

# **Jim Biles: a ilfe well lived**

text and photoessay by Ian Robertson

## **Gentlemen**

Sad news

Our dear friend and fellow

Bullpup



### **Jimmy Biles**

Has gone to his next rodeo

At Memphis Central

he was a gifted statesman and a brilliant scholar.

In his own words:

“I was introduced to politics with our class elections each year,  
With true campaigning, banners and speeches.

We learned group dynamics and how to influence people.  
I got to go to Tennessee Boys State and  
Exercised what I had learned, coming away with some honors.

I also was recommended to Northwestern’s Cherib Program,  
A premier university-based program for outstanding high school students,  
For a summer STEM  
(Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) program and  
introduction to engineering.”

He was also a gifted athlete  
Excelling in track and football



He could run the 440 in under 50 seconds

By way of comparison  
The Choate 440- record set in 1957 was 51.9  
Had Jim been in that race  
He would have won  
By more than 20 Yards

Jimmy was the fastest quarter miler in Tennessee  
But inexplicably he was runner up in the state finals

Which was won in a + 50 second time

Jimmy ***hated*** finishing second

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As a Tennessee football All-star

He was offered a full ride

To play football in the

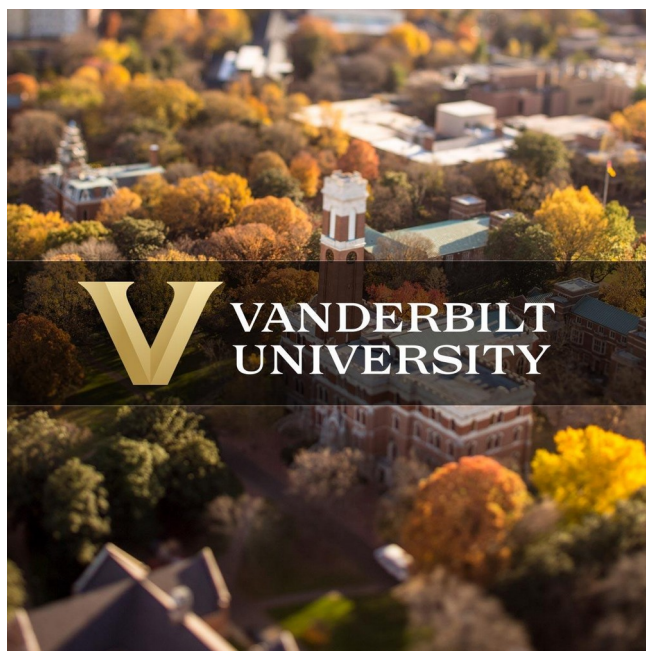


At

The



Of the South

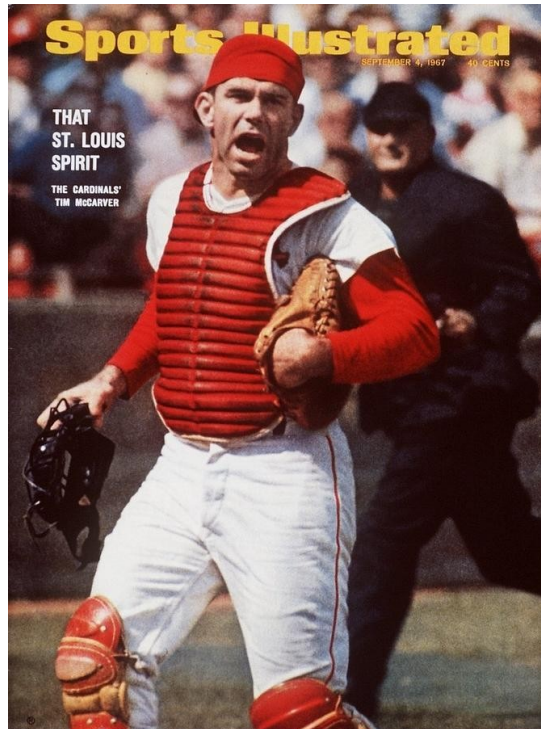


During his senior year  
Jimmy was chosen for the Tennessee all-star team

Unfortunately

During the game

He was hit in his back by



**Tim McCarver**

Suffering a fracture

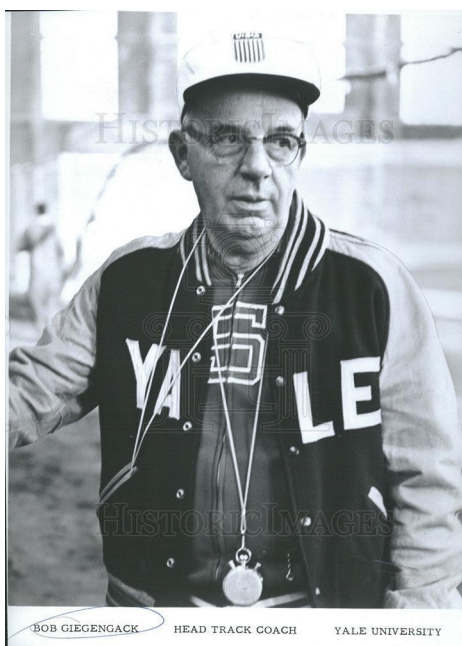
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The Ivies also wanted him  
Jimmy was heavily recruited by



**Gib Holgate**

And



**Bob Giegengack**

He

Declined "Harvard"

And came to New Haven

Like many high school graduates

His first year at Yale was a challenge

"I suffered culture shock when I went off to college."

Up East the food didn't compare to Southern cooking,  
Yale was an all-boys school,  
There was no decent music,  
The cold was pervasive,  
A tie worn at every meal, and  
Competing with the Eastern private school educations  
Was major league for a minor leaguer"

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Jimmy was one of the 100+  
Aspiring Bullpups  
Who hoped to play football for Yale  
Unlike most of us  
Jimmy was one of the 20 or so aspirants  
Whose name Gib already knew  
Or bothered to learn

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In the first week of practice  
Jimmy's back was again "broken"  
His football career was over

(We sure could have used him)

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In the spring he joined Yale the track team



A standout quarter miler at  
John Burroughs  
Couldn't catch Jimmy

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Jimmy's track career ended  
With the arrival of  
Two-time Olympic medalist  
Quarter miler



**Wendell Motley**

Jimmy ***hated*** finishing second

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## Sailing



(Jimmy in "after" years)

Was a lifelong passion so he joined the

### **Yale Sailing Club**

Thanks to Jimmy's proficiency

The Club did so well winning races that Yale made it a



### **Varsity sport**

As it still is today

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After Yale Jimmy followed 3 generations of doctors





## **Columbia Medical School**



## **Tulane division of Charity Hospital**

### **New Orleans**

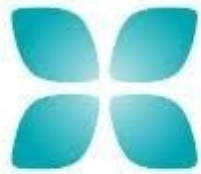
“I had one very memorable case that I got to present  
At the Hospital Grand Rounds,  
That no-one previously grasped.  
I puzzled out a very rare case  
By scrutinizing the patient’s symptoms,  
His swamp homesite conditions,  
The curious lab findings,  
And by using the antiquated medical library  
And some very new technology.  
A diagnostic first.”



## Johns Hopkins

Where later he served as an instructor

He then started his own practice at



Anne Arundel  
UROLOGY

Now



## Luminis Health

He also practiced at



“I have undertaken all the types of urologic cancer,  
Taking or referring some more difficult to Hopkins.

Intermingled with these were the basic cases of  
Stone surgery, nerve and brain urology problems,

Children’s birth defects, and

The many extreme odds and ends of urologic problems

Including sexual problems and

Old childbirth problems of the pelvis.

The variety is bewildering, and in no case is exactly the same,  
Requiring constant organizing of the puzzles and innovative solutions.

Coupled with this has been the fun of learning new technologies

To provide better care.

Included in this have been the sound wave lithotripsies (stone busting),  
Laser surgery, laparoscopic, and then robotic surgeries as well as new prosthetics.”

Jimmy drastically improved prostate surgery.

The result was more than a 99% success rate  
In preserving sexual function and avoiding incontinence.



Jimmy pioneered nearly 20 new surgical procedures

Often in collaboration with  
His classmate at Yale and Columbia



**Bob Meyers**

His real passion however was treating patients

*“There is nothing on earth like nursing a patient through the pain of a kidney stone”*

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## **Family**

Was central to Jimmy’s existence

“The other important grace in my life was having found my wife

## **Brenda**

Brenda was doing research for the  
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

She had received a Presidential appointment to  
The Sallie Mae Board

She was made an honorable  
And was personally hosted at the  
White House

By President Jimmy and First Lady Rosalyn Carter

Brenda helped raise **Jimmy (IV)** a son from a former marriage.

Like me, Jimmy IV had to deal with learning disorders

(I have had to deal with several).

Jimmy was *extremely* proud of his first-born's

Successful efforts to prevail and

Graduate from Chapman College despite his impediment.

(Believe me it is *hard*.)

I was told as a sophomore in high school that I was "not college material")

Together, Brenda and Jimmy had two children,

**Lindsey** and **Michael**

Who graduated from Princeton with many honors

Including a national championship in lacrosse



**Lindsay Biles**  
All American

A fifth generation Biles doctor  
Michael attended Columbia Medical School  
And had his residency at John's Hopkins.

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In 2019 Jimmy attended our '59 Bullpup memorial for **Jerry Kenney**.

He was on crutches.

He had developed two kinds of cancer,  
One in his ribcage, that required removal of ribs on his right side,  
And another that caused the loss of the use of his right leg.

Jimmy paid little attention to his "disability."

In January 2020, **Mimi Head**  
Invited Jimmy, his wife **Brenda** and me  
To spend ten days in her glorious home in St. Barth's.

Jimmy was unfazed by the precipitous stairs that accessed Mimi's home,  
Or the sand he had to cross to get into the ocean.

It was during that salubrious time  
That I learned how extraordinarily  
Bright and accomplished Jimmy was  
(He had to be to keep up with Brenda).

We became fast friends,  
Frequently sharing long phone calls.

Covid was a trying time for the Biles family.

Lindsey had a friend who contracted covid  
At the Biogen conference in Boston.

Lindsey then contracted Covid

A fit athlete with a child,  
And a job at the Discovery Channel  
She experienced heart problems and  
A debilitating lack of energy.  
Local cardiologists dismissed  
Any connection between Covid  
And her symptoms but  
Dr. Biles,  
Though a urologist by training  
Due to his voracious study of medicine,  
And his encyclopedic knowledge of the subject  
Believed that there was a connection

Jimmy was one of the first doctors  
To diagnose what we now know to be  
"Long Covid"  
Jimmy finally got Lindsey proper care.

Then in 2021,  
Jimmy told me his cancer had returned.  
This time little could be done.  
He was getting his affairs in order and  
Contemplating palliative care.  
He said he was not giving up and

Was trying to get into some trials,  
Prospects were dim.  
But he faced the future fearlessly  
With clear-eyed knowledge of  
What lay in store.

Soon thereafter

He sent me his autobiography.



Jm Biles Bio.docx

It began by reiterating 8 near death experiences:

- (Age)(1) allergic reaction to poisonous ants
- (3) almost drowned in the Mississippi River
- (5) allergic reaction to multiple bee stings
- (6) polio (10) Black Water fever
- (12) sailboat capsized almost drowned
- (20) narrowly avoided a plane crash in a cypress swamp
- (37) shot by a deranged former patient while sitting in his car

“I think I have challenged God’s omnipotence and help  
A bit too much, but  
With fair certainty,  
The nine lives are coming to a close,  
Considering that

I have metastatic cancer.  
Having been a cancer surgeon,  
I have held the hands of dying patients,  
Sensing their fears of death,  
The grief of loss,  
And some, the agony of dying.



Now I am in their shoes  
And struggling with the same emotions and pains.  
Am I holding my own hand the best way?  
What creates calm and comfort?  
Have I prepared myself?  
Have I asked for forgiveness where I should have?  
Have I said goodbye to friends and family?  
Does my spirituality support me?  
Have I passed on the proper legacies?  
Do I have the courage to manage my pain, and  
The trust and help needed?  
Can I have some control of my death through palliation or a  
“Death with Dignity”  
If I need that?

I guess the question is  
Why I became a doctor and  
How did I learn all this stuff,  
And still turn up with questions on  
How to approach death.  
It seems there is no good answer:  
Each of us takes a different approach.  
Few of us ever discuss this,  
Even on our dying beds.

We need to,  
As this way we can rest easier,  
Accepting all that has been done, and  
Can confidently hold our loved one’s hand.”

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Jimmy was able to participate in at least two trials.  
The trials slowed the growth of cancer  
But came with nasty side effects.

Undaunted

He still swam, sailed and laughed.

About a year ago he needed a scan.  
He told the technicians to be careful,  
He had a very fragile back.

Despite the warning they dropped him.

Jimmy was paralyzed from the chest down.

Our calls continued.  
You would never know  
The bright laughing man on the phone  
Was heavily medicated  
And unable to walk or even turn over.

In September of 2022,  
Three hours before we were to leave for Paris  
I called him to report that  
Bonnie was suffering from lower back pain.  
She had been advised to get a scan  
But was told it could wait three weeks  
Until we returned from our trip to  
Paris and a two-week cruise.

Dr. Biles sprang into action.

“You will cancel your flight...now!  
Go to the emergency room immediately!  
Call me.

I will tell the docs what to do.”

Flat on his back

Racked with pain

Jimmy exuded enthusiasm and positive energy

The scans he ordered revealed a large and painful kidney stone

Thanks to Dr. Biles

By 6 p.m. that evening



**Bonnie**

Was out of surgery and fully recovered

In extremis

Jimmy was able to do again that which he loved best

*“There is little on earth like nursing a patient through the pain of a kidney stone”*

In his 1981 autobiography Jimmy addressed

End of life issues

“Since I am close to this last issue,  
I am making sure  
I have all the loose ends of my departure  
All tidied up.

I am slowly making the rounds  
By saying goodbye in an indirect way,  
Letting people know the value of their friendship to me.

I guess to some extent  
I am setting an example for those around me to

Celebrate me and  
Not mourn or suffer through my departure.

I still live each day to its fullest,

Very happy to still be here,  
And not  
Dwelling on the end.

When all this is done, and  
With good faith,  
I think there is no real fear.

But for those who die early and  
Feel robbed of much of life,  
There is no easy answer other than

*I was lucky to be here and  
It was a good life.*

I have shared my love.

Here too, the ability to say goodbye  
As a whole normal appearing to your children and friends  
Is very important.

The problem, of course, lies in the  
Nature of the terminal disease.

Medical palliation has been a boon but  
Doesn't suffice in many cases.  
It makes complete ethical sense  
To provide medicinal termination

When those scenarios are expected.

It confers dignity and  
A comforting way to say goodbye.

I believe it is the individual's right  
To make this decision, and  
It is a travesty many religions and  
Government can't see this.

This afternoon after a sudden dark squall,  
The sky turned pure blue,  
The sun was a crisp golden  
Slanting through the new spring leaves,  
Sparkling like diamonds  
With the raindrops still on them.  
The returning birds were singing away.

On my crutches,  
My mind went to this  
Amazingly beautiful creation that  
God has placed us in.  
From a single source of energy,  
Through the simple forms of molecules, to  
The infinity of the universe,  
Here we stand

In perhaps the middle of this  
Unknowable, miracle.”

**A life well lived**



**Jimmy Biles (MD, FACS)**



Virus-free. [www.avast.com](http://www.avast.com)