

## Pass It On®...

### **The Most Recognizable Voice in the World.**

*James Earl Jones put away the villainous Darth Vader to enjoy a character more like his real self: the kind Mr. Mertle in Sandlot.*

The young James Earl Jones suffered from a debilitating stutter. Shy and self-conscious, young James was encouraged to try theater as a way to overcome it. Perhaps the teacher saw his future potential, but more likely, she saw a boy who needed a little confidence.

Jones worked hard as an actor, and the theater enhanced his social skills and ability to communicate. It even gave him a sense of direction. But he put it on hold to join the military. With a sense of duty to his country, he became a ranger and instructor in cold-weather and mountain training, achieving the rank of lieutenant.

He then returned to New York and began a prolific stage and film career. He was one of a handful of actors to win Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards, an accomplishment known as the EGOT. He received the National Medal of Arts and was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame.

Of all his brilliant work on stage and screen, James Earl Jones is most remembered for his role as Darth Vader, the father-gone-bad villain who destroys worlds and is finally overcome by his own son. The battle for good over evil in “Star Wars” reflects a universal experience in all our lives. It reminds us of the power one individual can wield when motivated by the virtues of love, forgiveness, honor and fairness for all. James Earl Jones reveled in the role, seeing the villainy as a warning to audiences. Stories of good and bad help form our young selves, help us see the consequences of bad decisions and the triumph of good ones.

When the icon of multiple generations showed up on the tiny set of “Sandlot,” the young actors were understandably in awe and intimidated. Patrick Renna, who played Ham, remembers that day well.

“He’s larger than life, and he’s famous — James Earl Jones. We’re all, like, speechless, and he was so cool.”

A huge “Star Wars” fan, Renna remembers that when he got the opportunity to meet Jones, “None of us had the guts to talk to him. Marty York goes up to him and goes, ‘Sir, I hear you’re James Earl Jones. You were Darth Vader in “Star Wars”?’ And he looked at him and said, ‘No. I am your father!’”

The moment was magical for the boys. And when the time came for his scene with them, they got to see the character Jones most embodied: Mr. Mertle. He was kind; his face lit up when talking to them. He loved sharing baseball with them in that sacred father-son rite. Perhaps, on that sunny afternoon when nostalgic boyhoods were being replayed, Jones was remembering his own childhood, back when he was a shuffling, self-conscious pre-teenager looking for a safe place to gather a little courage and receive a few kind words from a mentor, a handful of encouragement that can fill your sails and take you to places far beyond the universe you live in.

Of all the recognizable voices out there, the ones we should listen to are those away from the microphone, off-screen, whispering that we can be more. These are the same voices we should raise ourselves.

### **Lift your Voice...[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)**

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

*The Foundation for a Better Life® promotes positive values to live by and pass along to others.*

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