



Kennie James

January 6, 1932 - March 8, 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our good friend and member, Kennie James.

Kennie was born January 6, 1932, in Greeleyville, South Carolina, and died March 8, 2023. She was preceded in death by her parents, Robert and Roberta James, and her siblings, Archie James, Donald James, and Jean Stewart. She is survived by her brother, Theodore James, Sr., and sisters, Betty Powe and Oshunrire Naomi James.

Kennie attended Chicago Public Schools, graduating from Phillips High and receiving a degree from the Chicago Teachers College. She served as a librarian for many years at the Chicago Public Library before continuing her career in service as a teacher in the Chicago Public School System.

As the oldest child, Kennie took great care of her siblings, especially the girls, by engaging them in experiences such as the Opera, the Chicago Art Institute, the Goodman Theatre, and many other vast elements of the Arts. Her earnest desire was always to expose her family to the best experiences that life had to offer.

Kennie is honored and revered by her surviving siblings as well as four (4) generations of nieces and nephews. She is also honored and revered by her friends at the First Unitarian Society of Chicago, which she joined in 1989. Kennie attended church regularly, even coming by cab from her retirement home in Palos Heights on occasion.

Kennie was an active member of the church, participating for many years in the Membership Committee. She famously and reliably took responsibility for the welcome table at the front door every fifth Sunday of the month. Kennie was a founding member (2002) of the Global Studies Group (originally called the 9-11 Committee). Members of that group have called her one of the smartest and best-read people they have known – exemplifying the best qualities of a critical thinker. Perhaps that explains why she – an outspoken atheist and member of the Humanist Group – also attended the Christian Group. Earlier she helped lead the Great Books discussion group at the church. Kennie loved to socialize with her church friends. She could always be counted on to attend a party or to have lunch after church at the Medici, continuing the debates that had arisen earlier at the church, over her favorite dark beer.

At a time of increasing racial separation theology in the denomination and society, she remained a staunch multi-racialist with many black and white friends. She was a co-founder of the Nature of Racism course at First U and of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Multi-racial Unity Action Caucus. She joined one of the women's groups because the convener, a good friend of hers, was concerned there would not be a good mixture of black and white women participating. She was an active member of the multi-racial group of UU members living at the Windermere apartments, having weekly lunches there.

Kennie helped many at the church appreciate and support the Chicago Sinfonietta, which she always attended in her box seat; she was a member of

the South Side Friends of the Sinfonietta. As a part of her civic duty, she participated in the Chicago Area Council on Foreign Relations, inviting First U members to some of their important discussions. In addition, she was the First U ambassador to the UU United Nations Office (an independent affiliate organization of the UUA). On occasion she was an elected delegate from First Unitarian to the UUA annual General Assembly.

Outside the church, Kennie participated in an investment club, priding herself on her stock market acuity. She played bridge regularly.

Those who knew Kennie will miss her generous, kind, loyal and intellectual spirit. She saw herself as an embodiment of the First UU Principle: a person of inherent worth and dignity, leading a principled life.

A memorial service is scheduled for Sunday, June 4, 2023 at 1 p.m., in the First Unitarian Sanctuary.

Rest in Peace!

Cemetery Details

Private

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUN 4. 1:00 PM (CT)

First Unitarian Church of Chicago
5650 S Woodlawn Ave.
Chicago, IL 60637

Tribute Wall



“ I will miss my dear cousin, who came frequently to our gathering of the "Whack Family Reunions. This family reunion, started in Greeleyville, SC and expanded nationally, to other cities every labor day weekend. We always enjoyed her presence and beautiful spirit. She kept up with us as often as she could, phone calls, emails (I was always glad to hear from her) making me aware of a Whack family member who had made national, or international acclaim for art, music, etc. She was so proud of her "Whack" Heritage. She was a smart, energetic, and warm person, whom we loved. She will be sadly missed at the Whack Family Reunions because she was a part of us. Donna Whack Fields, Ladson, SC

Donna Fields - August 28, 2023 at 08:13 PM