

Goodbye, Jim

by Sr. Agent Joe A. Chandler Jr.

On Saturday, March 4, 2005, Enforcement Agents of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries gathered at Forest Lawn Funeral Home in Pineville to say goodbye to Sr. Agent Jim “Big Country” Matkin, who was killed in an automobile accident on March 2 while en route to meet other agents in Region 4A for a work assignment.

Jim was a graduate of LDWF Academy Class 13 and had been working on the Statewide Strike Force since then.

Jim was my friend. We attended the academy together. We began our careers together and it’s sad that we didn’t get to finish them that way. Jim had the largest heart of anyone you’re ever likely to meet and would bend over backward to help someone out. At the funeral, one eulogy was given by Sr. Agent George Robinson, who worked frequently with Jim on the Strike Force. George told a story of how Jim once purchased groceries for a hunter he had checked and realized he was hungry and had nothing. This was just the kind of guy Jim

was. It was a rare thing indeed for Jim to not have a smile and a handshake for everyone he came into contact with. He never met a stranger.

Jim was good-natured and took ribbing lightly. You really had to work at it to irritate him, which was a good thing since Jim was a fairly large individual. But his physique was not nearly so large as his heart. I don’t recall Jim balking

at any task given him. When he was given an assignment, he put every effort into bringing it to a successful conclusion. Although it didn’t always work out for him (same as for everybody else), I never saw Jim Matkin give less than full effort to anything.

It broke my heart to speak with Agents George Robinson and Ray Thomas. I stood guard with them over the cas-

ket in the wee hours of the morning on the day of the funeral. We spoke mostly of Jim, and I got a chance to hear some really entertaining stories about things that happened while they were working together. Jim was on the Strike Force, so he wasn’t at home a lot. I didn’t have the opportunity to work with him nearly so much as George and Ray had, and it apparently wasn’t wasted time. Jim made quite an impression on these two, and George was forced to stifle tears most of the night because his friend was gone. Jim wasn’t just their co-worker. He was their friend.

If a man’s friends are a measure of his worth, Jim was a valuable man. Rarely have I seen the depth of friendship expressed by these men, and it was humbling. A person can only hope that when they depart this life there will be men like George and Ray to remember them fondly. A per-

Helping those less fortunate came naturally to Sr. Agent Jim Matkin (left), who along with Sr. Agent George Robinson (middle) and Agent Ezekiel Talbert (right), supported LWAA’s charitable causes.





son's highest aspiration should be to leave behind a life that people want to remember and to be a positive influence on those with whom they have contact. Jim succeeded wildly in this.

Mr. and Mrs. Matkin, you can be proud of Jim. And you can be proud of yourselves. You raised a good man.

That's the point of all of this. Forget for a moment that Jim Matkin was an active enforcement agent, representing this department with honor and courage. Forget the cases he made, or didn't make. Forget any mistakes he made or accolades he earned with this department. Just remember this, because this is the most important—if not the only important thing you do remember: Jim Matkin was a good man. I'm a better man for having known him. Rarely have I seen anyone handle adversity with more

grace and character. He never bad-mouthed those who mistreated him and he tried to be a friend to all. I can honestly say that if you couldn't get along with Jim Matkin it was probably your fault.

I was proud to be at the funeral that day. I was proud I could stand with the agents present that day, to perhaps be a source of comfort to Jim's family. I was proud of the agents who attended because they realized that even if they didn't know Jim personally, he was a representative of this department, which is a pretty small, elite group of individuals who do a tough job, and are forced by necessity to perform in a harsh environment and rely on one another for help. We're all we've got, a lot of the time. But mostly, I was proud because I was there to say goodbye to a good man. He will be missed. 🐾

Sr. Agent Jim Matkin earned his bachelor's degree in wildlife management and was an avid outdoorsman.

