



Cary James Collins

October 23, 1947 - December 26, 2025

Cary J. Collins was described countless ways throughout his nearly fifty years practicing law, “a lion among lawyers,” “a terrific mentor,” and a “%&” by his adversaries, but all would agree he was a colorful character.

Born in Gary, Indiana on October 23, 1947, Cary was the oldest of six children and never let anyone forget it. His early years were spent at Holy Angels Grade School where he established life-long friendships.

Cary was always motivated. At ten years old, he became a paperboy for the Post Tribune. When he saved enough money, before he was old enough to drive, he bought his first car, “Peach Fuzz.” With “wheels,” he could deliver pizzas. Cary soon realized in a town like Gary, the only tips he would make were leftover pizzas, so he coerced his cousin Doug Fleming to refer him for his first “real” job. During the day he went to high school and worked nights and weekends selling women’s shoes at Lyttons. After graduating from Horace Mann in 1965, Cary spent one year at the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. Deciding it would take him too long to reach the top of the chain of command, he returned to Northwest Indiana, achieving a business degree at Indiana University Northwest while working full time at Midwest Steel. For a short time, he worked at Florsheim Shoes corporate, but when he began law school at John Marshall, he joined the Bursar’s Office at the University of Illinois Circle Campus.

In 1975, while still in law school, he met the love of his life, Sue O’Drobinak, on the slopes of a ski resort in Colorado. He knew immediately he had found

the person who understood him best and would be his emotional rock and support for half a century.

Cary's first job out of law school was at The Hill Firm in Chicago, but again, if Cary wasn't in charge, something would have to change. So, after a short foray with another law office in downtown Chicago, he opened The Law Offices of Cary J. Collins in Hoffman Estates.

While serving as a village trustee, Cary assumed many roles in Hoffman Estates including the Parks and Recreation Board and Police and Fire Commission. When his mentor Mayor Mike O'Malley died, he briefly considered running for mayor but instead served as deputy mayor so he could spend more time practicing law.

Throughout his career, he ran for a few other political offices, but his outspoken personality was not conducive in getting him elected. This character trait enhanced his admiration for our current president.

Although Cary had a diverse law practice, his passion was assisting and advising police officers and firefighters. He established the Illinois Public Pension Advisory Committee to educate pension board trustees on their responsibilities. Cary spent countless volunteer hours explaining the complexities of pension law and helping first responders understand their rights and responsibilities.

For nearly forty years, Cary's and Sue's "Xanadu" was their home on North Twin Lake in Phelps, WI. Once Sue convinced Cary to move "up north" full time, he never looked back—relishing boating, fishing, and an idyllic laid-back lifestyle. He especially enjoyed his role as "the lawyer" who offered free legal advice to friends and acquaintances around Phelps.

In addition to Cary's devoted wife, Sue, who passed away in November, he was preceded in death by brothers Tom Collins and Ted (Palika) Collins as well as his parents Betty and Richard Collins, nephew Alex Collins, brothers-in-law Warren Freiberg and Tom O'Drobinak, mother-in-law Bertha O'Drobinak, cousin Air Force Colonel Mike Collins, and cherished dogs Shadow, Pepper, Sparkey, and Lady.

Cary also leaves behind his beloved dogs Boots and Daisy and close friend, Mickey Walker of Elgin, IL. Cary is survived by siblings Tim (Alisa) Collins of Genessee, CO, Cathy Collins of Montezuma, IN, and Libby Collins (Tony) Ryan of Elm Grove, WI. Other survivors include cousins Cathleen and Tom Burrell, Peggy Totin, Jeff (Mary) Collins, Casey Collins, Margy (Bob) Cogswell, and numerous nieces and nephews including Marilyn Collins of Denver, CO, Robert Collins of Boulder, CO, Eric Collins of Chicago, Sean (Casie) Collins of Wisconsin, and Warren Christopher (Tara) Freiberg of Lowell, Indiana.

Cary was a member of St. Mary's Parish in Phelps, WI. He was proud of his NRA membership and although he had moved to Wisconsin, was still a member of the Knights of Columbus in Elgin, IL.

There was a Mass of Christian Burial at St. Mary's Parish in Phelps, WI, on Friday, January 2, 2026. A visitation in Northwest Indiana will take place on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, from 10 a.m. until the time of the funeral service at 11 a.m. at Burns Funeral Home & Crematory, 10101 Broadway, Crown Point, IN. Interment at St. John/St. Joseph Cemetery in Hammond, IN. www.burnsfuneral.com

Cemetery Details

St. John-St. Joseph Cemetery

1547 167th St.
Hammond, IN 46320

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 7. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (cst)

Burns Funeral Home & Crematory - Crown Point
10101 Broadway
Crown Point, IN 46307
(219) 769-0044
info@burnsfuneral.com
<https://www.burnsfuneral.com/>

Funeral Service

JAN 7. 11:00 AM (cst)

Burns Funeral Home & Crematory - Crown Point
10101 Broadway
Crown Point, IN 46307
(219) 769-0044
info@burnsfuneral.com
<https://www.burnsfuneral.com/>

Tribute Wall

AR

“ Alisa Ramey purchased the Sacred Duty Spray for the family of Cary James Collins.



Alisa Ramey - January 06 at 03:05 PM

AR

“ Alisa Ramey planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Cary James Collins.

Alisa Ramey - January 06 at 03:05 PM

E(

“ Eric Collins (Palika) purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Cary James Collins.



Eric Collins (Palika) - January 04 at 09:24 PM

E(

“ Eric Collins (Palika) planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Cary James Collins.

Eric Collins (Palika) - January 04 at 09:24 PM

DM

“ Cary was a great guy from a great Family. I worked with him on a project in Hoffman Estates and we got to catch up on our old "Gary Days" for quite a while. My condolences to his wife and especially to his brother Tim, with whom I worked quite a while. He'll be in my prayers.

Dan McDevitt - January 04 at 11:21 AM

TH

“ Terri Hunt and Justin Hunt purchased the Rose Remembrance for the family of Cary James Collins.



Terri Hunt and Justin Hunt - January 02 at 07:24 PM

EP

“ Elgin Police and Fire pensions purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Cary James Collins.



Elgin Police and Fire pensions - January 02 at 05:42 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Cary James Collins.



January 02 at 12:18 PM

TH

“ Cary was a friend for 40 years. I am so thankful and grateful for his friendship over the years. He had a tough exterior, with a heart of pure gold. He was always there to help anyone who was in need. He was passionate about the Law, his love for Sue and what he felt was right. His loyalty and honesty were unwavering. He had a very strong personality and opinions and that's what made him so unique and endearing. You always knew where Cary stood, whether you agreed with him or not. I am eternally grateful for his help, sound advice and friendship, especially in those early years. I can honestly say that his guidance helped to make a profound difference in my life. Rest in peace, my friend.

Terri Hunt - January 01 at 02:44 PM



Michael
Eshkibok

“ I went to grade school with Cary. He was a kind thoughtful man. I will miss him.

Michael Eshkibok - January 01 at 07:34 AM

TB

“ Ever since we hired Cary's Law Firm by our Board we have been very satisfied with his work and became a good friend too. His knowledge was greatly appreciated and helped us through many difficult situations. We will miss him greatly.
Tony Bialek, Board Secretary, Elgin Fire Pension.

Tony Bialek - December 31, 2025 at 08:16 PM

HH

“ Cary was a great resource for to Police Pension Fund as well as a good friend. Don't think he ever met a stranger. Cary will be missed
H Haggard

Harry Haggard - December 31, 2025 at 08:13 PM

JR

“ Cary was a wonderful friend he always provided sound advice for us Firefighters. Rest easy my friend.

Jeff Reich

J Reich - December 31, 2025 at 05:56 PM

JL

“ Cary was a wonderful friend. I found him a wealth of knowledge when we needed help with a pension matter in 1989 and worked with him for the decades following. He was loyal to our police officers providing sound advice. Rest easy now my friend. Jim Lamkin

Jim Lamkin

Jim Lamkin - December 31, 2025 at 05:28 PM

QR

“ Mr. Collins was a wonderful mentor during my time at his firm. He was not only a brilliant legal mind but also a true joy to work with. He possessed a fantastic sense of humor that brought levity to the office and brightened everyone's day. I will miss him dearly.

Quinn Rickert - December 31, 2025 at 04:07 PM

MK

“ Cary was a great man and a friend to police officers and fire fighters. Thank you Cary. You will be missed.

Michael Kilbourne

Michael J. Kilbourne - December 31, 2025 at 03:29 PM