great story to share everytime we ran into each other. As a generous benefactor to the community, he was always willing to support everything Saline; a true patron of this city. Jim, thank-you for your kindness, your generosity and especially your friendship. You will be missed!

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**James Datson** - September 19, 2023 at 09:39 PM

E(

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



**Emily Travis (Robison)** - September 19, 2023 at 02:27 PM

KC

*What a wonderful man. He was always helpful to all his clients. He helped with 3 of my family members. He will be missed.*

**Karen (Passow) Court** - September 19, 2023 at 04:53 PM



*That's exactly how I remember him growing up. Both your parents. Crazy! He was such a great doode, I really had a lot of respect for him.*

**Greg Swaney** - September 19, 2023 at 06:34 PM

BC

*What a Wonderful Man, my Mother, and Bills folks were there at his place. Brother in law recently, and Jim loved hubbys tie and ask for it Saying I want to be buried in that tie.. Bill took it off and gave it to him.. lol He just made the difficult time of death so much easier to bare!! Rest in peace Jim, All of us are going to miss ya buddy*

**Bill and Nora Clark** - September 19, 2023 at 08:05 PM

EF

*A wonderful photo of my two wonderful cousins.*

**Elizabeth Floyd** - September 19, 2023 at 09:46 PM

SN

*I am so sad to read of Jim's passing but he was a wonderful friend for over 50+ years and it brings a smile to my face to know he and Carroll are now raiding Heaven's kitchen for pots and pans to drum on. He was truly a wonderful friend helping even when our first two St. Bernard dogs fell ill and he came and helped us get them up and transported to the veterinary hospital and stayed with Carroll through the entire ordeal. Jim we loved you, still do and I am happy that you and Carroll can now share those drums in Heaven for all to enjoy 🍷👍😄*

**sandra nadig** - September 19, 2023 at 10:43 PM

DP

*Jim was a good man, I loved it when he would come into ACE. I would help him get what he needed. I will miss him. Rest in peace my friend.  
Dan Payeur*

**Dan Payeur** - September 20, 2023 at 07:23 AM

LS

*Jim was a great neighbor. He was a character for sure, with many stories and unfiltered opinions to share. The neighborhood will not be the same without him on his lawn tractor. It has been just over a year since we moved, and seeing Jim on his tractor across the street is one of the memories I treasure.*

**Lesli Sutherland** - September 20, 2023 at 04:40 PM

SW

*“ I've had the privilege of interacting with Mr. Robsion on multiple occasions throughout the years. He was quite the witty gentlemen challenged one to think and look at things from different perspectives. My thoughts and prayers go out to the Robsion family.*

**Shane Whitfield** - September 19, 2023 at 01:45 PM

LR

*“ To the Robison Family, Sorry to hear of Jims passing. He served all clients well, as did all of his help. Always joked when I saw him. will miss his humor .Rest in Peace Jim.*

**Leroy Reichenberger** - September 19, 2023 at 12:24 PM

CE

*So sorry to hear of Jim's passing. He was such a wonderful man and will definitely be missed by so many. Prayers to the whole family ❤️🙏  
Carol Eberle and son*

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**Carol Eberle** - September 19, 2023 at 02:51 PM

RC

*“ I am so so sorry to see this! I worked with Jim for years when I was at the Reporter--we had a great friendship and he was always making me laugh. He was the best guy. I remember in particular a story I wrote when he fell down the elevator shaft and broke his arms, I think it was. There are just so many stories. Rest in Peace, Dig.  
My deepest condolences to all of the Robison family. It's a huge loss.  
Renee Lapham Collins  
Tecumseh*

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**Renee Collins** - September 19, 2023 at 11:12 AM

JJ

*“ My deepest sympathies. He was so kind and shared lovely memories with me when Gary went to heaven last year.*

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**Judy Jedele** - September 19, 2023 at 07:47 AM

RM

*“ Jim has been a friend of the Merchant family for most of my life!  
Best Memory Jim playing the drums at my Dad's Funeral.*

*God Bless Jim!*

*Merchant Family*

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**rich MERCHANT** - September 18, 2023 at 10:44 PM

LR

*He was wonderful when Robby died. He was a good friend of his. Hope they are together, although it won't be safe 😊  
Jim also helped us through Bob and Woodies death and internment.  
Liz Merchant Rohs*

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**Liz Merchant Rohs** - September 18, 2023 at 10:56 PM

TF

“*Sending hugs and lots of love to the Robison family. I had the pleasure of serving Jim as one of his bartenders in Glen Arbor over the last 20 years. His many stories and unique insights into life were always a highlight on those slow and mundane winter nights. He will be missed by all that had the pleasure of knowing him. Rest easy Digger and hope they have the bar fully stocked up in heaven.*”

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**Timothy “Brother” Fuerneisen** - September 18, 2023 at 07:20 PM