



## John L. Mikesell

October 23, 1942 - September 12, 2019

John L. Mikesell died on September 12 at age 76. He was born in Bloomington and lived most of his life on family land in rural Monroe County, and spent his early childhood in a house without electricity or running water. In elementary school, he milked cows every morning before heading down the road to a 2-room schoolhouse, Phillips School. From these beginnings, he went on to develop as a teacher and scholar: he graduated valedictorian from Bloomington High School, received his BA from Wabash College, and an MA and PhD from the University of Illinois. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. After his first job working for West Virginia University, he joined the faculty of Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs, ultimately returning to live with his wife and three children on the family land he'd grown up on and which he called home for the rest of his life. Over the course of his career, he became an expert in international sales tax, fiscal reform matters including macroeconomic policy and budget policy, intergovernmental fiscal relations, institution building, and building local fiscal capacity. He is internationally recognized as a world expert in general sales taxation, described by colleagues as a "walking encyclopedia of tax policy."

Although he remained on the faculty of SPEA for his entire career, his expertise led him across the world: he traveled to the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan on World Bank public budget system reform missions; lived in Ukraine and Russia for a year (each)

working on USAID intergovernmental fiscal reform projects; and visited China on numerous occasions as Senior Research Fellow with the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy to help China develop a property tax. He also led a five-year joint partnership between SPEA and public administration schools in Saratov and St. Petersburg, Russia. Closer to home, he served on the Indiana State Budget Agency's Revenue Forecast Technical Committee for over 30 years, receiving the Sagamore of the Wabash award for distinguished service to the state in 2016.

His curriculum vitae is blinding with achievements. He was editor-in-chief of Public Budgeting & Finance for fifteen years, and received the Wildavsky Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement from the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management and the Steven D. Gold Award for Outstanding Contributions to State and Local Fiscal Policy from the National Tax Association. He published over 240 articles and book chapters and six books, including Fiscal Administration: Analysis and Applications for the Public Sector, the standard public finance and budgeting textbook in graduate public affairs programs across the country (now in its tenth edition). John was named a Chancellor's Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs Emeritus in 2008.

He was a consummate researcher, a "scholar's scholar," who had a knack for exploring a topic in a way that cut directly to the questions policy makers were asking. As a writer, John was famous for his footnotes, which incorporated interesting anecdotes, historical details, and amusing jabs at legislators. John also loved teaching, and while some students may have found his gruff demeanor intimidating at first, many credit his mentorship with changing their lives.

John was deeply pragmatic, and could be taciturn in the extreme. He didn't suffer fools, schmooze, or deviate from his principles. He could be counted on to say only what he meant. His family can't think of a single time when he lied.

While living in Kiev, Ukraine, John developed a love of ballet that would continue throughout his life. This intrigued and surprised his family, who were more accustomed to his practice of carrying the ugly canvas briefcase his kids had bought him for Christmas when they were young and continuing to use the same windshield ice scraper (also a child's gift) from the mid-1970s onward.

He felt most at home in the woods where his family lived, and could identify any tree by its bark alone. In the summer, he looked forward to collecting chanterelle mushrooms and in the winter, he looked forward to making maple syrup. He loved and respected animals, and they loved him back. Stray dogs often found their way to the Mikesell house and were never turned away. Cats favored his lap and routinely stranded him in chairs, for he was a man who understood the compliment, and gift, that is a cat who has chosen to sleep on you.

He died from a type of leukemia with a short and brutal prognosis that he outlasted with characteristic stubbornness. He is preceded in death by his parents, R.M. Mikesell and Minnie Shigley Mikesell, and many beloved dogs and cats. He is survived by his wife of 55 years, Karen Mikesell, his children, A. Elizabeth Mikesell, Thomas M. Mikesell, and Daniel G. Mikesell; daughter-in-law Kimberly H. Mikesell; grandson Theodore Mikesell; the cats Sammy and Kimchi; and Maggie, the dog who is grateful for all the toast he used to sneak to her under the table. He enriched all of their lives immeasurably, and they already miss him terribly.

Donations in his name can be given to the Exotic Feline Rescue Center (<https://www.exoticfeline rescuecenter.org/gift.html>) or the charity of your choice. The family will hold a remembrance ceremony on December 7

Online condolences, photos, & memories may be shared with family and friends at [allencares.com](http://allencares.com)

# Tribute Wall

LC

“ Great professor at Indiana University. Enjoyed his graduate school classes. May he Rest In Peace.

larry cutrone - September 29, 2022 at 11:10 PM

BE

“ I worked with John in Moscow in 1998 and 1999. I was saddened today to learn of his death. I know he is missed.

Barbara Edwards - June 29, 2022 at 11:22 PM

LC

“ Great teacher. Had one of John's classes while a graduate student at SPEA in Bloomington. May he rest in peace  
Lawrence G Cutrone.

Lawrence Cutrone - March 17, 2022 at 04:53 PM

 Alaina Brand

“ Harold Sturgeon Jr and LaVangelin Lois McCullough Sturgeon, my grandfather and grandmother (who was a long time childhood friend of John and the Mikesell family) would like to send their deepest condolences to John's family and their prayers during this time of great loss. As their granddaughter, not a single story my grandmother has shared from her childhood didn't somehow include John.

Alaina Brand - September 27, 2019 at 05:00 PM

LA

“ I was John's assistant at SPEA for several years. I was warned before I got the position that he could be difficult. I found those words to be totally untrue. John was a straight shooter, but he had a good heart, at times even a sense of humor and I truly liked him and I feel like he liked me. I am a straight shooter as well and our personalities (I feel) worked great together.

*I am so sad to hear of his passing. Rest well my friend. You have truly had an extraordinary life.*

*With condolences,*

*Lisa Allen*

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**Lisa Allen** - September 23, 2019 at 10:35 AM