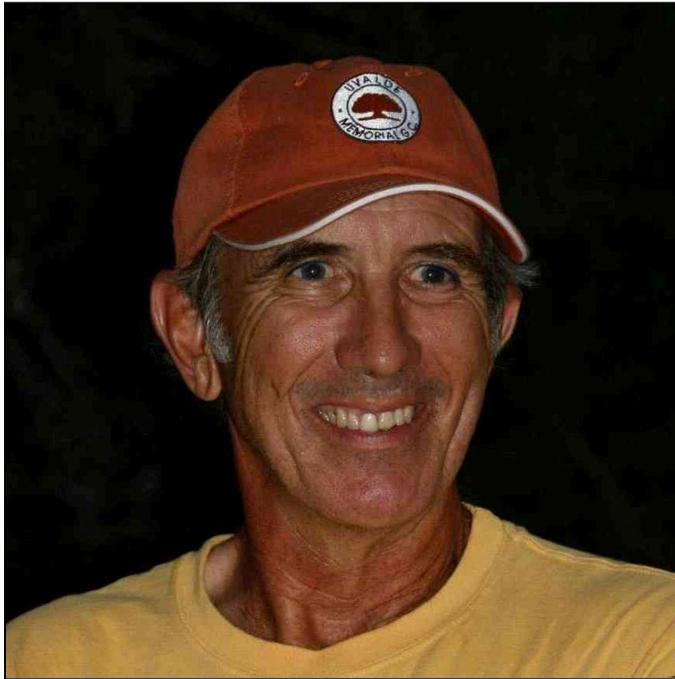


**Herbert Spencer Woods III**  
**March 13, 1949 - October 18, 2025**

*Compiled by Jay Jorden*

Herbert Spencer Woods III, NSS 38798, an Austin caver who was active in cave conservation and surveying with a passion for exploration, died on October 18, 2025 after a long illness. He was 76 years old.

Born on March 13, 1949, in Galveston, Texas, Spencer was the son of Dr. H. S. Woods Jr. and



Wilma Ruth Nelson Woods. He graduated from Baylor University in 1971, working first as a social worker serving children and their families, where he met his former wife and mother of their children, Susan Woods. For most of his life, he was a stonemason and small business owner who took pride in his work and taught his children to do the same.

Spencer met his soulmate and best friend, Pam Woods, on a caving adventure while surveying Carlsbad Caverns. It was the beginning of a 30-year marriage that continued from that first adventure, strengthened by devotion and kindness. She faithfully cared for him as he battled cancer for a number of years, providing unending loyalty and

unmatched patience.

Spencer's caving included trips to Mexico, the 1994 NSS Convention, and organized activities with the former Texas Cave Conservancy. He was an organizer of Cave Day, the TCC's annual open house for the public to visit its cave preserves in the North Austin and Cedar Park areas. These events, which began in 2004, hosted 1,000+ visitors to Avery Ranch and other preserve caves.

At Avery Ranch Cave, Spencer was able to use his welding experience to repair supports and railings for an observation deck where tourists viewed the big room.

Spencer is survived by his children, Sara Elizabeth Woods of Austin; and John Woods and his wife, Lindsay, of Birmingham, Ala. He delighted in being "Pop Pop," loving his grandchildren, Hudson, Emma, and Mason of Birmingham, and Cash and Dutch of Houston, Texas, with a full

and joyful heart. Family was the most important thing to him, and because friends were family too, his circle of love was wide.

Spencer is also survived by his twin sister, Sandra Hansen, and his younger sister, Martha Swilling. He was preceded in death by his sister, Virginia "Ginger" McVey. He loved being their brother and considered them his first friends.

Sara Woods commented on Facebook, "Many of you might have known him. He was a well-known caver and loved this community deeply. Caving was one of his passions, and I'll always treasure the memories of caving with him in so many places and exploring Bustamante with him and my brother many, many years ago."

No formal funeral service was planned, Sara said, adding that she was by Spencer's side along with his wife when he died. "We know he'll be remembered in the stories, friendships, and adventures he shared with so many of you. My entire life has been full of these very stories. Please relay to anyone who ever caved alongside him."

Sara requested anyone with photos, videos, or stories of Spencer from caving trips to please share them. "My heart is broken, but this makes me feel connected to him," she said.

Those who knew Spencer recalled how he entered a room as if everyone already belonged. He never encountered a stranger, meeting each person with the gift of unhurried conversation and lasting friendship. He saw value in everything and everyone. He loved music: listening to it, making it, and sharing it. He told stories that made you lean in and laugh out loud. He was funny, always ready with a joke, and generous beyond measure. A dignity-giver, he never thought himself better than anyone; his aim was always to build others up.

Spencer was a disciplined man with an unmatched work ethic who persistently taught his children to finish what they started, to keep their word, and to take the next right step. Words were his treasures. For birthdays, he asked for poems and songs, not presents, and he carried lyrics in the same way some people carry photographs.

Spencer's hobbies were vast and ever-expanding. Besides caving, he was a musician, inventor, collector, poet, explorer, river-lover, and risk-taker, eager to peer around the next bend, always curious, always learning.

The family is deeply grateful for the compassionate care shown by the "A-team" of doctors and nurses, hospice teams, therapists, and the many unseen helpers who swept floors, stocked supplies, adjusted machines, and served with gentleness.

A private family gathering was planned for a later time. In the spirit of Spencer's life, if you wish to honor him, offer someone the gift he loved to give: a listening ear, a good story, a song shared, or a word that restores dignity. He would have liked that because he endured his battle

with quiet tenacity and a twinkle in his eye, the same way he met every season of life. He loved people, believing that every person carried a worthy story, always noticing "the least of these."

### References

- Obituary in [Legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com)
- [Hall of Texas and Mexico Cavers](#)

### Tributes

"We are diminished. Spencer and I caved together 20 years ago. It was always an enjoyable time." - *Joe Ranzau*

"Oh Pam, Sara... so sorry to hear this. I've missed Spencer a lot over the years . . . was always looking forward to possibly seeing him show back up in the caving circle at some event." - *Terri Sprouse*

"Hello Sara - Carol and I send you our prayers and condolences ... . We did not know about Spencer's medical issue. We are very surprised and very hurt to learn about Spencer, and I feel very sad for Pam. Please give your mom our heartfelt condolences and our love. Our world of friendships continue getting smaller. We remember the good times, though ... . - *Kenny McGee*

"I remember many great stories from him! Our thoughts are with you and your fam." - *Philip Rykwalder*

"I got to catch up with another old UT Grotto caver today," *Peter Sprouse* wrote on May 21, 2024. "Had lots of adventures with Spencer Woods back in the day. He has struggled with health issues, but his spirit and sense of humor are very intact."

"... I saw a dish that reminded me of a caving trip to Bustamante Canyon in the 1990s. Prior to that trip, almost all of my camping trips involved eating snacks or sandwiches. We never brought cooking gear, certainly no steaks or fish. But on this trip that I was just now reminiscing about, one of the cavers cooked the most delicious meal that I had ever had on a camping Trip. His name was Spencer Woods. ... I imagine that it has likely been 20 years since I saw him, and only briefly at a TCR. I was friends with, or at least caving acquaintances with, his wife, Pam, before she moved from Houston to San Antonio ( 1990-92). She and I went on a caving trip, in my old Speleo Stationwagon to "Las Grutas de Carrizal" and we took another caver, Ralph Batche (R.I.P.), along with us. But I had hung out with her at grotto meetings and other caving things. I lost track of her when she moved away around 1992, and I moved back to College Station briefly in 1993. ... On the trip there with Spencer, we might have gone to Las Grutas de Palmito, but I am thinking instead we went ridgewalking or out west of the canyon to see the famous petroglyphs, or maybe we did something else far, far away like go swimming

near Sabinas Hidalgo ... imagine it was 1991. ... Spencer Woods ... played a role in my journey in life.” - *David Locklear*

“This makes me sad. I’m pretty sure I have a few pictures of his early caving. Don’t remember if he took the class, but he was on quite a few trips. Also don’t remember if he went to Bustamante with me in the early days. He was always a very pleasant person to be around.” - *Chris Thibodaux*

“Spencer was a great man and a dear friend for years. I likely have some caving photos to share.” - *Travis Scott*

“So sorry to hear this. Spencer was a swell guy.” - *Jim Kennedy*

“He was a great guy. We used to meet up at the Carousel Lounge to listen to music there. He will be missed.” - *Freddie Poer*

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### Photos



*Spencer Woods catching up with Peter Sprouse in 2024*



*Spencer Woods working on his 4WD PowerWagon*