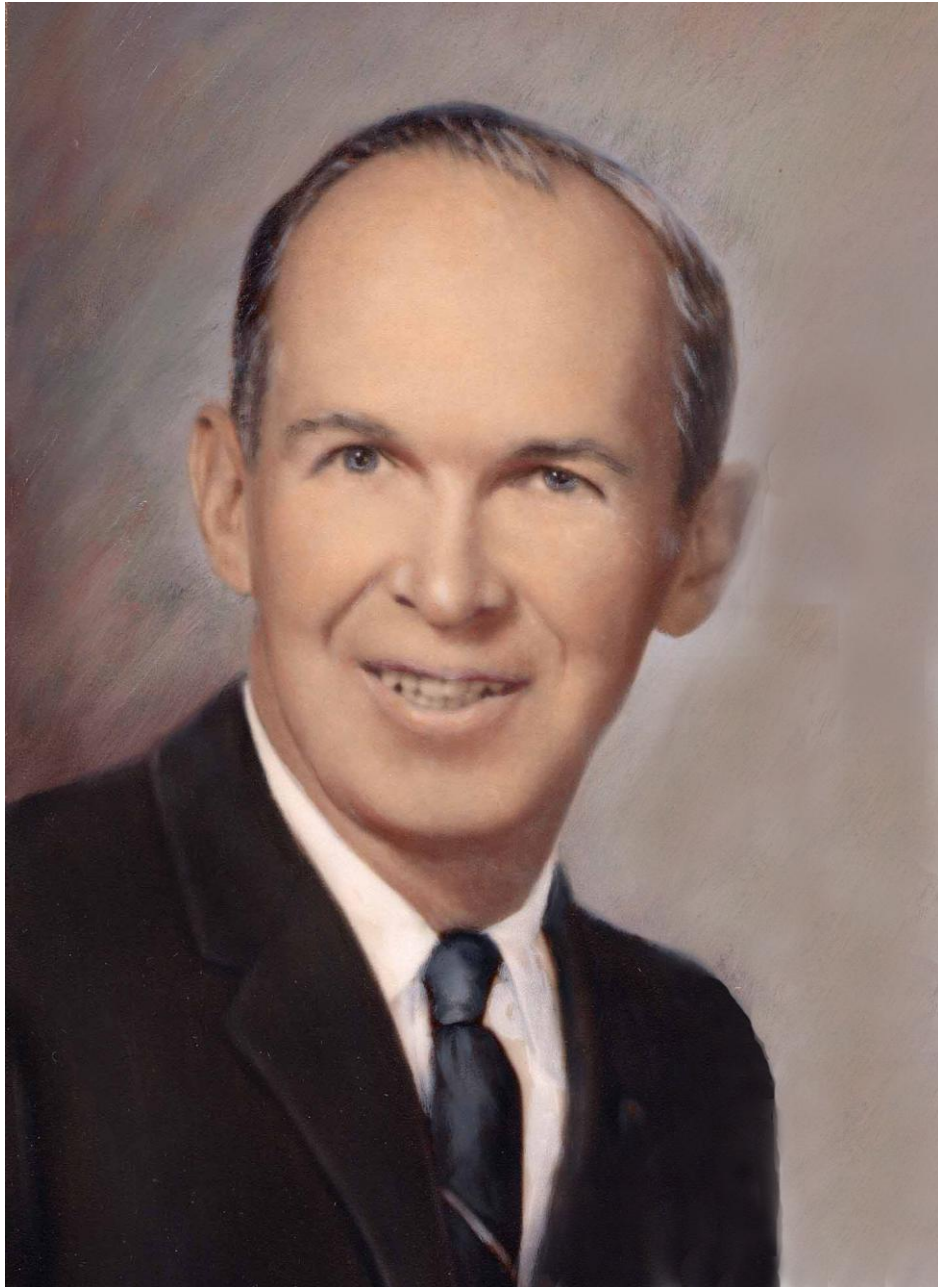


James Edward Benham



April 25, 1945 to September 17, 1971

A Short Biography
Of
James Edward Benham

This biography of James Edward Benham is meant for his grandchildren, Katherine and Matt Dittmann & James and Miles Benham. Your grandfather unfortunately died before any of you were born, and you know very little about him. Hopefully you will learn a little more about your family by reading these words. The first part of this remembrance will be some facts about your great grandparents and your grandfather, and then some remembrances from his children, Jim, Barbara and Harry.

Your grandfather's name was James Edward Benham. He was the third child and second son of Henry Laurens Benham Sr. and Katherine Carthage Cunningham Benham. There are at least four other "James Benhams" in the Family Records, dating back to the Revolutionary War. His father, our grandfather and your great grandfather, was Henry Laurens Benham. James' older brother was named Henry Laurens Benham, and Henry's oldest son also has that name. Your great grandfather was often called Harry. Your great uncle was called Hank and his son, our cousin, is called Larry. But they all had the same name.

Henry Laurens Benham, your great grandfather, was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, 2 January 1879. He was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. His first job was in an office in Chicago where he was thought to have contracted tuberculosis. He went west to a ranch owned by Will C. Barnes (probably a relative by marriage) at Raton, New Mexico, to recover in the dryer air. Once he regained his health, he learned ranching skills. Henry joined the newly created Forest Service in 1907 after Will Barnes sold his ranch.



Katherine Carthage Cunningham, your great grandmother, was born in Carthage, New Mexico, 9 July 1882. Kate, as she was known, came from a coal mining family whose ancestors came from Scotland. They prospected in Colorado and New Mexico for coal to supply the railroads. Kate put herself through the University of New Mexico and graduated in 1907. Her family refused to give her the necessary money. Apparently they did not believe in educating women. Kate taught school in New Mexico.



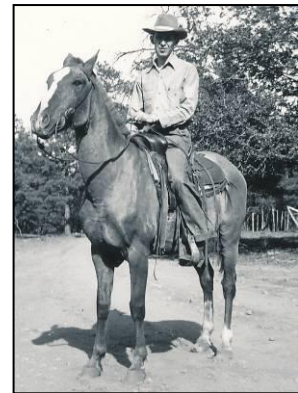
Henry and Kate met in New Mexico and got married 26 October 1909 in Gallup, New Mexico. Exactly how they met is unknown. Their first child, Anna Margaret Benham, was born in Gallup, New Mexico. The Forest Service sent Henry to Williams, Arizona and they set up housekeeping in a log cabin at Camp Clover, just west of town. Their second child, Henry Laurens Benham, Hank, was born there. This was before Arizona was state! Henry and his camp partner, Willard Sevier, sometimes accompanied by Kate, rode all over their territory. In 1912 he decided to homestead a place south of Williams. They homesteaded 155 acres in two phases beginning in 1912. In those days, an American could get up to 160 acres free as long as they developed it, as in building a house on the property, within five years. His supervisor said he couldn't homestead, so he

quit his job as Forest Ranger. For six years he tried to make a living raising cows and pigs and growing crops, etc. In 1918 he went to work for the Santa Fe Railroad, just to help out for the winter. He ended up retiring 30+ years later in 1948 or 1949. Sometime around 1949 Henry sold the ranch to a man by the name of Bill Williams who tried to make it into a dude ranch (Timber Mountain Ranch). This person was unable to make the payments, so the ranch reverted back to Henry probably in 1951. Sometime in the 1930s Gramp came down with pneumonia and was about to die. His doctor decided to try out a new drug called penicillin on him. It worked. Hooray! Kate was a school teacher for many years in Williams, Anita and Fort Defiance, all in Arizona. The family also had a house 208 S 5th St. in Williams, so it was easier to get the kids to school and themselves to work when it snowed, the town being above 6,700 feet in elevation. One tragedy occurred during Jimmy's childhood. His sister, Anna Margaret was killed in a horse accident. Anna Margaret's death was due to the results of an accident received while mounting a horse at her home. The details of the accident will never be known as she was alone at the time with the exception of a neighbor girl friend who was not watching Anna Margaret when the accident occurred. She died in 1925 after being taken on a stretcher on the railroad to Gallup for medical treatment.

Your grandfather, usually called Jimmy, was born on April 25th, 1915. He was born on the Benham Ranch in Coconino County, just south of the town of Williams Arizona. He was born in the same house that existed until 2007 when it was torn down to build a new house on the same location. It has been told that the house consisted, at that time, of a



single room, just the kitchen. Later on a living room and bedrooms were added, and the story goes that Jimmy helped to build the fireplace that was the source of heat for the house, along with the wood burning stove in the kitchen. It is also said that he helped to dig the well and the trench for the sewage system pipe to the ditch across the road. Jimmy grew up on the ranch learning to ride and rope, just like any cowboy.



Your grandfather, Jimmy, went to school in Williams. For at least one class, he had his mother for a teacher. Surely she did not cut him any slack. For his junior year of high school he was sent to the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, New Mexico. There is a picture of him in the N.M.M.I. yearbook, The Bronco, showing him with a bugle. He graduated from Williams High School in June 1932. He went to Arizona State Teachers College, now called the Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Flagstaff and graduated in 1936 with a teaching credential. He played the trumpet in the band. His major was physical sciences with minors in biology and mathematics. We're not quite sure how he met our Mother, Ethel Maxine McCoy, but they both ended up going to school



in Flagstaff. It is believed she worked for the same professor as did Jimmy. Ethel was born in Prairie City, Iowa and grew up in Chandler, AZ. She graduated from Chandler High School in 1934. Ethel was two years behind Jimmy in school. Jimmy taught school in Williams, AZ after graduating from college for one year while Ethel continued her studies at A.S.T.C. in Flagstaff. It is believed Ethel graduated in 1937 after three years of work rather than the normal four years.

Ethel and Jimmy were married in Flagstaff on August 14, 1937 and honeymooned at the El Tovar Hotel at the Grand Canyon for a day before going on to Oak Creek Canyon. Jimmy taught sciences, mathematics and music at Camp Verde but did not like teaching. Their first home was in Camp Verde, Arizona. Their grocery bill was about \$5.00 per week! Sometime in 1939 Jimmy also attended a Refrigeration and Air Conditioning School in Chicago. He apparently opened a business as a dealer and serviceman in Phoenix for air conditioning. During this time they rented an apartment at 703 E Adams, Phoenix, Arizona. This venture did not work out; Ethel and Jimmy moved back to live with his parents in Williams, AZ.



Ethel has told the story that she gave Jimmy an ultimatum: move to California or no children. This ultimatum was prompted by the 1939 death in Williams of Mary Virginia, Hank's first wife, as the result of a miscarriage. The only doctor in Williams was said to have been drunk at the time. Ethel's older sister, Enid, was already living in Los Angeles. She was there during the big earthquake in Long Beach in 1933. Her brother Harry McCoy and his wife Julia lived in Hollywood. Their second daughter, Harriet, was born in Hollywood in 1942. When Jimmy and Ethel came to California they first lived with Harry and Julia (probably at 4456 or 4334 ½ Lockwood St., Hollywood, Calif.) then by at least October 1941 James and Ethel got an apartment of their own at 1210 North Westmoreland, Hollywood, California. By February 1943 they have moved to 1214 ½ North Westmoreland, Hollywood, California. Their first two children, Jim, (short for James who's childhood name was Jay) and Barbara, were born while their parents lived in Hollywood. They were born at The California Hospital in Los Angeles.

Our parents bought a house at 5915 Tobias Ave. in Van Nuys in late 1943. Jim was almost two and Barbara was nine months old. The house cost \$4995.00 with a \$500.00 down payment. The house had two bedrooms and one bathroom. Our father built the garage, as did all the other new homeowners. The concrete slab was provided by the builder. Harry was born in November 1948 while our parents lived in Van Nuys. In March of 1956 the family moved to a 3 bedroom 2 bath house at 17506 Lorne St., Northridge, California, cost \$14,250. In March of 1959 a lot was purchased on Halstead St. in Northridge for \$7,500 with the intention of building a larger house. Plans were drawn up, but the house was never built. The lot remains vacant to this day.



After coming to California, Jimmy may have attended the Warren School of Aeronautics prior to obtaining employment at Lockheed in Burbank. Harry McCoy did attend this school, got a job at Lockheed and encouraged Jimmy to do the same. Jimmy took a course from the University of California in Tool Manufacturing and Engineering, completing it in January 1945. This was a War Training class.

After the War Jimmy worked as a washing machine repairman at an appliance store called Sincomb Bros. at 6265 Van Nuys Blvd in Van Nuys. He next worked at Radioplane, in Van Nuys, beginning March 21, 1949. Radioplane made drones for fighter planes to practice shooting down. He retired from Northrop (Radioplane was a division of Northrop) in Newbury Park, CA. There is some thought that he was exposed to radiation on the job, which may have caused his leukemia. His initial job was as an assembler. He worked on a punch press and eventually became a Tool and Die Maker. His last position was at a desk as a Manufacturing Methods Planner. The Parachute Division of Radioplane had the contract to provide the parachutes for the early space capsules. At the end of each flight we would all hold our breath until the capsule was safely in the water. Fortunately the parachutes always worked. He gave Barbara a silver bracelet with a picture of the parachute on it. Katherine may have it now. In August of 1967 Jimmy accepted a job at Weber Aircraft Company in Burbank. The company made aircraft seats. He worked at this job until February of 1970 when he was laid off. It appears he worked next for Lockheed in Burbank from about July 1970 through November 1970. In the months before his death Jimmy was studying computer programming at the Electronic Computer Programming Institute.

Ethel and Jimmy were members of and attended the First Methodist Church in Van Nuys, CA. They belonged to a group of Tobias residents that played a card game called 500, which persisted even as they moved away. It was a monthly night out for all those with children. Later Ethel and Jimmy joined the Northridge United Methodist Church. Jimmy was active in the Free & Accepted Masons of California, Lodge No. 450. He was also active in the Order of DeMolay with his eldest son. Jimmy belonged to the union and was active in it at least during some periods of his employment.

When I, Barbara, was in high school, my Mother told me that my Dad was sick with leukemia and would die from it, but no one knew when. He lived for ten years after the diagnosis. In the meanwhile, I went off to college, graduated, got married - my Dad walked me down the aisle - became a teacher and moved to San Rafael. He died on September 17, 1971 of lymphocytic leukemia, just nine months before Katherine was born. He died at the Granada Hills Hospital and is buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Chatsworth.



Remembrances

Remembrances from Jim:

Growing up on the ranch, Father was a cowboy. He knew horses. I couldn't tell a good horse from a sawhorse! Father could rope. I remember as a child in Van Nuys Father roped me from the bottom up. That is, rather than throwing the loop over my head, he somehow laid it in front of me, I ran over it and he flipped the rope and I was caught! I couldn't believe it. So he had some roping skills! In searching for information for this biography, I came across his spurs. He gave me his saddle blanket to take to college. I have taken it to the ranch in Arizona several times to put next to my bed. I remember where it came from and its first use.

Father was a Scout Master while I was in the Boy Scouts. We were part of troop 1 at the Van Nuys Methodist Church. On some ritual occasions where a ceremonial fire was required, Father would mix some chemicals and after a few minutes, a fire would start. To the young scouts it was almost like magic to see a fire begin with no obvious human intervention. We did a lot of camping in the local mountains. Even the family went camping at the National Parks, Sequoia and Yosemite, on at least one vacation. A lot of that old camping gear is still stored in the garage. Earthquake supplies!!!

Father made a wagon for me, which is still stored in the garage in Northridge. I have always assumed wagons were either too expensive or unavailable after the War, so father simply made one. It is much sturdier than the typical store bought wagon. Father made other toys for his children.

The longer I live the more grateful I am to Father for teaching me how to fix things and how to work with tools. Generally I am not afraid to investigate something that is broken and attempt to fix it. I am made aware of this talent when I encounter people who don't know the first thing mechanical and are afraid to try and fix something. The first step in fixing something is to understand how it works.

The first car I remember the family owning was a 1938 Chevy. The story is told that on one occasion I filled up the gas tank – with water!

Father did not drink, save one or two beers I saw him consume while on vacation at the ranch in northern Arizona. He did smoke, Camels, up until almost the day he died. He never could kick the habit. When Ethel began teaching after Harry started school, the family had a little more disposable income. We were lower middle class. Father always had a job, but we didn't have a lot of extra spending money in the early years.

Remembrances from Barbara:

My Dad was a quiet person. He usually acquiesced to what others wanted. But he was also friendly and outgoing. He loved to talk to other people. He often went for an evening stroll in the neighborhood in Northridge and came home with stories of people he'd met and talked to. Usually it was some guy working in his garage making or repairing something.

My Dad loved babies. Whenever there was a family get together and there was a baby present, you would find him carrying the happy baby around.

My Dad could fix anything. He loved restoring old cars. He seemed to always have an old car in the garage that he was restoring. In fact he drove an old Chevy coup for many years. It was probably from the thirties or forties. Ethel says that he sold a Model T Ford to buy her wedding ring. He made the dining room table in Ethel's house and also started the bookshelves in the living room. It was left to Jim to finish

My Dad made me a bike, probably from War surplus. He went to the junk yard and found all the pieces, cleaned them up, painted them blue, and gave me a bike for Christmas. I loved that bike and many people commented on how unusual it was.

Almost every summer, we all got into the family car and headed to Arizona. Part of the time was in Chandler, where our mother's family lived, and then we went up to the cool mountains to the ranch in Williams. Dad seemed to be a different person at the ranch. He was more relaxed, outgoing and comfortable. At the ranch he would take us riding on horses and he also took my brother Jim and me to the midden across the road or to the cinder pit to shoot old tin cans with his 22 special rifle.



One of my first memories was when my Dad worked as a washing machine repairman at an appliance store in Van Nuys. He would come home for lunch every day, and then we would send him off, back to work, on his red bicycle. I'm pretty sure we owned a car at that time, but he rode his bike back and forth from work.



During some of my school years, Dad worked the swing shift – 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. Sometimes, if I had trouble with a math problem, I would ask him to wake me up and help me with the problem. I remember that in the 11th grade I got an A in geometry, but my teacher put a little note that said "for your Dad"

Other times he would work the day shift and get home at 3:30. He would drive me to piano lessons and pick me up from school events in his old Chevy coup. My Mother became a teacher when I was in 6th grade, and was busy until later in the afternoon.

Remembrances from Harry:

There are many remembrances. Jim mentioned that my father was a cowboy. Growing up in the LA suburbs, I didn't see much evidence of that aside from some spurs in a drawer and an old hat. But one summer in Arizona we rented some horses with some other people and the whole group went riding. Returning, the horse ridden by a girl started to "runaway" with her. First thing I know, here comes Father with his horse at a dead run passing everyone. He caught up with the runaway, grabbed its bridle, and pulled both horses to a stop. In the process, his horse reared up but my father stayed on with apparent ease. So I saw some real cowboy!

My Father made time for his kids. He participated in Scouting when I was a Scout and certainly passed on a few outdoor skills. The troop folded after a year or two and we didn't seek another. He also got me into DeMolay. He was an advisor while I was busy being a less than sterling member. When it was obvious that my interest was limited, he didn't force me to continue. But we frequently worked together in the garage; he helping on my projects or getting me to help with his. I can recall countless trips to hardware stores or lumberyards to pickup whatever was needed for the current project.

My Father did pass on some of his "fixit" and building skills. At times, I'm sure the process was very trying. We built an 8' pram from some plans in **Popular Science**. We had just spent about 30 minutes getting the bow pieces clamped together when I said "but it should look like this" and moved the sides causing everything to fall apart. He just helped me put it back together and *suggested* that I not mess with the fragile clamping until the glue had had a chance to set. Another time, thinking I knew what I was doing, I took apart the rear axle / transmission of my 3-speed bike. But I forgot how it came apart and couldn't get it back together. He and Jim spent a good couple of hours that afternoon getting it back together. The next time I took it apart I was able to put it back together. And then there's my first lesson in roofing. I'd discovered that asphalt shingle pieces flew pretty well when tossed like a Frisbee. Over a few months, I'd removed quite a few shingles from the garage roof. One day my father was in the garage and noticed a bit of sunlight on the floor coming through a hole in the roof. He immediately inspected the roof and was *a little upset*. Next weekend, I was replacing shingles and learning a valuable skill.



The garage was full of tools. I was always allowed to use those tools I'd been taught to use. The rule for power tools was only use them when someone else is at home. But by the ripe old age of 17, I figured those old rules didn't apply. I'd never used the jointer before and no one was home. The ER folks had to call Mother at school to get authorization to treat me for having trimmed a joint off my finger. After I had recovered, I asked my father to show me how to properly use a jointer. It was hard for me to work with that piece of equipment. As I looked at my father, I realized that it was much harder

for him than it was for me. I'm sure he was thinking, "What if I'd shown him how to do this earlier?"

I don't recall when I first learned of Father's leukemia - probably sometime in late Junior High or High School. Father seemed to deal well with his illness. After the initial diagnosis and treatment, he appeared to be in remission. I was able to forget about his illness as he appeared to be 'normal.' I was away at college when his condition began to deteriorate. On my visits home, he was generally upbeat and positive. I was a couple of weeks into my second year of graduate school when he passed away. Jan recalls Ethel saying something like, "Jimmy was a perfect husband only he died too soon."

Pictures



James Benham. Picture probably taken in 1969.



James Benham. This picture was taken by Barbara just a month or so before his death in September, 1971. This is the last known picture of Jimmy.