



James Erwin Morrison

September 13, 1961 - June 19, 2024

James Erwin Morrison, 62, died at IU Health Hospice House on June 19, 2024, after a six-week illness. Jim was born in Lafayette, Indiana, on September 13, 1961, to Richard William Morrison and Ethelyn Louise Berrier Morrison. The family, joined by sister Dawn in 1962, moved often in Jim's youth, as his father pursued a career in education administration. They lived in eight cities in central Indiana over the next ten years, until 1972 when they moved to suburban St. Louis. In 1974, they moved to Winfield, Kansas, where Jim spent his high school years, graduating from Winfield High School in 1979.

In fall 1979, Jim came to Indiana University, Bloomington, and moved into a place that would forever hold a special place in his life and heart: the Ralph L. Collins Living-Learning Center (though it wasn't named that until 1980). He found his people there. Jim spent the fall semester of 1981 in the Rocky Mountains as part of the National Outdoor Leadership School. This was a formative experience, leading him to change his major to outdoor recreation. He worked two summers at Long Lane School, a correctional facility for adjudicated youth in Middletown, Connecticut (1982-1984). He graduated in 1984 and worked as an outdoor education instructor at Frost Valley YMCA in upstate New York.

By 1985 Jim was back in Bloomington. He liked working with kids, but living at camp was isolated and pay for outdoor educators wasn't great. He decided to follow in the footsteps of his parents and become a teacher. While taking

courses for his elementary education certification, Jim worked part-time at the Developmental Training Center serving young adults with autism (1985-1987), as a resident assistant at Wright Quad (1986-1987), and then returned to his special place, Collins LLC, as assistant coordinator (1987-1989).

In the Collins dining hall, Jim met Erika Dowell. They started dating the summer of 1988 and married on July 18, 1992, in Peoria, IL. They made their home in Bloomington and had a son, Johnathan Harold Dowell Morrison, born March 27, 1999.

Jim's first teaching job was at Eastern Greene Elementary School in Bloomfield where he worked from 1989-2000. He taught sixth grade for five years, and third grade for six years. By this time, he had earned an MS in elementary curriculum and instruction (1993) and his certification in elementary administration and supervision (1995), both from IU Bloomington. He moved into administration, serving as assistant principal at Grandview Elementary in Bloomington, and later also for Highland Park Elementary (2000-2005). He was principal of Nashville Elementary in Nashville (2005-2007) and was assistant director of the Office of Early Learning and Literacy at the Indiana Department of Education (2007-2009). At the Center for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jim trained teachers on positive behavioral interventions and support (2010-2013).

In 2013, Jim returned to classroom teaching at a school he had always admired, the Bloomington Project School. He brought his many interests into the classroom, meeting student needs playfully and persistently. His students appreciated his cartoons and frequent use of props. He was known for preserving the dignity of each student and broke through to students that had had adverse experiences in education. Jim loved working in a collaborative setting. Even with 20 years in the field, he took feedback in stride. He felt that The Project School was made up of exceptional teachers, leading learning in the way it was supposed to be done. He was a mentor to many and a friend to all. In 2018, he left full-time teaching to help care for his mom but stayed connected to the school as a substitute and supporter. In spring 2022 he

returned to full-time teaching at the TPS middle school, retiring again in 2023 to help care for his father.

Jim fell ill in early May 2024 and spent nearly a month in the hospital, eventually being diagnosed with lymphoma. For most of this time, his family thought he would be coming home to do chemotherapy over the summer. But complications led to his entering hospice care on June 16 and his death on June 19.

Jim was a special person. He was warm and loving with a loud and distinctive laugh. He enjoyed connecting people, whether it was introducing two friends, or helping someone find a good job. He never skimmed on praise or tamped down his emotions. If he was proud of you, he said so. If you did a good job, he wanted you to know.

He was deeply in love with Erika through their 32 years of marriage and never hesitated to tell her so. They supported each other personally and in their respective careers and created a small but special family with their son, Johnathan. Jim loved being a dad and was so proud of his son. Having a teacher as your father means you have an in-house tutor but you also can't get away with much. Jim took great pleasure in their shared interests, such as gaming and film, and was overjoyed when Johnathan became a devoted Collinsite during his own undergraduate time at IU. In recent years, he loved hearing about Johnathan's experiences in New York City.

Jim was a great teacher. He was collegial and creative, and worked hard to connect with students, especially those that had a tough time with school. Jim often spoke of teaching as an act of faith— you cannot know which actions, which lessons, will have a lasting effect on students. It has been very special to hear from former students in recent days about how important Mr. Jim was to their lives.

Jim loved to play. He loved model-making from a young age, and got into D&D early. He relished tabletop games, but his true calling was historical miniature wargaming. He treasured the friendships he made at game conventions and

in Bloomington's gaming scene.

In Jim's final days, and since his death, his family has been overwhelmed with the support of people from all parts of Jim's life. Jim leaves a big hole in the lives of his family and many friends. He is survived by his wife, Erika Dowell; his son Johnathan, of Brooklyn, New York; his sister Dawn Graves and husband Phil, and their children Adam and Clara, of San Jose, California; his in-laws, Joanne and David Dowell, of West Peoria, Illinois; and Erika's sisters and their families: Ingrid and Brian Peele, and son Calvin, of Brimfield, Illinois, and Olivia and Travis Prewett and daughters Sylvia and Gloria, of Richland, Missouri. Jim was preceded in death by his parents.

A gathering of family, friends, colleagues, and former students will take place on Thursday, August 1, 4:00-7:00 PM, in the Frangipani Room in the Indiana Memorial Union. Memorial contributions may be made to the Collins Living-Learning Center Fund: <https://collins.indiana.edu/alumni-giving/giving.html>

Previous Events

Memorial Gathering

AUG 1. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM.

Frangipani Room at Indiana Memorial Union

Tribute Wall

IV

“ I just learned this news and was so sorry to hear it. "Mr. Jim" as we knew him was a homeroom teacher for our two daughters at the Project School for 2 or possibly 3 (I forget) years. He was a warm, kind, unfailingly supportive presence in their lives. My daughters and their friends all appreciated Mr. Jim and knew that he cared about them and wanted the best for them. My wife and I also really enjoyed and appreciated getting to know Jim a bit in parent-teacher meetings and otherwise at the school. He was a great teacher and mentor, and both our kids and we always enjoyed running into him and Erika in town in the years after they left TPS. This is such sad news. All our condolences and best wishes to Erika and the rest of Jim's family.

Ivan - July 30, 2024 at 10:40 AM

EB

“ I was director of the Living-Learning Center when Jim Morrison joined the program as freshman. From the moment I first became aware of him, during one of the "Renaissance Fairs " we organized (later called Collins Fest) I was charmed and impressed by his vivid personality, his vitality and enthusiasm, and I later greatly appreciated his work as Assistant Coordinator. We repeatedly met again in the years since then at special Collins events, and our affection for each other remained undiminished through the decades. I loved to hear him talk about his work as a teacher, and am indebted to him for valuable advice and references related to elder care. We last met on the occasion of the LLC's fiftieth anniversary in May of last year, and he was the same warm, vital and cordial spirit I had always experienced him to be. So the shock I experienced, upon just having returned from Germany, of learning of his sudden illness and death two weeks ago, was profound and deeply saddening, and I greatly share his family's mourning of his tragic loss.

Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, Professor Emeritus of English and former director of the Ralph L. Collins Living-Learning Center

Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch - July 05, 2024 at 11:47 PM

TP

“ Dear Dawn, We are so sorry for the loss of your brother. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

Tony & Joan Viscusi (AFS parents) - July 03, 2024 at 11:20 AM



“ Jim and I went back to when I first met him at Collins in 1979. He was a special young man who became an even more special person and friend to me and so many others. We worked in student government together and later became Resident Fellows and eventually Assistant Coordinators working with/for Donna Wilber Fromm. Jim possessed the ability to be present with anyone with whom he conversed. He was fun, intelligent, caring and a life-long learner, all traits enhanced by his experience at Collins LLC. I wish for all friends and family eternally great memories of Jim to harbor in your hearts, minds and souls. Those memories can nourish us all in our time of mourning. We've made a memorial gift to the Patricia Templeton Patrick Fund at Collins LLC in memory of the special person James E. Morrison, that I was so fortunate to have known.

Michael Davis - July 02, 2024 at 05:15 PM

DO

“ I only met Jim a handful of times but he made such a big impression! It doesn't surprise me a bit that he had such an impact on so many lives. I only got a glimpse of it and only wish I could have known him better. My heart goes out to Erika and Johnathan and all of Jim's loved ones.

David Orr - July 02, 2024 at 04:46 PM

BP

“ Jim and I served on the (then) Cardinal Stage Education Committee. His insights and dynamic persona were invaluable. His contributions as an educator cannot be numbered. He will be missed.

Beth Perney - July 01, 2024 at 11:59 AM

RO

“ Erika, so sad for you and your son. We regret that we never met Jim but we have no doubt that he was indeed a special person, and we have a special respect for leaders in the educational field who have outstanding empathy and kindness. It has truly been a year of major ups and downs for you. You have our deepest sympathy. Rich and Conna

Richard W Oram - July 01, 2024 at 09:44 AM

SP

I am so sad to hear about this loss. I want to say that Jim had a special energy that I immediately related to. He just had a brightness and you felt you could see the cogs turning in his head that would translate any ordinary moment into something funnier, sweeter, a little more valued and important. I kind of feel like he knew how to put the momentous into the moment, if that makes any sense. I feel so lucky that my kids were in his classroom. Please accept my deep condolences to everyone who, (I 'm sure Mr. Jim would say) were part of making him such an awesome person. -Sarah Pearce

Sarah E Pearce - July 30, 2024 at 11:21 AM