

## A Farewell to Jim

I said goodbye to a dear old friend last week. His name was Jim Bailey, and like him, his farewell was unique and unforgettable. Sit back and relax, and let me tell you about it.

Jim and I met about 30 years ago in the late 70s. We shared two major interests, flying and Baja California. I take credit for introducing him to Baja; he discovered flying on his own. His favorite Baja place was Punta San Francisquito. Here he is at San Francisquito with a nice jurel.



Here's Jim in front of Big Red, my Hummer H1, on the road coming into San Francisquito. Jim is the one in the red shirt. Also in this picture are my son Jesse (on Jim's right), and Armando

Regalado, another good friend, standing between the two young Mexican soldiers with the machine guns.



My four kids all loved Bailey. My eldest daughter Coleen wrote this about him in a log from one of our trips:

*"We thought about our good friend Jim Bailey often on our trip, but never so much as when we were at San Francisquito. Dad and Bailey had almost died twice having "fun" here, once when they decided to go scuba diving (long before Dad had actually gotten certified) and once when they were out fishing for the "big one" and ran out of gas miles up the coast. They hadn't returned well after dark, and we were all frantic with worry on the beach. We asked the fishermen to go out and find them, but they said it was too dangerous. I remember the night clearly because we almost stepped on a rattlesnake on the way to the bar in search of help.*

*Then at about midnight, we heard voices and laughter from down the beach. We ran toward them, and there were Dad and Bailey, looking like two white ghosts from the salt spray dried all over them. They had wild hair, and were dragging their catch-- several huge yellowtails. They had used the tiny oars to row back to the beach, and had*

*even broken one of them. Of course they were thrilled to be alive, and we were ecstatic to have them back.*

*On a less life-threatening note, I recall so clearly sitting under dazzling starry skies at San Francisquito and talking about astronomy and life with Bailey. He kept telling me if he had a daughter, he wanted her to be just like me. I still find it humbling that he would want his daughter, Shawna, to be just like me. We were all sad because Bailey and Shawna couldn't make it on the trip. I am very much looking forward to getting to know this father's daughter. Bailey is one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most sensitive men I know, next to my own father. What lucky girls we are to see the world through their eyes."*

But now I better get on with the details and background for the memorial service. It starts a long time ago. Jim's dad Bill (that's right, Bill Bailey), after a long career as a Greyhound bus driver, retired and started spending his summers in a little Arkansas town called Diamond City. Diamond City is located right on Bull Shoals Lake, a huge man-made reservoir in the northern part of the state near the Missouri border. Bill spent those summers fishing with his good friend Frank, a longtime Diamond City resident. In ill health in his last years, Bill told Frank that, when he passed, he wanted to be cremated and his ashes spread in the lake. Frank, always logical, explained to Bill that if he did that, his ashes would just end up in New Orleans somewhere, and then out in the Gulf of Mexico. Frank had a better idea. He would put Bill's ashes in a block of concrete and drop him in his favorite fishing hole. That way he could stay in Bull Shoals forever. Bill liked the idea and gave the go-ahead. When Bill died, Frank executed the plan and Bill rests now in about 40 ft. of water in the lake.

A few years after Bill passed his widow Jean died. Jim thought that it would be appropriate to also put his mom's ashes in concrete and drop her in the lake near her husband Bill. Once again, Frank answered the call and now Bill and Jean rest together at the bottom of Bull Shoals Lake. Soon after Jean died, Jim's brother Jerry died (way too soon), and once again, Jim arranged for his ashes to be delivered to Frank who, now an expert in this, placed Jerry's ashes in concrete and dropped him close to his mom and dad.

You probably see where this is going. Jim retired a few years ago (he had founded a successful computer service company, Neocomp, based in Southern California). He had visited his dad in Arkansas many times over the years, and fell in love with the area. He and his lovely wife Patty built a beautiful home in Diamond City, where he spent his last years fishing in the lake, playing golf, and schmoozing with wonderful friends.

Jim died last year. Fortunately, I had the chance to spend some time with him in Diamond City a week before he died. We both knew it would be the last time we would see each other. I claim no expertise in poetry, and I am not sure that the following even qualifies as poetry, but on the day Jim died, I wrote this:

### To Jim Bailey...

Where are you old friend?

Now that you know the answer to the unanswerable question, where are you?

Are you out at the edge of the universe, having a close look at the stars we used to see...

Lying on our backs in the sand, late at night...

On a Baja beach?

Or are you on short final to one six right at Van Nuys?

Or on top, southwest bound at nine point five?

Or feeling the smooth surface of the throttles in three zero sierra delta, that old plane we loved?

Are you tipping one with old Mike at that little corner bar at 94<sup>th</sup>?

(Isn't that where we met?)

Is there a white light?

Are you looking over Shawna's shoulder?

Jeez you were proud of her...

For good reason.

Are you in Diamond City, with Patty and all your friends in Lee's living room, watching the river...

And listening to their mellow sounds?

Or are you here with me...

I think so; I feel your presence...

I always will.

Or are you everywhere?

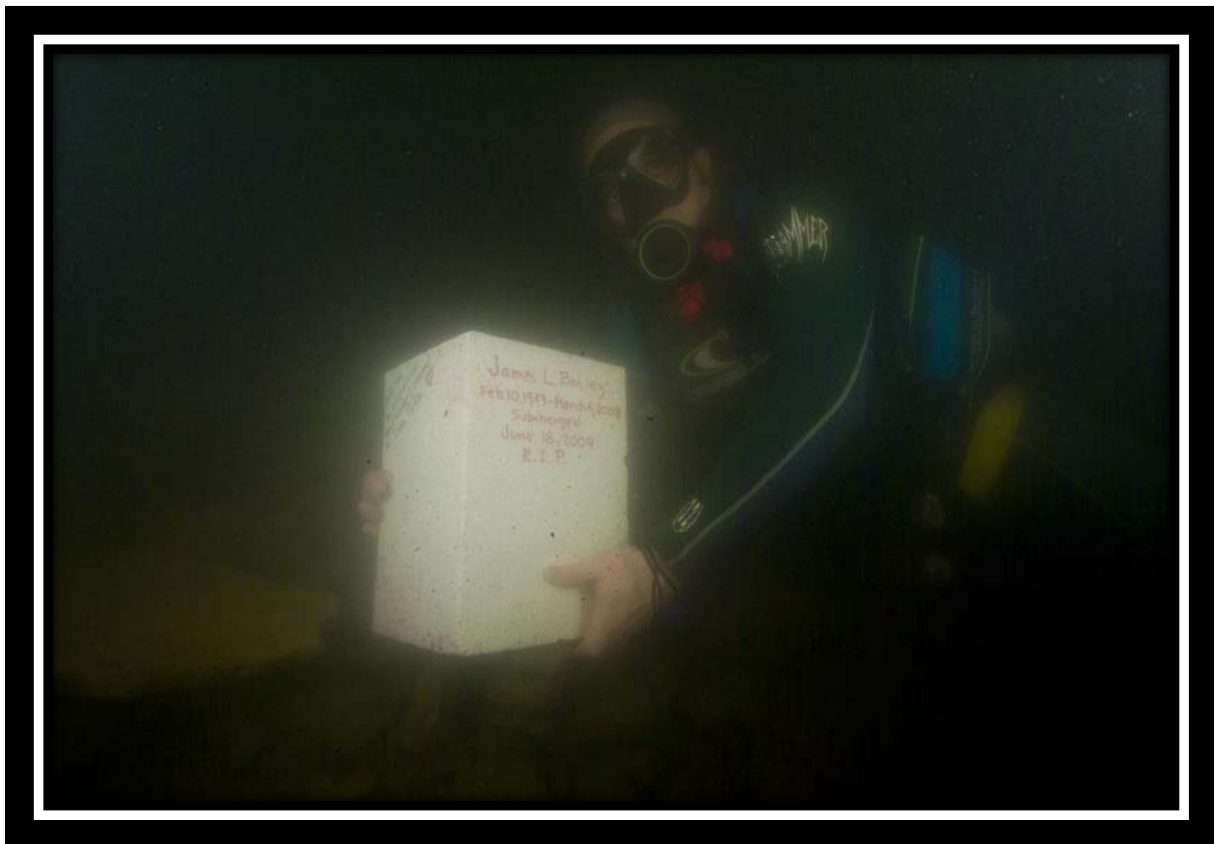
Where are you old friend?

Sorry about that. Anyway, after Jim died, once again Frank was called into duty, and he placed Jim's urn and ashes in a 90-pound block of concrete. Patty planned a memorial service for Jim in the early summer of 2009 where Jim's friends and relatives would gather and say goodbye to him as he was placed in the lake with his mom, dad, and brother. I got a wild idea. What if I, a diver and underwater photographer, accompanied Jim down to the bottom of the lake and took some pictures of his last resting place?? It was the least I could do for such a wonderful old friend, with whom I had shared so many great times. I bounced this off of Patty and she thought it was a great idea. The big event happened last week.

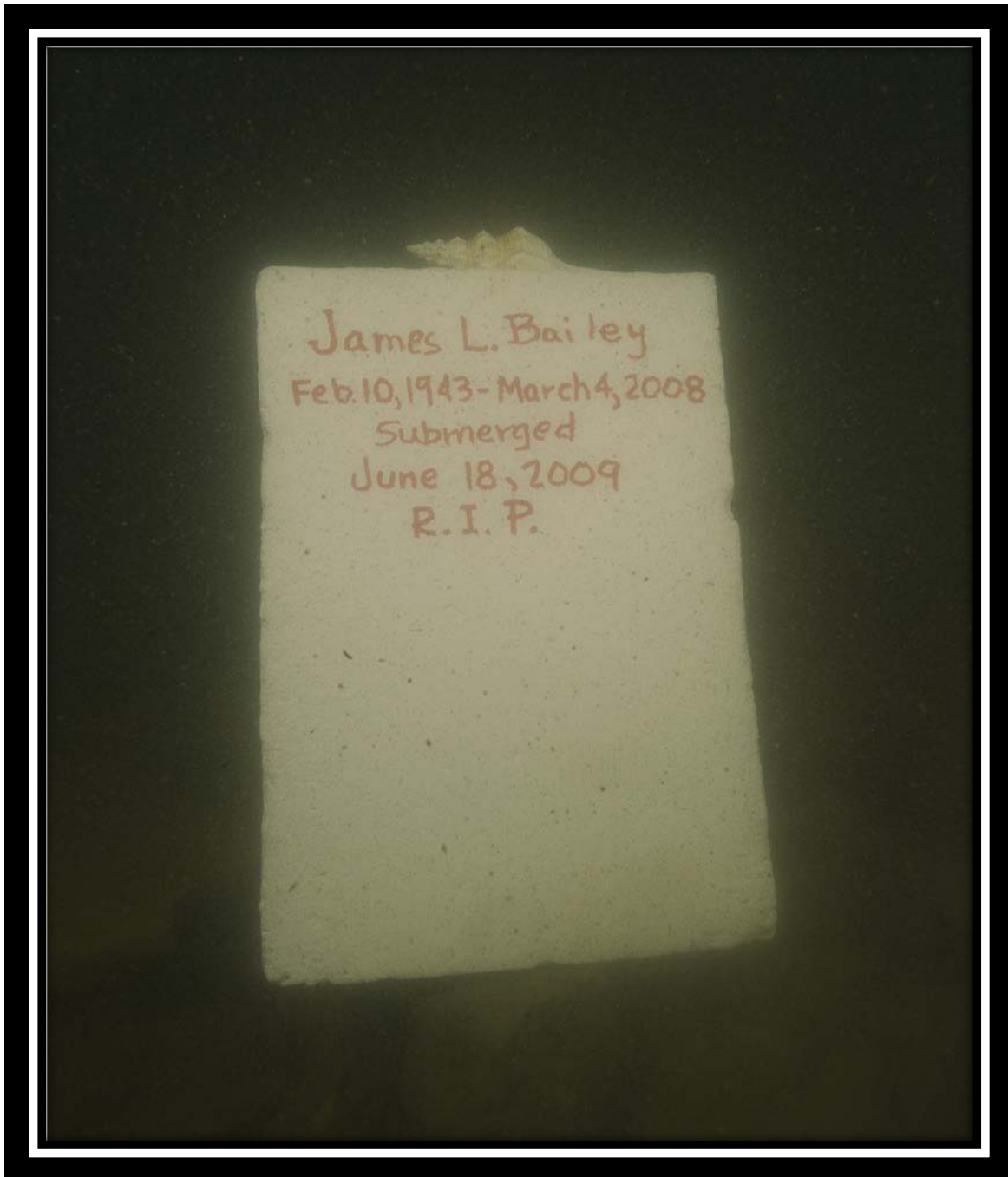
Friends and relatives started arriving at Jim and Patty's home a few days before the actual ceremony. I put a brief inscription on Jim's block of concrete, and many of the guests signed it with touching farewell notes using permanent markers. At 6 pm on Thursday afternoon, June 18, 2009, after a very hot, steamy Arkansas day, about 40 of Jim's friends and relatives,

boarded four boats and, with Jim on board, headed out from the Diamond City Marina for Jim's (and his dad's) favorite fishing hole, about a 15 minute ride. The boats tied up together in shallow water, and Lee Dixon, another great friend and neighbor who does bluegrass magic, accompanying himself on the guitar, sang three very emotional songs as a tribute to Jim. Jesse and I went in the water with scuba gear, and Jim was lowered into the water. Jesse, (with a fully inflated BC!!) moved Jim to a pretty spot on a rocky ledge in about 30-35 feet of water while I followed with the camera. Diving and underwater photographic conditions were VERY difficult (read: terrible), a maximum of about 5 feet of visibility (most of the time I couldn't see my fins), lots of particulate matter in the water, VERY dark. Jess and I could only stay together with a line. Under those circumstances, there was no way to find Jim's mom, dad, and brother Jerry, who as I said, all rest in similar blocks of concrete somewhere nearby. But it is nice to know that they are all close to each other now.

I did manage a few recognizable images. This one shows Jess giving Jim a final hug:



And this one shows the block of concrete with the inscription. The small murex seashell on top of the block of concrete is from Punta San Francisquito. We thought he might like that:



During the whole time we were underwater, a little bluegill was aggressively harassing Jesse. It simply wouldn't leave him alone. Bluegills are normally not considered aggressive. We think Jim had something to do with this:



Like the man himself, Jim Bailey's farewell was unique and unforgettable.