



Richard Gonzales

February 3, 1938 - January 18, 2026

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Richard "Rich" Gonzales, 87, beloved husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend, passed away surrounded by love.

Rich was born the second of seven in Topeka's Mexican American "Bottoms" neighborhood. Rich quickly assumed responsibility beyond his years, learning the value of hard work and discipline. At five, Rich promised his grandmother he would never drink or smoke, a pledge he kept as an early example of his defining integrity.

Rich was a "hot-rodder" and, with his rolled jeans and white t-shirts, took great pride in his cars and in his nickname "Speedy." He would later tease his son that his birth meant sacrificing his dream Corvette.

Basketball brought Rich to Topeka's First Wesleyan Church, where he terrorized the courts playing under what he later would refer to – with a wink – as "Mexican rules." Of course, tales grow longer down the line, and listeners decades later could be forgiven for thinking these games involved more brawling than dribbling.

The First Church league's outreach ultimately led to Rich's salvation – but only with an assist from a raven-haired beauty whom Rich knew right away was

not like other girls. Through her powerful combination of feminine charm and iron will, Sharon softened the hot-headed Rich, and together they formed an enduring 60-year union. Sharon was, in his words, "the special blessing the Lord had reserved for him." This farm girl/city boy marriage would change both, with Rich encouraged to pursue college - a goal not typically thought available to "Bottoms" kids – and Sharon receiving support and guidance as she pursued her nursing career.

Rich and Sharon were blessed with three children and eight grandchildren. To Rich: "Family was what life is about – love, loyalty, and dedication." He delighted in being actively involved in his children's and grandchildren's lives, creating countless memories through sports events, coaching, church activities, and road trips.

Rich was an active and engaged community member – traveling frequently with Sharon and volunteering with Meals on Wheels, where his gift for conversation – the "old Gonzales charm" – brightened lives. Later in life, Rich developed a mild golf obsession, playing frequently, occasionally using his "foot wedge," and reporting somewhat accurate scores.

Professionally, Rich began his career at General Printing and Paper, where he spent 14 years building lifelong friendships on bowling, softball, and basketball teams. Following his graduation from Pittsburgh State University in 1978, he joined the State Printing Plant and worked his way through various positions until Governor Hayden appointed him State Director of Printing, a position he held with distinction for 15 years, managing 130 employees under five Governors. As a political appointee, Rich's longevity attests to his self-effacing warmth, competence, and understanding of people, their needs, and motivations. Later, he earned a Master of Science Degree, and PSU awarded him the 1991 Alumni Meritorious Achievement Award.

At 65, Rich finally succumbed to political whims and stepped down from the Director role. In a difficult moment, Rich struggled with the loss of the job that had been the source of so much satisfaction. Within a few years, however, in a testament to his resilience, Rich followed Sharon's career to Coffeyville, where, in short order, he was elected to City Council, then Mayor, and soon was greeted on the street like a trueborn 'Coffeyvillianite'.

In Rich's final years, he became Sharon's devoted caregiver, tending to her with patience, tenderness, and quiet strength. He considered it an honor to care for the woman who had been his partner in every season and rarely spoke of sacrifice—only gratitude.

Golf scores notwithstanding, Rich was a man of character and unwavering integrity — loyal, dependable, and deeply empathetic. Friends and family recall his sociable nature and genuine love for conversation and connection. Through life's roller coaster, Rich maintained his good humor and profound gratitude. His favorite saying, "Love lifted me when all else failed", reflected his deep faith and understanding of the sustaining power of love.

Rich was preceded in death by Sharon, his parents, John C. Gonzales and Isabelle Marie Van Voorhis-Gonzales, and siblings, John Jr., Barbara, Robert, and Patricia. He is survived by his children, Brian, Jill (Miguel Gonzalez-Bravo) and Joy (Jason Fry); eight grandchildren; siblings, Albert and Larry; and numerous extended family members and friends whose lives were blessed by his presence.

Rich's legacy is one of faithfulness – to his word, his wife, his family, his employees, and God. From the promise he made at age five to the tender care he gave Sharon in her final years, Rich demonstrated that true success is measured not by titles or tenure, but by love given, lives touched and

promises kept.

A private family graveside service will be held at Mount Hope Cemetery in Topeka, Kansas. Richard and Sharon passed within a short time of one another, a final testament to a life spent side by side. While on hospice, Richard requested that one Celebration of Life honor them both, as they had always done everything together—salt and pepper. Their lives were celebrated on Saturday, January 10, 2026, at Gracepoint Church in Topeka.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Oklahoma Wesleyan University for the Sharon Gonzales Nursing Scholarship sent in care of Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka KS 66614, or online at <http://www.okwu.edu/give>.

Condolences may be sent online to www.kevinbrennanfamily.com.

Tribute Wall

BH

“ To Joy and Family- I was saddened to hear of your Dad's passing. I know it's been years since we played basketball together, but I remember the cold Saturday mornings in the gym. Your Dad was one of our coaches. He was so patient and kind. I remember "the wink" but when he winked as a coach I felt like it was his way of telling me "don't worry, you'll get it next time." May you find peace, and remember your Dad's love during this difficult time. Keeping you and your family in my prayers.

Beth Hapgood

Bethany Hapgood - January 26 at 11:35 AM



Thank you

Joy Gonzales Fry - January 30 at 11:13 AM

VM

“ My deepest condolences to the family. For the last few years I served with Richard on the Bottoms committee. I enjoyed hearing his stories of the neighborhood and was grateful for the memories he shared.

Valerie Mendoza - January 23 at 09:14 AM

JG

He loved his trips to Topeka to meet with the committee.

Jill Gonzalez-Bravo - January 25 at 09:14 PM



Thank you! Like my sister said, he loved meeting with the committee. Please reach out when it comes around. I would love to be apart of it or just help.

Joy Gonzales Fry - February 01 at 05:48 PM

JB

“ *Richard bought me my 1st Barbie Doll; we were together with some of his and some of my sibling at a store in Topeka called Katz. We knew each other through church. Later in life his wife Sharon and I had baby girls about the same time. I was 24 and Richard was 42. Those were fond memories. Love you all. Joanna*

Joanna Copeland Bayless - January 22 at 04:53 PM

JG

Thank you for sharing.

Jill Gonzalez-Bravo - January 25 at 09:13 PM

JG

You were my Sunday school teacher. It comes full circle. :)

Jill Gonzalez-Bravo - January 25 at 09:14 PM



Thank you Joanna. These stories mean the world. I'm so thankful you and my momma had babies at the same time. 💜 Love you all.

Joy Gonzales Fry - February 01 at 05:50 PM