



## John Mark Irvine

December 19, 1942 - May 23, 2025

John Mark Irvine, 82, passed away in Bloomington, Indiana on May 23, 2025. Born to William E. Irvine and Marie (Hill) Irvine in Indianapolis in 1942, John lived a life marked by determination, intellectual curiosity, and a commitment to public service. He was many things: a father, a lawyer, a teacher, an excellent storyteller and jokester, and a builder of community and home.

John did not have an easy childhood, and had to work hard from an early age to support his widowed and disabled mother. He took on whatever work he could find: summer construction jobs, door-to-door cookware sales, cleaning toilets, and long night shifts at Kroger. In these pursuits, John showed a level of tenacity that would never leave him. He also read voraciously and with great pleasure in those years, which he could continue to do for the rest of his life. After graduating from Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis in 1961, John started coursework for his undergraduate degree in History at Indiana University. Often working up to 30 hours a week at Kroger to pay for his education, John graduated in 1967. That same year, he put down roots in rural Monroe County on a tree-filled property purchased with the help of dear friends Ron and Sharon Isaac, his first wife (Betty), and a generous loan from another friend of many years, William R. Hotz. There, John lived with his friends, his wife, and his mother. In 1970, he graduated with honors from the IU-Bloomington Law School, and in 1972, built a beautiful home on that

property with the help of life-long friend Charlie Harden. Overlooking a small pond and surrounded by trees, the window-filled home became his sanctuary.

John loved to work and work hard, which he did as Director of Indiana University's Student Legal Services for 31 years (1972-2004). Over the course of his career, he transformed the program from a fledgling one into the far-reaching student service and internship program that it remains today. He was a tireless advocate for affordable and equitable housing and was instrumental in drafting local and state landlord-tenant ordinances to protect renters— work shaped in no small part by the housing insecurity he experienced as a young person. John liked to joke that he had sued every landlord in town, which may well have been true (at least at one time).

John also served Monroe County, Bloomington, and Indiana in other roles: as an attorney with the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, as Deputy Mayor under Frank McCloskey, as Monroe County Commissioner, as an adjunct instructor at SPEA and the IU Law school, and as a member of the Board of Zoning Appeals and Monroe County Plan Commission. His work helped make the community what it is today. Initiatives like the Youth Services Shelter, the preservation of the historic courthouse, and the peace statue on the courthouse lawn all bear John's imprint. So too does the Sliding Scale ordinance, a policy designed to help manage growth, reduce sprawl, and preserve rural landscapes and natural areas. Another effort that was near and dear to John's heart was Monroe County's only covered bridge, which was installed near the intersection of North Maple Grove and Delap roads in 2019. John fundraised and lobbied for 19 years to get federal and local funds to salvage and preserve the bridge, which had been improperly stored and was deteriorating. This year, a plaque was installed inside the bridge to honor his

hard work and many contributions to the county and community. It made him very happy to see that.

A man of routines and simple pleasures, John also found plenty of joy in daily life. You could find him on weekends eating a hearty breakfast at the Village Inn, mowing the property with his zero-turn mower, clearing fallen trees with his chainsaw, or relaxing in his hammock with a stack of books picked up from the Monroe County Public Library. He relished the chance to debate and talk politics, which he did at dinner parties and over email in lively exchanges. He enjoyed working on tractors less, and was endlessly thankful that his friend Chris Kleindorfer was willing to tune up his broken Kubotas time after time. And let's not forget the classic cars! John adored all his vehicles, but was especially fond of the cream-colored 1972 Mercedes-Benz 250C coupe with brown leather interior. In that car and inside his home, John found happiness. He loved to sit in his corner chair, next to his woodstove with a view of his fish tank, with jazz or Broadway shows playing in the background. There was almost always a dog in his lap: dachshunds, golden retrievers, and basset hounds. When his three girls were little, they were there, too: at first sounding out phonics, and then graduating to Nancy Drew.

Those girls, Sara Rebecca Irvine (daughter of Betty Jo Irvine), Tina Anne Irvine, and Rachel Marie Irvine (daughters of Valerie C. Merriam) were what he was most proud of in his life. They survive him and will miss him very much. Other survivors include son-in-law, Chaz Sinn, two grandchildren, former wives Betty Jo Irvine and Valerie C. Merriam, with whom John shared significant chapters of his life, and dear friends Terry Bunton and the Baron and Baron-Caudill families. He is preceded in death by long-time friend and constant source of comedic relief, Steve Danzig.

A memorial service celebrating John's life will be held at a later date. His daughters welcome anyone who has stories, memories, and appreciations to share them with [tina.irvine@gmail.com](mailto:tina.irvine@gmail.com).

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the ACLU of Indiana, continuing John's legacy of principled resistance and commitment to civil liberties and civil rights.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory 4155 South Old State Road 37 has been entrusted with the arrangements.