

John "Mark" Payne, beloved son, grandson, brother, nephew, cousin, uncle and friend, died Monday, July 19, 2021 at Mission Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. He was just three weeks shy of his 41st birthday.

Mark was born at Haywood Hospital in Waynesville, North Carolina on August 6, 1980, the second child of Margaret (Payne) Varner and the late Jerry Payne. He grew up in a home on Spring Street and later moved to Galbreath Creek in Bryson City. He graduated from Smoky Mountain High School in 1998.

Mark majored in Computer Science at UNC Asheville, and later graduated from AB Tech with an Associates Degree in Computer Science. After college, he remained in Asheville and worked as an IT Support Specialist at Asheville Cardiology. Mark later moved back to Bryson City to be closer to family and accepted a role as a Customer Service Specialist at Drake Software, a provider of professional tax preparation software.

During sales trips for Drake, Mark took full advantage of the opportunity to explore the cities and towns he visited. He admired the monuments in Washington D.C., ate the best BBQ across Texas, explored art exhibits in New Mexico, and learned about architecture in Chicago.

In early Fall of 2020, Mark experienced some discomfort and visited his physician. In November of 2020, Mark was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer and told he had between six months to five years to live. Mark handled the news as he always handled himself, with a quiet dignity, a full and knowledgeable understanding of the situation, and the utmost privacy.

When Mark was in elementary school, a teacher told Margaret she loved Mark's "sparkling eyes." After Mark's chemotherapy treatments, his eyelashes grew longer than they had before, making Mark's eyes appear even more beautiful. Despite countless blood transfusions, blood clots, medications and the huge toll placed on his body, he never once lost that sparkle in his eyes.

Mark was genuine to a fault, tender hearted and yet he sugar coated nothing. He will be sorely missed and survived by his mother Margaret Varner of Bryson City, NC, sister Nicole (Payne) Baker, brother-in-law Jeff Baker and their daughter Madison of Weston FL, aunt Roberta Means and her husband Gary Means of Whittier, NC, and cousin Lauren Arsuffi, her husband Joshua Marr and their son Jory of Asheville, NC.

A family greeting will be held on Saturday, August 7, from 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM at Bryson City United Methodist Church, 76 Main St, Bryson City, followed by a remembrance service from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM.

Following the remembrance service, the family would like to invite those in attendance to lunch at the Fellowship Hall at the Bryson City United Methodist Church. We will enjoy Mark's favorite food he ever ate - pulled pork BBQ from the Bar-B-Que Wagon in Bryson City. Mark was always supportive of and respected his vegetarian family members, including his sister Nicole and cousin Lauren, so there will be options for non-meat eaters as well.