

Keith, George D. (04/25/1939--10/23/2007). After three semesters at Grinnell, George Keith transferred to the University of Colorado, where he received a J.D. degree in 1963.



He spent the next two and a half years as an FBI agent, primarily investigating civil rights cases in Mississippi. The most prominent one was the 1964 disappearance and murder of civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman that was depicted in the movie *Mississippi Burning*. George was part of the forensic team that recovered the workers bodies in an earthen dam. Afterwards he said that the Robert Kennedy Justice Department was "extremely interested in making sure that the full powers of the federal government were used to accomplish the civil rights revolution." At the same time, George said, the FBI was trying to determine if there was a substantial communist influence within the civil rights movement. (Kinney, [Late Waterloo lawyer probed '64 civil rights slayings for FBI](#), Waterloo Courier (10/26/07), [wfcourier.com/.../article_ce0o73d8-535](#); Kinney, ["Mississippi Burning" revisited: Waterloo lawyers recall their "Freedom Summer" dealings](#), Waterloo Courier (03/05/89).)

From 1966 through approximately 1993, George practiced law in his home town of Waterloo, Iowa. In the 1980s he helped to mediate farmer-creditor disputes. He also took occasional cases without fee. One was a messy divorce and child custody case for a woman. Later she said that George was "the kindest, most optimistic supporter a person in my situation could have asked for" and that his help was "a pivotal benchmark in my life and in the lives of my children."

In 1968 George as an assistant county attorney in Waterloo prosecuted and convicted the subsequently infamous "Killer Clown" John Wayne Gacy, Jr. on a sodomy charge. Although sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, Gacy was paroled in 1970 and returned to his native Chicago. In 1980 an Illinois jury found him guilty of 33 brutal murders of boys and young men over six years and ordered him to be subjected to the death penalty. Gacy's execution finally took place in 1994.

From 1993 through approximately 2005 George lived in California where he was a corporate general counsel and involved in real estate brokerage. In 2005 he returned to Waterloo where he worked as a legal assistant, his Iowa attorney's license having expired, until his death.

George is remembered for being an exceptionally bright man with many passions, ranging from golf and skiing to politics, community theater and music. In his freshman year at Grinnell he was in a glee club (Scarleteers?) with Herbie Hancock, and later George often told the story of his once saying to the glee club that Herbie was off pitch and being immediately contradicted by the director.

I did not know George while we were Grinnell students, but connected with him in 1984 when he attended a liberal arts seminar for lawyers that I organized at the College. Afterwards, George described himself as a "born again fallen-away Grinnellian." The College, he said, "has a quite palpable aura" and was "the place where [many of our enduring values] . . . were refined, buttressed or altered in an atmosphere which required the free exchange and testing of ideas."

George was twice married and divorced. He died of kidney cancer and was survived by a son, Andrew D. Keith, and a daughter, Elizabeth K. (Keith) Walker, and five grandchildren. ([George D. Keith \(1939-2007\)](#), Waterloo Courier (10/26/07), http://wfcourier.com/lifestyles/announcements/obituaries/friday/article_564c7b59-6cb7-5419-89ed-c8b9e6d5d85e.html.)

By *Duane W. Krohnke*