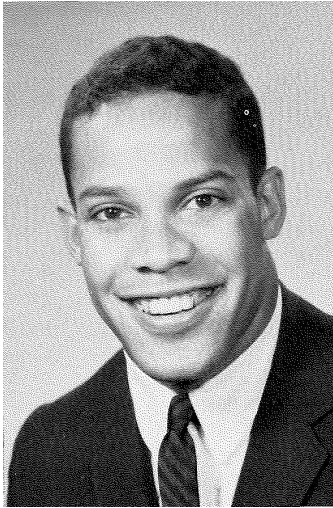


Simmons, James Richard (March 1, 1939—November 4, 2022)



Jim Simmons from Chicago's South Side joined our class after graduating with a scholarship from Francis W. Parker High School (FWP), an eminent private school just off the shore of Lake Michigan on the city's prosperous North Side.

At Grinnell, he immediately made his mark as a capable, valuable member of our class and as a resident of Smith Hall, which he served his senior year as its president. That meant he was a member of the Council of House Presidents, whose overall leader, Gary Knamiller, says Jim always provided a feeling of warmth and laughter and support for whatever they were doing.

Jim received his Grinnell B.A. in Sociology-Anthropology in 1961 followed by a M.A. in Social Work in 1964 from the University of Chicago and a M.B.A. from Brandeis University in 1984.

As Jim told us in our 50th reunion booklet, he started at the College "intent on becoming an aeronautical engineer, [but] after almost getting buried in the science building, I made the judicious decision to switch majors from physics to anthropology/sociology. Little did I know then how that decision would significantly influence my life. It happened that I was talking to another Grinnellian, who at the time was in graduate school in social work who told me, 'you're good with people so you should consider becoming a social worker.' Needless to say, I took his advice and made a wonderful career as a social worker. In retrospect, I also realize the intrinsic values of social work (e.g., acceptance of differences, valuing individual choices, and self-realization) were nurtured during my years at Grinnell."

Jim expanded on those thoughts in the next reunion booklet when he said, with counsel from Roger Smith, his Smith Hall mate and class of 1960, "I found my true calling as a social worker, working with delinquent kids in Chicago's inner city. I began by working with street gangs and after graduate school (University of Chicago, MA (Social Work), 1964), I worked for the Illinois Department of Juvenile Corrections, where I was responsible for the maximum security dormitory housing sixty juveniles from all over the state. My subsequent career included being a psychotherapist, administrator, consultant, college instructor, and public policy analyst. It has been very evident to me that my Grinnell experience prepared me for these experiences in ways that I didn't realize except in retrospect. At Grinnell I learned how to think critically, express my thoughts effectively, both verbally and written. I think my altruistic tendencies were enhanced and stimulated, leading me to a stimulating and rewarding social work career."

Nor can anyone forget Jim's superlative athletic career at the College. In football as an end, he was a letterman and all-conference his sophomore, junior and senior years plus most valuable player and co-captain his senior year and Little All American his last two years. In basketball he was a letterman all three years plus recipient of an award for outstanding player his sophomore year. Jim also earned letters in track all three years and his mile relay team set a new conference record. Jim managed to squeeze in the freshmen baseball team his first year. All of these awards naturally made him a member of the Honor G honorary athletic club and the College's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Jim's positive Grinnell experience undoubtedly rubbed off on his family, some of whom also became Grinnellians: his brother (William B. Bailey, 1974), his son David Sean Simmons (1988) and daughter-in law Kimberly Simmons (1989).

Simmons' friend and classmate from Chicago, Jim Lowry, adds that the two of them enjoyed singing old Everly Brothers songs at a College talent show accompanied by fellow Grinnellian, Herbie Hancock (class of 1960), now a world famous jazz pianist.

Immediately upon learning of Jimmy's death, Lowry wrote, "Accepting a death of a close friend is difficult at any age, but is extremely painful during your twilight years. I just lost my close friend of seventy plus years. . . . He was the nicest person one would ever meet. This death was very painful."

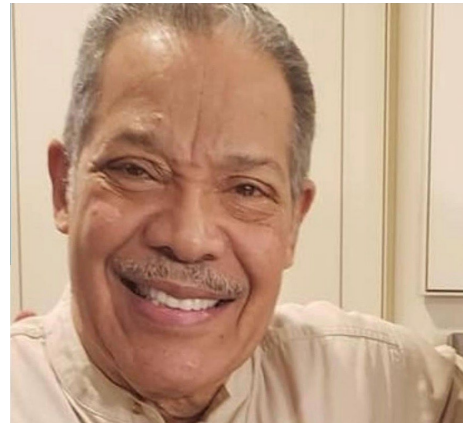
"To relieve my pain," Lowry said, "I immediately visited his house and listened to the pain felt by his widow. I hugged her and told her I loved her. I did the same with his two fantastic sons, when they came to visit me. The same day I called my older brother and told him I'm coming to visit him and his lovely wife. In the warmth of their home we laughed and reminisced the good times. I also told him how much I love him and appreciate his being a part of my life."

"My pain didn't go away, but I felt better and I was able to sleep that night," Lowry concluded. "My advice to all, don't be afraid to tell the persons close to you, you love and appreciate them. And don't put off the visit... they might not be there when you finally find the time in your life to visit them. Close friends are dear. Cherish, love and hug them."

Lowry later provided a moving eulogy at Simmons memorial service on December 3 that stated, "I was privileged to know Jim Simmons (or Jimmy Simmons, as we called him on the South Side) for 75 years, thus practically all my life. My life journey with Jimmy started in kindergarten at A.O. Sexton Grammar School in the gym class led by an outstanding P.E. teacher, who was Jimmy's Mother (and later, my surrogate mother), Phyllis Simmons." The eulogy continued as follows:

- “In many ways, Grinnell was an extension of FWP--academically challenging, participating in three sports and maturing as young adults. But it was at Grinnell, Jim truly blossomed as an athlete (little All-American in football, all conference in basketball and football, a solid student and a campus leader. Everyone on campus loved and respected Jim Simmons.”
- After college graduation, . . . [Jimmy] married his high school sweetheart Joan and soon became the father of two wonderful sons—Ricky and David.”
- “Over the next 60 years, . . . the bond between us only became stronger. There was seldom a week we did not call each other, a month when we did not view sports events together and as friends did not confess how fortunate and blessed we were for having each other in our lives.”
- “When we both reached 80 years of age, we called each other more often, accepting we were ‘on the back nine of life,’ we repeated the same stories over and over, laughing constantly. We often mentioned, as close as we were, we never had a single argument.”
- “Although we always shared stories of FWP, Grinnell, and local and national political events, we devoted the majority of our time discussing our families. He never stopped talking about his sons Ricky and David, whom he loved deeply. Without failure, he also would devote hours talking about his grandchildren.”
- “Their discussions usually shifted to the two women in his life: his Mother Phyllis, who amazed us all with her longevity, intelligence and wisdom; and his wife Judy, whom he loved so much.”
- “Jim was loved by all. Jim had a positive impact on me, on his family and on everyone who got to know him. Jim Simmons, you were my brother. I will miss you every day for the rest of my life.”
- “Keep smiling Jimmy, you are in another place, but you will always remain the anchor on whom we always lean and your smile will ever be present.”

Jim is survived by his wife Judith Simmons; sons James R. Simmons, Jr. (Ricky) and David Sean Simmons (Kimberly Simmons); grandchildren Aaron Simmons and Jeremy Simmons of Chicago, IL, Asha Simmons Paulino (Bryan Paulino), Aria Simmons, and Aidan Simmons of Columbia, SC; great-grandchildren Ashley and Ariana Simmons Paulino of Columbia, SC.; and brother William B. Bailey.



Duane W. Krohńke