

Michael Andrew Swinford

25 January 1951–12 November 2011

Mike Swinford was born in Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas, and lived in the Haltom City area of Fort Worth and in Azle, Parker County. He was 21 when he married Sheila Darnell Bles, 18. Their children are Christina Swinford and Marney Andrew Swinford (deceased).

Mike was a good friend of Dale Ellison, and they were childhood schoolmates. They were members of the Maverick Grotto along with Butch Fralia and many others.



“Mikey” Swinford

Dale Ellison

Certainly “Mikey” was one of a kind. I have hundreds of stories about our ventures together. In his later years, he was feeling all the injuries he had over his lifetime. He was working high steel on the third floor, and a guy pushed him off and he landed on a concrete floor. That hurt him and the doctor wanted to amputate one of his hands, but Sheila refused, telling the doctor that he didn’t know him. I think he broke his arms on about 4 occasions. He dug the post holes and installed a metal fence around my backyard while he had one arm in a cast. I was about to be discharged from the Marines and Mike drove to Georgia a few months before I could leave. Mikey lived the swamps in a small tent. In one incident I was working part time as a short-order cook at a drive-in cafe. Mikey would hang around, flirt with the girls and bus tables. On time someone yelled at me in the kitchen that Mikey was in a fight. I asked how many there were and their reply was “seven”. I turned off everything and grabbed a big butcher knife and headed to the front. I saw Mikey kicking one cowboy in the ass as he was trying to jump into the back of a pickup already loaded with the other 6 guys. I heard Mike tell them that they were welcome to come back if they could behave themselves! Classic Mike. I have many stories like that. I very much miss him.

Mike had two brothers, Keith and Shane. Mike was the oldest. His wife, Sheila Darnell Bles, was born on 18 January 1954, and died 6 January 2015. The only survivor of that family is daughter Christina Swinford, born 19 December 1972. His son, Marney Andrew Swinford, was born 12 January 1974 and is deceased.

Butch Fralia

Mike's claim to fame was building a trailer-mounted hot tub with propane heating. Its first outing was at a park on the Paluxy River in Glen Rose. The deputy sheriff came by and all the naked cavers ran and hid behind trees while I talked to the deputy. He said he was glad to see a higher class of people using the park than usual. Said he'd be patrolling during the night to make sure none of the local undesirables came by and bothered us.

Mike was a good guy and crazy as hell. His dad died and left him a BBQ joint in North Fort Worth. We had meetings there for a while. He attended several Texas Caver Reunions with Dale.

Jay Jorden

I recall that Mike was that he was a small business owner who was also employed as a welder, living in the Haltom City area of Fort Worth. He was a member of the Maverick Grotto, a former NSS-chartered IO in Fort Worth, and went caving with Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia and others.

Mike was associated with the Maverick Grotto. During the heyday of this defunct club, Mike welded together a hot tub on top of a trailer constructed from a pickup bed. This he towed to a number of caver events, including the Rites of Spring held with the Maverick and Cowtown clubs and the Dallas-Fort Worth Grotto along the Brazos and Paluxy Rivers, southwest of Fort Worth. Mike went caving with the Mavs at Colorado Bend State Park and on other grotto trips.

Mike had a big heart. When the Mavs had trouble with their programs at club meetings, he graciously purchased a new TV set and DVD player. When the club needed a place to meet, Mike offered his barbecue joint where members could have private meetings (they had been meeting at another BBQ restaurant).

Survived by his wife, Sheila, Mike also had a son and daughter plus three sisters and a brother. Sheila died in 2015. Son Marney Andrew had four boys while daughter Christina had one son.

Bill Steele

Thanks, Jay. I went to one Maverick Grotto meeting at his BBQ place several years ago.

Contributors: William R. Elliott, Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia, Jay Jorden, Bill Steele. 21 January 2020.



Mike (left) and son Marney building the hot tub.



The portable hot tub arriving at the Paluxy River.



The Maverick Grotto hot-tubbing on the Paluxy River.