



James Kenny

October 12, 1933 - February 3, 2026

James Kenny, an educator, author, clinical psychologist, children and family advocate, noted storyteller, father of 12, and longtime resident of Rensselaer, IN., died peacefully in his sleep on February 3, in Indianapolis, with his wife of 69 years, Mary, and three of their children by his side. He was 92 years old.

James Andrew Kenny was born on October 12, 1933, in Chicago, the first of three children born to James Valentine Kenny and Anne (Filz) Kenny. A brother, John, arrived next, followed by a sister, Mary Ann.

He married Mary Jane Nelsen on January 26, 1957. "I married him because I thought he was smart, funny, and that life would never be boring," she would later say. Although his professional life began in Chicago and included stops in Florida, Germany, Bloomington, IN., and Indianapolis, and in his personal life, he visited dozens of countries around the world, Rensselaer was considered home. In his 2017 memoir, I'm

a Lucky Guy,
he explained, “Once we decided to leave the military, we began to think that a small
Midwestern town would be the ideal place to raise a large family.”
He received offers in Iowa and Illinois, but selected St. Joseph’s because he liked the town
of Rensselaer, it was closer to Chicago, but mostly, he often joked, “because the Bears held
training camp there in the summer.” He was a lifelong Chicago Bears fan, having gone to
games at Soldier Field since he was 10 years old, and his best friend’s father was the team
physician. Two weeks before he passed, he watched from his bed as the Bears beat the
Packers in the playoffs, with his son Mike by his side.

In Kenny’s professional life, he had many job titles over a long career—social worker,
professor, psychologist, therapist, author, researcher, foster parent, swim coach, expert
witness, columnist, public speaker—and each one played a role in shaping his one true
career, as an advocate for families and children.
He also had an extensive writing career. For more than 20 years, he co-wrote, with Mary, a
weekly column called “Family Talk” for the Catholic News Service. He authored or co-
authored dozens of magazine articles and published six books, the most popular being
Caring for Your Aging Parent and Whole Life Parenting.

Jim and Mary left Rensselaer in late 2005 and moved into an apartment along the canals in downtown Indianapolis, to be closer to their children and grandchildren. While there, he continued as an advocate, co-writing legislation that led to an Open Adoption Law in the State of Indiana, as well as consulting on dozens and dozens of cases involving foster children and families.

While his professional interests and commitments were many, his children will remember him as the dad who had summers and holidays off, the little league manager and coach of the summer swim team. The dad who took them on vacations in the school bus, setting up camp at Turkey Run, Raccoon Lake or Brown County State Park.

The dad who read them stories, gave them books to read, and taught them to drive. Dad, the storyteller, who secretly wanted to be a comedian. A master of the ghost story around a campfire, from Old Man Jacobs, who lived at the bottom of Lake Lincoln, to the Giant Turtle in the Pond, who lived in the front yard of Pondview. They'll remember the dad who taught them to be kind, the dad who was always there.

James A. Kenny is survived by his wife, Mary; his children, Joe (Kim) Kenny of Greenwood

IN, Kit (Julia) Kenny of Baton Rouge LA, Chaz Kenny of Bloomington, IN,
Mike (Brenda)
Kenny of Indianapolis IN, John Paul (Gretchen) Kenny of Bloomington, IN,
Tom Kenny of
Oakland CA, Pete Kenny of Indianapolis IN, Annie (Rick) Mulcahy of
Bloomington, IN, Bitta
(Scot) DeWees of Bloomington, IN, Bob (Diane) Kenny of Richmond, IN,
Sharon Kenny of
Napa Valley, CA, Matt Kenny of South Bend, IN; 30 grandchildren; four great-
grandchildren,
and his sister Mary Ann Kenny.

A Celebration of Life is being planned on Saturday, June 13, 2026. It will be
held at Primo

Conference Center in Indianapolis from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Address: 2615 National Ave. Indianapolis, IN 46227

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

JUN 13. 1:00 AM - 4:00 AM (ET)

Primo Conference Center
2615 National Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46227

Tribute Wall

JB

“ *Judy Burvan lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



Judy Burvan - June 08 at 03:58 PM

JR

“ *He was such a kind man. Helped me at a difficult time in my life. He gave me the book The Velveteen Rabbit, such a wise man.*

Janice Henning Roebuck - March 22 at 10:23 PM

JS

“ *Judie Steiner lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



Judie Steiner - March 03 at 03:45 PM

ML

“ *Marilyn Lowry lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



Marilyn lowry - February 28 at 12:28 PM

GS

“ Gary Sheffer lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Gary Sheffer - February 28 at 10:31 AM



“ My thoughts,prayers, sympathies and condolences go out to the entire Kenny family. I am eternally grateful for the impact this man and his family had on me as a human being: they made me better . I am so sorry to hear of his passing . Godspeed and thank you.

David Brinley - February 27 at 11:41 AM

DE

“ A wonderful man! I'm sorry for your loss, but I'm grateful that you have many fond, funny memories that will stay with you forever.



Deb (Rose) Ellis - February 27 at 08:21 AM

RW

“ Regina Warfel lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Regina Warfel - February 27 at 08:16 AM

JB

“ *Judy Burvan lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



Judy Burvan - February 26 at 07:43 PM

MF

“ *Mike Filson lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



mike Filson - February 26 at 07:13 PM

JS

“ *Jim Steiner lit a candle in memory of James Kenny*



Jim Steiner - February 26 at 05:56 PM

PW

“ *Jim was our friend. He and Mary gave of themselves in so many ways, even opening their home to our families when we married over thirty years ago. He was a kind, gentle, and compassionate man. Thank you for everything you did for us, Jim. Our deepest condolences to all the Kennys. Peter and Jody Watkins*

Peter and Jody Watkins - February 26 at 05:56 PM

GK

“ Greg And Kim Kaufman lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Greg and kim Kaufman - February 26 at 03:02 PM

DW

“ Dave And Becky Ulm Walter lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Dave and Becky Ulm Walter - February 26 at 01:30 PM

CS

“ Cindy Sheffer lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Cindy Sheffer - February 26 at 01:13 PM



“ Rebecca Chastain lit a candle in memory of James Kenny



Rebecca Chastain - February 26 at 11:47 AM