

James Ray “J. Ray” Elingburg (1939 - 2020)



OBCGS is sad to share the news that one of our valued contributing members, Ray Elingburg, passed away on Feb. 24, 2020.

A Reflection of Life Service will be held at Mission Health/ AB Tech Conference Center (16 Fernhurst Dr., Asheville NC 28801) on Saturday, March 21, 2020 at 2:00 pm. His obituary is below and appeared in the 26 Feb 2020 issue of the Asheville Citizen-Times.

Ray started volunteering at OBCGS in 2003. He worked as a docent, helping patrons research their family histories, and filled several positions on our Board. When the Society needed a larger space, he was instrumental in a fund-raising campaign, locating our current space and facilitating the library's move.

Ray was a dedicated member and volunteer. With his leadership, we have been able to grow and expand our mission to provide education and support for those researching their family histories. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Obituary

Asheville, NC-James Ray “J. Ray” Elingburg, 80, passed away on February 24, 2020 at the John F. Keever, Jr. Solace Center (Hospice) from complications of diabetes.

Born on March 16, 1939, and a native of Buncombe County, NC, Ray was the son of the late Raymond Dalton and Mary Ann Gregory Elingburg. He was preceded in death by his wife, Roberta “Dolly” Straine Elingburg of 46 years who passed in 2009. He was also preceded in death by his brothers Charles L. Elingburg, Carroll S. Elingburg, Robert Louis Elingburg, and Raymond Dalton “Ted” Elingburg and sisters; Anne Morgan and Shannon Elingburg Capps.

He is survived by two daughters, Julie Elingburg Gifford of Seneca, SC and Jennifer Elingburg (Lewis Sprouse) of Hendersonville, NC; one granddaughter, Sabrina Gifford Simmons (David); grandson, Richard Lee Gifford II (Leslie) and step grandson, Jacob D. Sprouse; four great granddaughters; and many wonderful nieces and nephews.

He is also survived by brothers: Jack Earl Elingburg, John Thomas “Tommy” Elingburg, and William Richard “Rick” Elingburg (Jan) and a sister: Shelia Elingburg (Robert Maxwell), sister-in-laws: Mary Ruth Elingburg and Karen Lane.

Ray graduated from Valley Springs High School (now known as T.C. Roberson) in 1957 where he played basketball and baseball. He also played with his brothers on the Elingburg Family basketball team, which was coached by their Dad and raised money for Skyland-based charities.

Ray entered the U.S. Army in 1959 and served one year stateside and almost 3 years in Germany.

As class President at Asheville Biltmore College (UNC-Asheville) he graduated with his Bachelor's Degree in History and with his Teacher's Certification in 1966, the first class to graduate as the college's newly accredited 4 year college status. Ray later achieved his Masters Degree in Secondary School Administration from Western Carolina University in 1971. He also played college basketball and baseball, and coached J.V. Basketball at Asheville Biltmore College.

Upon completion of his Bachelor's in 1966, Ray became a History teacher and basketball coach at A.C. Reynolds High School. In 1968, he became the Vice Principal for the high school.

In 1970, Ray ran on the Democratic ticket and won the Buncombe County Clerk of Court position while he finished the last year of his Master's Degree. He was elected for 5 consecutive 4-year terms until he retired in 1990.

Then he was appointed by the county manager to head a study and implementation for a new county jail, which lasted about 3 years. Next, he was hired to oversee Buncombe County's Child Support Office for 2 years. Following that position, Ray was hired as the interim Director of the Automated Criminal Justice Information System for 2 years. For the better part of the next 3 years, he headed the NC joint state/county Criminal Justice program- a "Re-entry" program to assist criminals back into society and the workforce.

Then he "retired" again and volunteered at the local Habitat for Humanity. After his wife Dolly passed in 2009, Ray became a visiting home Hospice volunteer for Care Partners. Being a proud UNC-Asheville Bulldog, Ray was a contributor and instrumental in making the Kimmel Arena a reality for the basketball program.

Proudly, he served 19 years on the A-B Technical College Board of Trustees from 1983 to 2002. He was subsequently elected to the Board of WNC Historical Association in Fall 2001, overseeing the Smith-McDowell House and Museum until 2008. He continued to be a day volunteer for Smith-McDowell House and has been an integral part of WNC Historical Association's fund raising for a history museum and the Civil War Trails program.

His lifelong dream to research and publish his Elingburg family history led him to volunteering at Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society & Library (OBCGS) in 2003 when it was a small room at the Innsbruck Mall. He served on their Board as Public Relations Coordinator from then was elected 2nd Vice President of the Ways and Means Committee in 2008. His tireless campaigning to raise money to relocate the operation to a larger site resulted in their current location at the old Square-D plant on Bingham Road in Asheville. He loved his days volunteering there helping others research their family history while using the resources to work on his own.