

In Memoriam
Dr. Jack Randolph Kirby
April 16, 1929 – November 29, 2016

Dr. Jack Kirby, 87, associate professor emeritus of Education, passed away November 29, 2016 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was born in Chicago on April 16, 1929, to Harry W. and Virginia L. (Harrell) Kirby, one of four children. He is survived by his great-niece Sheila Davis, great-great nephew William Davis, Jr., and several cousins, all living in Chicago.

Jack attended school in Chicago and graduated from Chicago Teacher's College in 1951. He served two years in the Army after being drafted, completing his tour of duty in August 1954 at the rank of corporal. By 1965 Jack had earned two masters degrees from DePaul University, one in Educational Administration and the other in History while also keeping busy teaching elementary, secondary, adult, and evening school students in Chicago. In 1969 he earned a Ph.D. in History & Philosophy of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana. That same year, Jack moved to Fort Wayne and took a position teaching Educational Foundations at IPFW. Dr. Kirby taught at IPFW 1969 – 1989, retiring on January 1, 1990. Upon his retirement, Jack became an active supporter of and sometimes participant in productions of the Fort Wayne Arts community. He served on the IPFW School of Visual & Performing Arts Advisory Council, the Allen County History Book Advisory Council, and as an ex-officio member of the Arena Dinner Theatre Board of Directors.

Colleagues remember Dr. Kirby as a disciplined and caring teacher who focused most of his energy on his course preparation and students while at IPFW. After his retirement Jack could be seen at the Allen County Public Library, where he kept busy researching the history of Fort Wayne and Allen County schools. Recently, Dr. Kirby established two scholarships for IPFW students — the J. Randolph Kirby Scholarship in Educational Studies to commemorate IPFW's 50th Anniversary, and the Kirby Family Memorial Endowed Scholarship in Music Education.

As I was preparing this Memorial Resolution, several colleagues shared their memories of Dr. Jack Kirby by email. Dr. Lowell Madden, Professor Emeritus of Education, writes:

Dr. Jack Kirby was a wonderful man and educator. His colleagues highly valued him and his students greatly respected and admired him. He spent many, many hours at the Helmke Library and the downtown Allen County Public Library. His research yielded numerous historical documents which were both valuable and most interesting. Dr. Kirby had a very pleasant personality which he often accented with a smile and chuckle. [His] Leaving Chicago to teach in Fort Wayne was its great loss but IPFW's most fortunate gain. Over the many years, we have been blessed by his presence. Dr. Kirby, thank you for being you. Rest in peace.

Tammy Davich, Department of Public Policy secretary and former School of Education secretary, writes: "... I remember him as a very kind person who cared about student learning."

Dr. Carolyn Carter, former Education faculty member at IPFW, writes: I remember him as a humane educator whose wit augmented his scholarship.” Dolly Szymanski, former IPFW Student Teaching Supervisor, writes: “I saw Jack at ... concerts. He was always friendly and addressed me by name, even though I did not know him well.” Dr. Jerry Rodriguez, Associate Professor Emeritus of Education, writes he and Dr. Kirby remained friends for life and spoke by telephone regularly. Dr. Rodriguez adds: “Jack was a philosopher, historian, poet, playwright, actor, philanthropist, colleague and loyal friend. We are all better off for having known him.”

Linda Balthaser, Assistant Dean Emerita of the School of Arts & Sciences, writes:

I remember Jack as a highly regarded IPFW colleague.... I also remember Jack’s interest in community events — especially in the arts — and the frequency with which we saw him when we attended Philharmonic concerts.... While downtown, it was not unusual to see Jack riding his bicycle even before doing so was such a popular activity. Jack’s continuing interest in community service was also apparent in his activities as a volunteer after his retirement.

Dr. Kathleen Murphey, Professor Emerita of Education, writes:

Jack Kirby was a lovely man.... Since I ended up teaching The History of American Education [when I was hired after Jack’s retirement], I sort of followed in his footsteps. Students came up to me ... saying how much they enjoyed Dr. Kirby’s classes. He had his lectures all written out and delivered them with wit, a gentle sense of humor, and ready warm smile that he was so admired for.

Since I was studying desegregation, I asked him about his views. He was very interested in desegregation and had, of course, watched it play out in Fort Wayne.... He was also very interested in his own situation of being the only Black faculty member at IPFW for many years. He was, however, very proud to be a member of the IPFW family. It was truly *his* family and all those who knew him thought that he epitomized the family spirit of those early years on the IPFW campus. He was a gentleman, a scholar, and a beloved faculty member.

Dr. Kirby’s friends and neighbors prepared a Eulogy to share at his memorial service, including such comments as:

He purchased his home in West Central in 1972 and lived there for the rest of his life. He cherished the home, known as the Dillon/Keegan House, and he extensively researched its origins, modifications, owners, and occupants.... His garden was on the West Central Historic Home and Garden Tour in 2009 ... he called his unique back yard with its artistic objects, enclosures and well-defined spaces his “Secret Garden.” He installed a plaque ... to commemorate [the house’s] historic character, and he maintained a park bench there as well. Typical of his generous nature, he wanted to make sure that a tired walker could sit down and rest.

Jack was cheerfully unconventional, and he lived life as it made sense to him. He bicycled everywhere, including to and from his position at IPFW. At one point, Jack had a 10-year-old car with only 3,200 miles on it. Well into his 80s, Jack bicycled almost every day, including during the winter....

Jack enjoyed local theatrical productions and appeared in several shows. He was in "The Odd Couple" and "Arsenic and Old Lace" at Arena Dinner Theater, "Little Foxes" at First Presbyterian Theater, "To Kill a Mockingbird" at St. Francis University, and "King Lear" at IPFW.... He played very much against character in a starring role in "The Exonerated" at IPFW ... a powerful play made even more powerful by Jack's strident and commanding performance. It also provided the unique experience of hearing Jack curse....

Jack loved music ... and enjoyed many Philharmonic performances over the years.... One of his favorite songs was "When I'm Gone" by Phil Ochs, and Jack took its message to heart and lived life to the fullest.

On a personal note, I remember Dr. Jack Kirby for his love of teaching Education majors and for his sense of humor. Whenever we ran into each other in the community after his retirement, Jack always shared a smile and a witty remark designed to bring a smile to others' faces. He will be missed.

Submitted by M. Gail Hickey, December 14, 2016