

HONORABLE JUDGE JAMES R. KELLEY



The Honorable Judge James R. Kelley passed away peacefully on November 1, 2023. He was born on May 31, 1931, the youngest of nine children to U.S. Congressman Augustine B. Kelley and Ella Bates Kelley.

Judge Kelley loved and lived life fully and always as the consummate gentleman. He was forever energized by others, and perhaps especially fond of those who found home in Western Pennsylvania. He found

endless thrills in the conversations that were offered through each new or old acquaintance. Nothing engaged him more than a robust exchange of ideas.

The Judge served on the Commonwealth Court from June 1990 until December 2011. During his 20-year tenure, Judge Kelley viewed his role, and that of the Court as the "watchdog over the government."

Prior to his tenure on the bench, he engaged in the general practice of law in Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia for over twenty-five years. He served as Westmoreland County Commissioner (1968-1974), and as a Pennsylvania State Senator (1974-1988). He also served as a member of the Democratic National Committee from 1972-1980. Throughout his life, Judge Kelley was active in numerous and various charitable and civic organizations.

During his tenure on the bench, the Judge was privileged to have many with whom he worked that he loved and respected. He believed passionately that his staff did not work "for" him but "with" him.

When hiring, the Judge preferred applicants who were of "delayed vocation" to the law. He valued that someone with deeper life experiences could offer a more insightful perspective when contemplating a legal issue. His respect and appreciation for his colleagues was unflinching. Upon his retirement from the bench, he sent a letter to every employee on the Court thanking them for their service.

Judge Kelley answered to many names: Jim, Jimmy, Dad, Opa, Senator, Commissioner, Uncle Jim, and 'Big Rich Handsome Uncle Jim'. Whatever the title, he was delighted to respond. And whatever the venue, he was never difficult to identify. You could easily find him sporting a 'Bowler' in the Fall and the Winter seasons and a 'Straw Boater', along with his seersucker suits in the summer months. And if unable to spot him with his signature gear in a crowd, it was always a sure bet that he was never far from the love of his life: his wife, Patricia Phillips Kelley. And if all else failed, if music was heard he would most certainly be holding Patricia closely on the dance floor.

Raised principally in the Kenwood section of Chevy Chase, Maryland, he graduated from Georgetown Preparatory School and thereafter St. Vincent College and later from Catholic University for his Juris Doctorate. He was admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Courts of the District of Columbia, and the Federal and State Courts of Pennsylvania. Always passionate about education, and the belief that education should be available to each and every individual, he was a powerful early supporter behind the establishment of the Westmoreland Community College 53 years ago. At a recent celebration at the College, the Judge shared the lasting impact of his involvement with the creation of the Community College and commented: "Probably of all the decisions I've participated in, the most gratifying was the community college. I can't tell you how much it means to me to see all the people who have gone through there and gone on to do so much. It's nice, to know I had a hand in this."

Judge Kelley is predeceased by his wife, Patricia; and his daughter, Hilary Kelley Querry. Additionally predeceasing him are his five brothers (Robert Vincent Kelley, Augustine Regis Kelley, Colonel Paul Aloysius Kelley, Jay Hilary Kelley, and Richard Bates Kelley); and three sisters (Marcella Brown, Therese Leisy and Kathleen Schellenberg). Each of whom he adored and loved dearly. He is survived by five children (Melissa Kelley, Brendan Kelley (Natalie), Colin Kelley (Bonnie), Alicia McConnell (Kevin) and Justin Kelley); six grandchildren (Caroline Willig (Andrew), Margot Kelley, Grace Brotsker, Hazel Morgan, Aidan McConnell and Mairead McConnell); one great-grandchild (Murphy Hope Willig), 66 nieces and nephews; numerous great-nephews; and nieces; and multiple god-children.

He enjoyed sharing with anyone willing to listen that he was born an 'Irish Catholic Democrat'. In truth, after the Church his wife and family came first. He loved engaging in lively dialogue with his children, his staff, or his law clerks, and with his dearest friend of 50-plus years, Arthur J. Boyle, Sr. Later in life, he found additional delight in baiting his grandchildren into political or social discussions. They stood steadfast, however, in their positions which amused and thrilled him further.

He found joy every day. Humor and wit were never lacking. He carried that twinkle in his eye throughout life. His joy was contagious to every environment and setting in which he participated. He didn't know the meaning of selfishness. To him, giving back to society and service to the larger community was what drove and inspired him. His energy diminished marginally later in life, but not his mind. He was forever aware of politics and the economy. Nothing dampened his thirst to learn and be educated on current events and history. To the end, he steadfastly absorbed the actions, activities, and achievements of his children and grandchildren. He loved, was loved, and will be missed by many.

All grammatical errors contained herein were inserted intentionally in the loving memory of Daddy and Opa—who took infinite pleasure in finding every available opportunity to correct and argue with us the grammatical rules of the English language.

Family and friends will be received on Sunday, November 5, 2023, from 1 to 3 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. at **KEPPLE-GRAFT FUNERAL HOME**, 524 North Main Street, Greensburg. A Funeral Mass for The Honorable Judge James R. Kelley will be held at 10 a.m. on Monday, November 6, 2023, at St. Vincent Basilica, 300 Fraser Purchase Road, Latrobe. Everyone is asked to go directly to the church. Private interment will follow at the Greensburg Catholic Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to St. Vincent College or the Westmoreland County Community College. To offer online condolences, please visit www.kepplegraft.com.

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