

James Kowalick

November 15, 1937 – December 27, 2023

Funeral Service
Minister: Guy

January 13, 2024

Minister's Introduction:

Welcome friends. And a special welcome to Kathleen's brother Bill and Bill's wife Celeste, and to Kathleen's son Michael, and also to James' grandchildren Ean, Finlay, and Phoebe, who are with us today.

We have come together to honor the life of our beloved friend, James Kowalick.

We are here to bear witness to the mortal man who moved through this lifetime, playing the role of his name, and to the immortal soul which has transcended that role.

James brought numerous talents and abilities to the school, generously sharing his knowledge, experience, and being in many areas. Yet the picture of him that remains vivid for so many of us is that of the angular figure at the piano in the Galleria, providing the soundtrack for our gatherings, and swaying slightly as the music—sunny and joyful—flowed effortlessly from his fingertips.

Now let us stand and remember James in silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank you.

The physical body is designed to produce presence and being, and then to be laid aside. Walt Whitman said, "The best of me then, when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly preparing." James takes with him the presence that he gained in this lifetime, and his connection with Influence C. Our teacher has said, "That is all we can take with us, but it is more than enough."

[Reading: From the writings of C. S. Lewis]
(Reader: Robert M.)

From C.S. Lewis:

The Past is frozen and no longer flows, and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays.

We do not want merely to see beauty—we want something else, which can hardly be put into words: to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

[Music: Pachelbel, “Canon in D”]
(Musicians: Finlay, piano)

[Eulogy: Nicole]

James lived a fascinating and full life with joy and exuberance. He was born in a small town in the Appalachian Mountains – Ringtown, Pennsylvania – on November 15, 1937 and enjoyed a carefree childhood surrounded by family and exploring the outdoors.

He had a keen intelligence and irrepressible curiosity. He excelled in school and graduated at the top of his high school class of 23 students. His father encouraged him to attend Lehigh University where he received a full scholarship to study mining engineering. When he realized that he didn't enjoy mining engineering, he forfeited his scholarship to instead study chemical engineering. After college he was hired as a civilian contractor at a military base and began his career as an inventor. He received many patents for his designs and enjoyed getting to play with explosives and visit test sites. But he hated going to conferences and when he was promoted to management where he would no longer be creative, he resigned.

While he always made sure that he was providing for his family, he held a standard that he would not do something he disliked – he would either switch to something new or find a way to make what he had to do more interesting. A classic example was his approach to home repair. When the spring on the door from our home into the garage broke, Kathleen asked him to fix it. All that was needed was to go to the hardware store, buy a new spring, and attach it to the door and wall, so the door would slowly close by itself after being opened. But that wasn't interesting to James. Instead, he attached a series of eye bolts along the top of the door and down the wall, and tied a string to the farthest eye bolt, threaded it through all the holes and tied it onto the handle of a 1-gallon water jug. When the door was opened, the jug would raise up along the wall, and then the weight of it would slowly close the door as it lowered back down. It worked, it amused him, and was a staple in our house for many years.

If he couldn't get around something, then he faced it head on. When his fear of public speaking became an impediment to his burgeoning consulting career, he joined Toastmasters and not only conquered his fear, but became a gifted speaker and performer.

When he encountered the Taguchi Method for improving products and processes, he had an instant affinity for it, as improving his own condition and projects was already his way of life. The method just gave him a systematic way of approaching it.

When James became enamored with a new subject, he fully immersed himself. He was a voracious reader and would sit for hours reading and absorbing as many books as he could on the subject. Then he had to try it out for himself. I came back from school one day shortly after he returned from his first trip to Japan to learning Taguchi to find him in the kitchen baking cookies - hundreds of cookies. He was trying to find the optimal cookie recipe using the technique. And then once he fully understood and felt he had mastery of a subject he *had* to share it. He was passionate about knowledge and discovery and the culmination was always a distillation of and a passing on of knowledge.

James began writing vignettes of his autobiography over the last few years and would text them to me. In one, he described how his lifelong connection to music started when he was 3 or 4 years old. He was with his mother in a “Five and Dime” store when he spotted a small toy xylophone and asked her to buy it for him and wouldn’t take no for an answer. In the car on the way home, he began playing “Mary had a little lamb” without any instruction or effort, a song he had only heard other children sing. His parents recognized his natural talent and got a piano for their home and hired a piano teacher for him. James adamantly refused the lessons, angering his father. But his mother’s younger sister, Betty, who was a nightclub singer and knew all the popular songs of the day, stepped in and took him under her wing. She would come and sing popular love songs and James (seemingly automatically) would provide the background music. He would go on to play at school assemblies and, as a young teenager, with an adult ensemble at the local firehouse dances on weekends.

Once he moved to Apollo in the 1990s, he began playing at the Galleria for the Friday evening receptions, adapting his selections to the preferred genre of the time. (Although even in the classical phase he would still sneak in popular songs that he knew Robert enjoyed). James had an amazing repertoire of every song he had ever encountered – once he had played a song, he knew it forever. One evening, Robert kept sending requests over to the piano until he found a singer that James was not familiar with. By the next week, James had added several of that singer’s songs to his repertoire.

Amazingly, James didn’t really know how to read music. While he could work out the notes on musical scores and sometimes consulted them to get a certain sequence of notes correct, he could never play something from sheet music that he hadn’t heard before. But once he heard something, he could reproduce it instantly. First, as he heard it, and then right afterwards, in any key, with his own embellishments. At home he would often play a song in multiple styles for pure enjoyment – he would make it jazzy, then island style, then bluesy.

While he applied the same dedication to learning music as other topics by seeking out and listening to new pieces and practicing, music was an area where his emotional center dominated and the melodies just poured out of his being as his whole body swayed to the music.

James continued to play for pre-dinner receptions and during dining on Saturday evenings for three decades up until the beginning of last month. Many students fondly remember James’ playing at the Galleria or at center events where James would sit at the piano, playing popular tunes and challenging the assembled group to name the song or sing the lyrics. He often accompanied Michael G. for performances and Michael wrote that “his warm, lively accompaniment made the pieces soar.” Patrick S. shared with James that his own mother played the piano and would play Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Song of India” for him when he was 6 or 7 years old and that he could never get enough of it. From that time on, James would play the song when he saw Patrick enter the Galleria. James’ piano playing was truly a gift that he generously contributed to Robert, the school, and fellow students. One student eloquently phrased it as “the love he gave through his music”.

James had an impish humor and mischievous sense of fun.

He loved to tell yarns, embellishing his own past adventures for the entertainment of his listeners. His grandchildren, Ean and Finlay, were convinced he was a spy for most of their childhood based on one encounter he had with the CIA in his early career as he never let the truth get in the way of a good story.

When I was a young girl driving with him in the car, he made a big production of turning the lights green on his command. To my embarrassment, my own children figured out how he did this much younger than I did. At the dinner table each night, he often introduced an intentional topic of conversation centered around a scientific discovery or how things work... or an elaborate set up for a prank. One memorable evening he gave a whole speech about telekinesis – moving objects with your mind – and then asked us all to concentrate very hard on a particular spoon on the table and try to move it. And it started sliding across the table! It was exhilarating! Only later did I learn he had a strong magnet under the table.

James and Kathleen's golden retrievers were fair game as well. He would dress them up in his old underwear, shirts, and ties and sit them up in chairs and they all had turns sitting on his lap at the piano as he used their paws to play.

Then there was safety man. Safety man was a poseable mannequin that was advertised to women drivers to put in the passenger seat of their car so they would feel safer. James bought safety man, but it wasn't for Kathleen's *safety*. He kept safety man in his office and dressed him in his own clothes and posed him with his back turned at his computer desk and then would delight in watching Kathleen come into the office and start talking to safety man for a while before realizing it wasn't James. For several years he would periodically change his outfit and put him around the house in different places to trick her. This was when James was already well into his 60s, or possibly 70s.

James shared his passions and values with his children. He took them to museums, classical concerts, ballets and fine dining even when they were very young. His eldest daughters, Karen and Laura are both appreciative of those early experiences and have fond memories of singing along to him playing John Denver and Hank Williams songs on the guitar and listening to him play classical music on the piano. His stepson, Michael, remembers the many ways he showed his concern for him through acts of service – taking him out to breakfast every morning before school and to sporting events, teaching him to ride a bike, and offering guidance when he was a young adult. James and his grandson, Finlay, who inherited his gift for playing by ear and improvising, spent many hours bonding over music.

James and Kathleen's 46-year marriage was a beautiful and beneficial partnership for them both. Kathleen provided James with a firm rooting from which to explore and grow. And while he benefited from her groundedness and sensibility, he also encouraged her to pursue her own desires and dreams and to drop her responsibilities in favor of enjoying the moment. They were most relaxed and happy when James would sit at the piano in the evenings and play his favorites songs – popular music from the early to mid 1900s – and Kathleen would be doing her own thing nearby and he would tell her about the songs, or quiz her about what it was called or who sang it, or sometimes even croon along to a love ballad, inserting her name.

James once told Kathleen that he remembered looking up at the stars one night when he was about 5 years old and wondering what it was all about. After what he referred to as a “nervous breakdown” in his 30s, his magnetic center strengthened and he began searching in earnest. He joined a great books reading group, did yoga, went to seances, churches, and B-influence groups. One evening in 1978 he watched a late-night TV show on which a longshoreman turned philosopher famed for having read many books was being interviewed. He said he always chose the thinnest books to read because longer books contained too many lies. The next day, James went to the library looking for the thinnest book he could find and discovered *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*. It contained a bookmark for the Fellowship. He joined the Philadelphia center shortly afterwards and became an active member. His valuation for the school was immediate and the School and the Work became the focus of his life.

Three years later Kathleen joined the School as well and they began looking for jobs in California to be closer to Apollo. They moved to southern California in 1984 and opened the Newport Beach center, with James serving as a center director. In the following years he was a traveling teacher to Japan, China and New Zealand and visited centers in Europe and Russia. At Apollo he served on the boards of several organizations and was an active participant in Apollo University. Over the years, many students sought out his counsel and he was always generous with his time - never expecting – or accepting – anything in return.

He gently supported the growth of my own magnetic center throughout my childhood and as a young adult. When I was backpacking through Europe, I would stop in at an internet café every few days to keep in touch with my parents. Each time there was a message from him waiting for me with a few verses of Walt Whitman’s Song of the Open Road.

James also quietly did the work out in life. He spoke about the Fourth Way, gave workbooks to those who seemed interested, and invited colleagues to meet him in Oregon House and visit the property. Anne McFarlane met James through a seminar he taught at CalTech and remembers vividly that there was something different about him. He gave her a workbook and continued to speak to her about the work for several years before she was ready to join the School.

Over his years in the school, James become softer and more emotional. While his intellectual focus shifted frequently, his valuation for the School remained consistent and he appeared never to have an interval in his Work. He was grateful for the extraordinary life the School had given him. In the last year, as his health declined, he accepted this part of his play without resentment and became more humble as he yielded to receiving help. Yet as his mobility diminished, his mental activity soared. He wrote prolifically, continued to learn, and set aims and goals for himself. In his last months, he often spoke of feeling joy even as his body suffered.

James admired so much in the world, and his admiration inspired others. He spoke well of almost everyone he encountered, finding some detail or skill to acknowledge. A student remembers, “In all the time I worked with James, I never heard him say a negative word about anyone or anything. He was generous with his time. He was lavish with his praise. And he loved both Robert and the School deeply.”

James was a master at creating an emotional state with dramatic silences between the notes as he played music. Now we are experiencing a more lasting silence as he moves on to a new realm to explore and delight in. Farewell. You are missed.

[Music: “Amazing Grace”]

(Musicians: Sharon S., soprano; Justin, piano)

[Reading: Walt Whitman, from “A Song of Joys”]

(Reader: Rebecca)

From Walt Whitman:

O TO make the most jubilant song!
Full of music—

O the joy of my spirit—it is uncaged—it darts like lightning!
It is not enough to have this globe or a certain time,
I will have thousands of globes and all time.

O the joy of my soul leaning pois'd on itself, receiving identity
through materials and loving them, observing characters and absorbing them,
My soul vibrated back to me from them, from sight, hearing, touch,
reason, articulation, comparison, memory, and the like,
The real life of my senses and flesh transcending my senses and flesh,
My body done with materials, my sight done with my material eyes,
Proved to me this day beyond cavil that it is not my material eyes
which finally see.

O to realize space!
The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,

For not life's joys alone I sing, repeating—the joy of death!
The beautiful touch of Death
My real body doubtless left to me for other spheres.

O to have life henceforth a poem of new joys!
To be a sailor of the world bound for all ports,
A ship itself, (see indeed these sails I spread to the sun and air,)
A swift and swelling ship full of joys.

Minister's Conclusion:

The death of a friend reminds us that we each inhabit a fragile and temporary vessel, from which presence emerges and connects us.

May James' consistent use of his talents to serve the school and his friends in practical ways inspire each of us to use our own essence to the fullest;
May his fresh and creative approach to his life help us to see each moment anew; and
May his ever-deepening valuation for his play, his family, and his fellow students renew our gratitude for what we have been given.

Dearest James, we thank thee.

Minister:

The task of this lifetime has been fulfilled. The role of James Kowalick is complete. The shell of the body falls away, and the soul that inhabited that body is released to continue its divine journey.

Candle Ceremony

With this candle to light our way, let us join in raising a glass to James and then depart, with a renewed and vivid appreciation for the gift of life allotted to each of us.

Minister: Please rise.

Funeral party leaves.

Participants gather for the toast.

[Toast: Michael G.]

At the Cemetery

Minister's Introduction:

Dear friends,

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May his fresh and creative approach to his life help us to see each moment anew; and

May his ever-deepening valuation for his play, his family, and his fellow students renew our gratitude for what we have been given.

Dearest James, we thank thee.

Here in this sacred place, we gather to release James to his, and our, true home. From earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Words fade in the face of a great reality. We, too, arrive at this simplest of moments—our friend James showing us the way.

Urn is placed in the grave.

Minister scatters rose petals into the grave.

The earth returns to the earth, and a divine spark returns to its divine source. The circle of life is now complete.

[Reading: Walt Whitman, "Joy, Shipmate, Joy"]

(Reader: Patrick)

Joy, shipmate, joy!

(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)

Our life is closed, our life begins,

The long, long anchorage we leave,

The ship is clear at last, she leaps!

She swiftly courses from the shore,

Joy, shipmate, joy!

Patrick scatters rose petals.

Participants scatter rose petals.