



John W. Vinson

July 21, 1960 - August 29, 2023

John Vinson, also known to others as Johnny and Biggles, passed away peacefully at his home on August 29, 2023, in the presence of family members who loved and cherished him.

Born July 21, 1960, in Lafayette, Louisiana, John was an exuberant, irreverent man who delighted everyone who knew him with his wit, playfulness, and generous spirit. (He was known to wear pearls to parties long before men's jewelry became fashionable.) A lifelong lover of the natural world, he had an encyclopedic knowledge of its flora, fauna, fungi, rocks, and stars. John loved to go fishing with his father in the Atchafalaya Basin. He also began gardening as a child in Lafayette, growing sunflowers and tomatoes at an early age. He later expanded the scope of his childhood gardening efforts to include transplanting shrubs from more affluent neighbors' homes to homes in need of a landscape upgrade. (He was well known in the neighborhood for taking the law into his own hands.) A stargazer too, he befriended the astronomers at a planetarium close to his home. When he was ten, his eagerness to share his love of the stars propelled him to escort his three-year-old nephew, Brant, up to the rooftop of his house, so they could behold them together.

As a young adult John was attuned to the degradation of the environment and the dangers of global warming. Throughout his life he often despaired about the fate of the planet. Yet he engaged in his own rescue efforts. Together with

his wife, Martha, he transplanted cacti from land being cleared for development in Austin to "Little Bend," his desert garden. Later he created a "Safe Place for Toads," a small garden pond accessible to toads that allowed them to easily lay eggs. John also crossbred the inconspicuous mosquitofish from two different ponds in his garden, hoping to ensure a more robust genetic stock. And even after developing myeloma, he planted and maintained peach and plum trees on a strip of public land in the neighborhood so that everyone could enjoy their fruit.

John was endlessly curious and prodigiously creative. He hiked, collected rocks, foraged for mushrooms, and made bread, beer, sauerkraut, and kimchi, which he shared with friends, family, and neighbors. He also loved to cook and was known for his P Soup recipe (containing ingredients beginning with the letter p, including pumpkin, persimmon, papaya, and potato as well as "powdered spicing agents"). And he was a music lover and artist, painting his "Rabbit" series of portraits as well as other paintings, all now treasured by his family and friends. John wrote haikus and witty pieces and circulated them among friends and family. After his stem cell transplant in 2016, he captured the experience in haikus written for the staff at the bone marrow transplant program at St. David's South Austin Medical Center. He also published the piece "Reported Legal Case Opinions Pertaining to or Mentioning Coleslaw" in the online literary journal McSweeney's (<https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/reported-legal-case-opinions-pertaining-to-or-mentioning-coleslaw>).

A graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas and Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland, John began his legal career as a constitutional litigator working with Madalyn Murray O'Hair on First Amendment cases throughout the United States. He joined the Office of the Texas Attorney General in 1992 as an Assistant Attorney General. There he monitored, investigated, and litigated cases involving the large nonprofit sector in Texas. John had a lead role in a suit against several Texas nonprofit hospitals for

their failure to offer the required charity care, which spurred the passage of Texas's Nonprofit Hospital Charity Care law. He also played a lead role in a yearslong suit against Texas's nonprofit Blue Cross Association. Through the suit he attempted to ensure that the Association, which at the time was merging with a for-profit entity, would establish a charitable trust to fund healthcare for low-income Texans. Other cases that intrigued him involved managing a rodeo and exposition, taking action against a megachurch and one of its leaders for deceiving donors, imposing receiverships on primate and tiger sanctuaries that were mistreating animals, and dealing with the complex probate and corporate holdings of the artist Donald Judd.

After John left the Office of the Attorney General, he worked for the Texas Department of Insurance and then opened his private practice. Specializing in probate, estate planning, nonprofit, and cooperative corporate law, he served on numerous co-op boards and became the go-to legal guy for cooperative businesses around Texas. He also became the go-to legal guy for the neighborhood, choosing to make his services affordable to people of all incomes. Once the pandemic began and John was taking precautions due to his highly immunocompromised status, he did not hesitate to meet with his clients in the open air of his garage, where his fishing gear, art materials, gardening and brewing supplies, and unusual collectibles became the backdrop for the signing of important legal documents.

Loved by all who knew him, John is survived by his wife, Martha Vogel; his sister, Genna Vinson (John Twomey); his brother, James Richard Vinson (Sandy); his brothers-in-law Steve Vogel (Carole Wolin), Paul Vogel (Vicki), John Vogel (Jennifer), and Matthew Vogel (Kathy Bucher); his sisters-in-law Margaret Vogel and Catherine Holt (Tim); 28 nieces and nephews, including Brant Davis (Desiree) and Elizabeth Didlake (Billy), who were as close to him as siblings; his loving friends, and his cat, Olive.

We are grateful to Dr. William Matsui of Dell Medical School and UT Health Austin, Dr. Jason Melear of Texas Oncology, Dr. Aravind Ramakrishnan and Ashleigh Smith of the Sarah Cannon Blood Cancer Center at St. David's South Austin Medical Center, Gladys Nicholls of Cancer Rehab and Integrative Medicine, the dedicated nurses and therapists on the sixth floor of South Austin Medical Center and St. David's Rehabilitation Hospital, Brian King of Austin Palliative Care, and Mario Piña and Katrina Shawgo along with the other wonderful staff of Hospice Austin for their care of John during his long cancer journey.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to your local Meals on Wheels, an organization that John supported throughout his life.

A celebration of his life will be announced at a later date.

Tribute Wall

NO

“ Met John in Girard Park in the summer of my 7th grade. He would have been in 6th. One of the smartest humans I've ever met. We were snarky heathen kids in Lafayette, Louisianastan. Perhaps that explains why John became a warrior against theocratic fascism. We grew up around the zealots who are the theocrats destroying our secular nation as I type. I'd prefer to remain anonymous. This isn't about me. John & I were huge Zappa fans. Go figure, right? That ain't no cosmic debris. Love y'all antifAmericans



NotAboutMoi - August 25, 2025 at 05:15 AM

BP

“ I was a law school classmate of John's. He was one of the really “good” people in our class. We are having our 40th reunion later this month, which is why I was trying to contact him. So sorry to learn about his passing, but glad to read about his very rich and rewarding life. Not surprised at all about the that! I will share this story with my classmates at our reunion.

Bill Perkins - September 05, 2024 at 06:36 AM

CF

“ John was an amazing person, and very dear to many in the Austin cooperative community. He will be deeply missed.

Carol Fraser - September 20, 2023 at 02:42 PM

GV

“ 1 file added to the album Adventures



Genna Vinson - September 15, 2023 at 02:57 PM

SG

“ John was our lawyer for a special needs guardianship and was very caring . He had to quit because of his illness and we are sorry for your loss.

Scott and Lola Glover

Scott Glover - September 14, 2023 at 11:47 AM

CL

“ Carol L. purchased a sympathy card for the family of John W. Vinson.



Carol L. - September 12, 2023 at 06:52 AM

MM

“ *Martha,*

My name is Michael Moore. I worked with John on a pre-bono estate case for an inmate in TDCJ that was being taken advantage of by the executor, Ronnie Hemphill, from 2016 to 2022!!

He had no money, but John agreed to try and help Ronnie if he could. Working together over the 8 years we only met once, in court. We talked often and his dedication and spirit, while battling his illness, inspired me. I grew to love him for that. I miss talking to him.

Michael J Moore - September 10, 2023 at 03:09 PM