

The Life of Jim Dittman



Jim Dittman, 70, of Highmore died March 30, 2020 at St Mary's Hospital in Pierre after one last slug fest with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). A private burial service was held at the Highmore Cemetery on April 1. A celebration will be held at a later date due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. If you would like to honor Jim in the meantime, go ahead and work 28 hours per day, eight days a week.

James Walter Dittman was born August 1, 1949 to Fred and Pearl (Bawdon) Dittman. His childhood rivaled a Huck Finn adventure: taking care of livestock on the family farm, spending more time outside than inside of his one-room country schoolhouse (After he had walked there. Uphill. Both ways. Probably in a blizzard.), learning life lessons the hard way, and pranking the local police. "Wildman" graduated from Highmore High School in 1967.

Legend has it, Jim's farming career began at the ripe old age of six when his dad grew tired of him constantly being underfoot, so he allowed Jim to drive his own tractor and haying equipment. His life-long love affair with/addiction to the cattle business began as a teen "with one calf and my dad's corn". Jim was well-respected for his keen eye for quality cattle and his livestock marketing ability. While Jim generally preferred dealing with animals over people, he

befriended a wide range of characters in the livestock industry over the years.

Throughout his entire life, Jim considered the phrase "you can't" as a personal challenge and took extreme pleasure in proving others wrong. This was never more evident than after he was diagnosed with MS at the age of 36. He refused to use his disease and disability as an excuse; instead he relied on grit and stubbornness to expand his business and continue to support his family. Even as his disease progressed, he continued to put in a full day's work.

The best decision Jim ever made was marrying his high school sweetheart, Shirley Kusser, on February 1, 1969. Shirley served as the dedicated mother to his children, farm labor, secretary, cook, and later Jim's sole caregiver despite his advanced disease. Together they raised three daughters. His preference would have been three boys but it turns out girls can be great farmhands too. Jim frequently reminded his girls how lucky they were to "get to" work with him all summer and he loved to take credit for their work ethic.

His grandchildren will remember their Papa for teaching them to "drive" his pickup with his assistance around the farm as preschoolers and then independently once they met his stringent requirement of reaching the gas pedal and seeing out the windshield at the same time. He partnered with them to secure dessert from Grandma; gave them the opportunity to operate farm equipment; and allowed them to do almost anything else they wanted.

Jim fought the war MS had waged against him every day for over 34 years. Knowing that Jim liked to have the last word and was a sore loser, we think he would point out the pain and suffering of MS died with him, so technically they ended in a tie.

Left to tell stories about the grumpy guy are his wife Shirley; daughters: Jackie (Steve) Peck of Prosper, TX, Deb (Collin) Gengerke of Groton, SD, and Bridget Dittman of Franklin, TN; grandchildren: Kendra, Devon, Jenna, and Grant Peck; Patrick, Trey, and Brooke Gengerke; and Brandon Bates; and numerous extended family members.

Jim's dad and father-in-law, Joe, greeted him and his pristine new body on the other side with some perfectly prepared beef and a huge serving of ice cream before they set out for the feedlot.