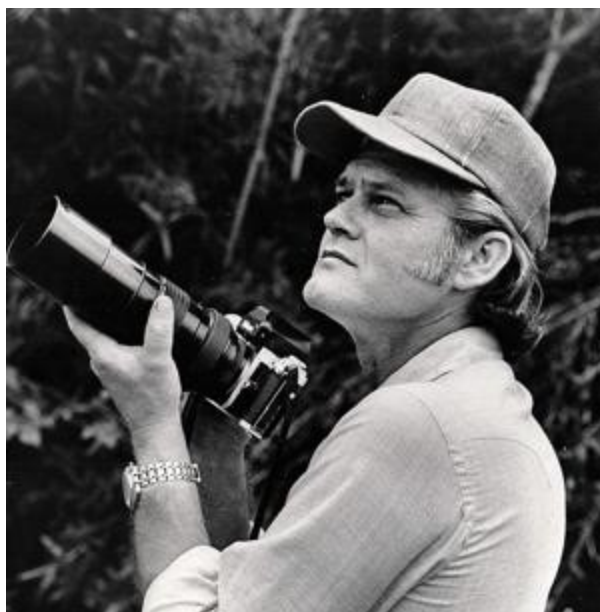


## Blair Pittman

12 February, 1937 – 10 October, 2016, 79



**Dean Blair Pittman**

[http://www.alpineavalanche.com/obituaries/article\\_05820320-96f4-11e6-82df-67f894f1e8d1.html](http://www.alpineavalanche.com/obituaries/article_05820320-96f4-11e6-82df-67f894f1e8d1.html)

Posted: Thursday, October 20, 2016 1:35 pm

Dean Blair Pittman, Jr., 79, a widely known Big Bend author and longtime photographer at the Houston Chronicle, died in Alpine, Texas, on Oct. 10 following complications from a stroke. His photographs won numerous regional and national awards, and he was known for his books on the Big Thicket and the Big Bend.

A memorial service will be held 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 22., at St. James Episcopal Church in Alpine.

Pittman photographed a story on the Big Thicket published in *National Geographic Magazine* in 1974, which was influential in gaining recognition for a national wildlife preserve. His later books included *The Natural World of the Texas Big Thicket*; *King of the Dog People*; *Texas Caves*; *Tales From the Terlingua Porch*; and *More Tales From the Terlingua Porch*.

His photographs appeared in *National Geographic* books, *Time-Life* books, *National Wildlife Magazine*, *American Heritage*, *Smithsonian*, and other national publications. Photographs from his archive are held by Texas Tech University, including photographs of Elvis Presley, Lyndon Johnson and other Texas figures.

Pittman began his career as a journalist in 1964 at the Denton Record-Chronicle, and moved to the Houston Chronicle in 1967.

Roy Hamric, a longtime friend and the former editor of the defunct Desert Mountain Times in Alpine, said Pittman's work on the Big Thicket was a significant contribution to the creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve.

"He recognized the Thicket's importance early on, and he devoted a decade to meeting the people and helping to tell that story. He was a student of nature and people, and after the Thicket work, his home became the Big Bend, another wild place in the Texas landscape," said Hamric.

Pittman moved to Terlingua in 1999, and lived alone in an rock casita in the desert. He was a regular member of the porch gang at the Terlingua Trading Post, where he gathered many of his stories for his popular books of Big Bend tales.

In 2009, he married Jean Hardy, the owner of Front Street Books in Alpine, and in 2011, he moved to Alpine to live with her following an automobile accident.

"Blair and I shared a passion for Far West Texas and our desert and mountain country," said Jean. "It was a joy for me to share with him the last 10 years of his life."

In 1955, Pittman graduated from Arlington Heights High School in Fort Worth. He was an Explorer Scout Troop adviser from 1958 through 1961, when he was only a few years older than his scouts. The troop specialty was caving, and they traveled throughout Texas and adjoining states, exploring non-commercial caves and helped to map them.

One of his former Scouts and a lifelong friend, Cedric Snyder of Austin said, "When Blair moved to Big Bend, he immediately was assimilated into the culture, as evidenced by his many friends there. I was privileged to be best man when he married Jean, and she was a godsend through his health issues the last few years."

Pittman's sister, Sue Fox of Fort Worth, said "I was fortunate to be the little sister who sometimes got to tag along on his expeditions - mountain-climbing, rappelling, Scuba diving and cave exploring. He made me braver than I might have been, and far more daring.

"Blair had an energy about him, always excited for the next new thing, and people were drawn to that energy and enthusiasm. They wanted to be with Blair and to go with him on his next adventure," Fox said.

In 1962, Pittman married Abbie Carlene Brummett in the Caverns of Sonora, where he worked at the time, turning the natural cave into a commercial tourist attraction. They had a son, Troy Randall Pittman, now deceased.

Other former wives included Jeanne Norsworthy of Dallas, Houston, and the Big Bend, an artist and great-granddaughter of Dallas Morning News publisher George B. Dealey; writer Gay Scarborough of Houston, now both deceased; granddaughters, Elizabeth "Toni" Pittman and Rachel Smith, and her husband, Bryan; great-grandchildren, Anthony Lavender and Jasmine Simmons. Also he is survived by two great grandchildren.

He was born Feb. 12, 1937, to Myrtle Lawson and Dean Blair Pittman, Sr., in Little Rock, Arkansas. As a child, he lived briefly in Pecos, Texas, and overcame bouts of pneumonia and polio.

He is survived by his wife, Jean, and his sister, Sue Fox of Fort Worth.

## **Blair Pittman, former Houston Chronicle photographer, dies at 79**

He captured the best, worst of Houston in a golden age

By Craig Hlavaty Updated 4:28 pm CDT, Wednesday, October 19, 2016

<https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Blair-Pittman-former-Houston-Chronicle-9983692.php#photo-6701857>

On Oct. 10, former Houston Chronicle photographer Blair Pittman passed away at the age of 79 in Odessa, Texas due to complications from a stroke.

Longtime Houstonians probably remember seeing his name attached to many great photos documenting Houston pop culture during his time on staff, starting in 1967. He previously worked at the Denton Record-Chronicle.

After his time here at the Chronicle he would go on to capture life in the West Texas, Big Thicket and Big Bend regions through photos and words, with his work in high demand.

RELATED: Vintage photos show Big Bend National Park in all its desolate beauty

Pittman moved to the West Texas area in 1999, but his first brush with the region coming during a family trip when he was all of 7 years old.

Pittman's "Tales from the Terlingua Porch" series of stories told and retold from the series' namesake location will likely be read for decades to come. He was also an avid caver, starting when he was an adolescent, exploring caves in Texas and Mexico.

Friends and colleagues revered Pittman for his eye for an image and he was loved as a mentor and a role model.

Publications like National Geographic, National Wildlife, Time-Life, Forbes, Texas Monthly, Texas Parks & Wildlife and Smithsonian all carried his award-winning work. He was selected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to participate in the five-year "Documerica" project, which is still routinely seen around in the web.

In our Houston archives we can see shots he snapped of luminaries as diverse as Waylon Jennings, Judy Garland, Elvis Presley, Don Knotts, the Jackson Five, Truman Capote and Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco as they all visited Houston.

He was also on hand to cover a 1967 appearance by civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. at the Sam Houston Coliseum, capturing one of the biggest names of the 20th century onstage giving a speech at a rally to benefit the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Photos of notable Houstonians like Ninfa Laurenzo, Leon Hale, John Mecom, Gus Wortham, Lynn Wyatt, Mickey Gilley, Barbara Jordan and Ima Hogg also appear in his archives.

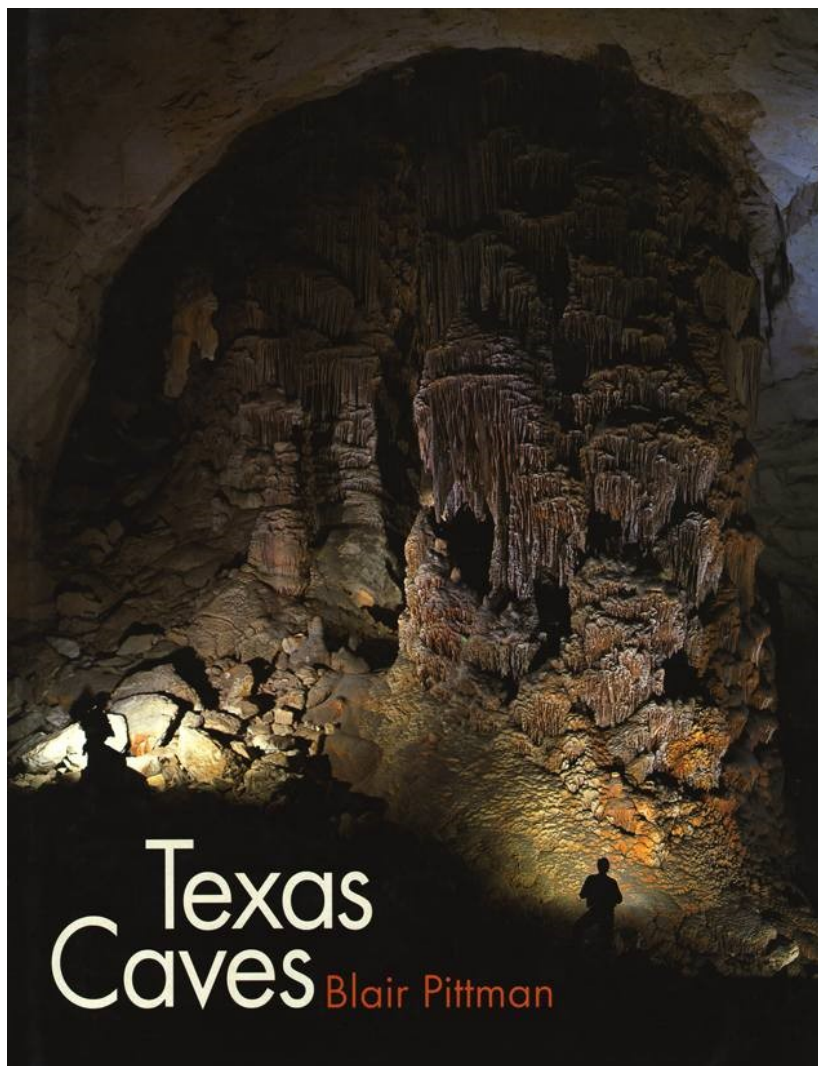
He was there at the Astrodome in 1974 when KTRK-TV anchor Dave Ward broke his leg, pelvis, and collarbone during a Houston media motocross event. For what it's worth it appears he won the race. The media races were ended the next year lest anyone else break any further bones.

Pittman was also on hand at serial killer Dean Corll's Pasadena house in 1973 as officials began looking for the bodies of his murder victims. Elmer Wayne Henley Jr., then just 17 years old, had placed a call to Pasadena police telling them had shot and killed 33-year-old Corll following a struggle.

A memorial service for Pittman will be held Saturday, Oct. 22 at the St. James Episcopal Church in Alpine.

Click through the slideshow above to see Pittman's work for the Houston Chronicle.





**Texas Caves**, Blair Pittman, 1999, Texas A&M University Press, 122 pp.  
Foreword by Francis E. Abernethy

Texas has about three thousand known, explored caves, ranging in size from small crawlways to huge caverns. Most of these caves, however, are generally restricted to exploration by trained, experienced cavers, geologists, and biologists.

*Texas Caves* introduces this seldom seen world, providing basic cave geology and biology, a description of the seven show caves that have been opened and developed for public visiting, and information on state speleological parks.

The engaging text as well as a hundred full-color and black-and-white photographs reveals the glories of Texas caves, “wild” as well as commercial, showing different types of cave formations, the creatures that live in them, and the people who explore them.

Caving experiences from cave photographer Blair Pittman, cave discoverer Orion Knox, cave developer Jack Burch, and commercial cave manager Jim Brummett bring to life places that house the hidden beauties that lie beneath the surface of Texas.

Texas Speleological Association Chair Gill Ediger adds what it means to be a caver and how cavers, cave owners, and the general public are all involved in the conservation of cave resources.

*Texas Caves* offers a deeper understanding of the underground world of caves and an invitation those who wish to explore another dimension of Texas’ natural history.