



Below, ca 1944—  
James with his  
daddy, Orville.



## chapter 5.4

### JAMES WENDELL BROWN

Kiree & Orville's fourth-born (b. 1942 - d. 1966)

*Written by his brother, Kenneth Brown*

#### **1942–1957—James's Douglas County Missouri years:**

James Wendell Brown was the first boy born to Kiree (Hartley) and Orville Brown after having three daughters, Evelyn, Jana Lea and Iris Ann.

James' birthday, December 2, 1942, came about two months after a son, Raymond, was born to Kiree's brother, Eldon and his wife Verda. He was about 18 months older than his cousin, Beverly Sue Luttrell, and two years older than his brother, Kenneth.

James' mother, Kiree, kept two baby books for him which survive—one a gift from Grandpa Ira Hartley's sister, Viola "Ola (Hartley) Adams and the other from a best friend, Leota (Estes) Smith. According to these books, James came into this world at 3:30 a.m. at the family home south of Ava, MO. The gift list of a baby shower given by his Aunt Rosie Davis included a blanket from his Grandma (Mintia) Hartley and a baby gown from his newlywed Aunt Levon (Hartley) Luttrell. On that first Christmas, three-week-old James was taken to visit Grandma Hartley at her farm out at Williams Hollow.

In his baby books, Kiree listed James' health for the first year as "poor" with the following remark: "... he has little use of left hand and arm since birth. He's beginning to use it some. March 1944. Left leg has been weak." Eventually James was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and, at some point, started having epileptic seizures which continued periodically throughout his life.

When James was around four, his father's health began to fail and the family moved into town (Ava). A house was purchased just east of the Ava High School. Orville, James' dad, died of tuberculosis when James was six. Not long afterward, Kiree took James to St.

Luke's Hospital in Kansas City for treatment. When he returned to Ava where the family lived mostly until 1957, James told Kenneth: "From the hospital window, the cars looked like little play cars down below." Also he said he was given ice cream to eat every day—made Kenneth want to go there!

James went to the first grade at Ava in the 1950-51 school year. But the next two school years, he attended a one-room school, Dogwood, in northwest Douglas County, MO, where his mother was the teacher. This school was close to Grandma Hartley's place on Williams Hollow. Grandma had two other houses on what was called the "upper forty." James's mom left the Ava house vacant and moved the family into the larger one of Grandma Hartley's extra houses that had been used earlier by Kiree's brother, Eldon.

By James' fourth grade, his sister, Iris Ann, was to start high school; so the family moved back to the family home at Ava. Kiree took a job at a one-room school closer to Ava—Hunter School just east of Ava. James had become a robust but gentle boy whom his classmates remember even to this day. One remembered the teacher telling James' classmates how to react when James might have a seizure. Another remembered that he could hit the baseball farther than anyone in class in spite of his handicap.

All the family enjoyed the years in Ava across from the school. Iris Ann was popular and all the high school girls and boys dropped in at the Brown house almost daily. Grandma Hartley sold the Williams Hollow farm and bought a house in Ava on the west side of the high school in 1952. James could stand on the family porch and look across the school grounds to Grandma Hartley's house (and vice-versa).

James' seizures made school difficult—they almost worked as an eraser in James's mind. But the teachers worked with him steadily during this "pre-special-education" era. As Kenneth recalls James was treated well with little taunting or hazing because of his handicap. Yet he dreaded Saturdays.

A boy from the country (first name Wendell) would come

### James's Life in a Nutshell

- Born 1942 in Douglas County MO
- Attended schools in Douglas County, MO and Wichita, KS
- Graduated from Wichita (KS) South High School in 1962
- Diagnosed with lymphoma in 1965
- Died of the cancer in 1966
- Buried in the Ava MO Cemetery next to his parents



James on the porch of the Brown home in Ava -- ca 1956.



1949—James (left) and Kenneth watching the sow eat back behind the family’s house in Ava.

1958 — James with Grandma Hartley at his home on south Seneca near 47th St. in Wichita



to town and if he crossed paths with James, he would harass him. Interestingly, once that boy became a teenager, he had a car accident that left him a paraplegic. That boy remained a recluse ever after, and one has to wonder if it was because of his own attitudes toward the disabled that caused him to close himself in.

**1957-1966—James’s Wichita Years**

In the spring of 1957 all the county’s one-room schools were consolidated with the Ava schools. James’s mom, Kiree, was out of a job, and Iris Ann had graduated from high school and about to be married. James and Kenneth both had finished the seventh grade.

All of Kiree’s siblings were in Wichita along with her oldest daughter, Evelyn. Kiree had enough education to qualify to teach in the Sedgwick County, KS, school system. So in the summer of 1957, Mom packed up James and Kenneth into her 1946 Chevy coupe and she moved to Wichita where she lived in Evelyn’s garage for a short while. Kiree got a job teaching first grade at Enterprise School on south Seneca, and she and the boys moved into a three-room house at the back of a trailer court on MacArthur Road. James and Kenneth both entered the eighth grade at Enterprise. For the next two years, Kiree kept moving into other temporary housing causing James and Kenneth to go to Derby (KS) High School for the first semester of their freshman year (with cousin, Ray Hartley), then to Wichita Truesdell Junior High School for the second semester.

Wichita South High School opened in 1959, and James and Kenneth were part of its first sophomore class. By this time, Kiree found a nice little house on South Seneca a couple of blocks south of Seneca Square. It was a nice place, and James and Kenneth could walk to and from South High School. James continued to struggle but teachers worked with him,



1962 Graduation picture -- Wichita South High School



and he was able to graduate with Kenneth in the South High Class of 1962.

During the summer following graduation, Kiree had a serious car accident that sidelined her (and the family) for the next year. Eventually she recuperated, and with a modest settlement from the accident was able to buy a little house over on McComas Street in west Wichita. While living there in 1965, James was diagnosed with lymphoma (cancer of the lymph glands). He was in the Wichita Osteopathic Hospital for months and died there on September 20, 1966, at the age of 23. He died a very painful death because of restrictions on the use of morphine and other pain killers.

James never caught a break but he coped with his condition as well as anyone could. He became a devout Christian as a teenager and was baptized in October, 1961, at the Faith Baptist Church in south Wichita.

Below, 1961—James was a good singer and was in the Wichita South High Choir. At left, James is somewhere in this combined schools choir at the old Wichita Forum.



Above, ca 1960-62, James and Kenneth's basketball goal next to their mom's rental house (in background) on South Seneca in Wichita. Probably was the last place the two of them shot baskets together with Uncle Lawrence's boys and other cousins and friends