

John Ralph Smiley Irelan, passed away peacefully on August 30, 2025, in Castle Rock, Colorado, cared for by his loving family. He lived a full life to 89 years old. He was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico on December 8, 1935, the son of Ralph and Ruby Irelan. He grew up in Amarillo, Texas. In his youth, Smiley was curious and active in many things, and was a hoop dancer in the Boy Scout troop Kwahadi Indian Dancers his father helped establish.

Smiley graduated from Amarillo High School in 1954 and from Texas Tech University in 1959 with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. He was in the Naval Reserves from 1954 to 1962, serving just after the Korean War as a radar specialist and rose in rank from Seaman Recruit to Electronics Technician (Radar) Petty Officer 2nd Class. After graduating from Texas Tech, he worked as a plant control chemical engineer for the US Bureau of Mines Helium Activity in Amarillo. He then earned MA and PhD degrees in Chemistry from the University of Oklahoma, where he also met the love of his life, Nancy Beth Lewis, from Shawnee, Oklahoma. She was also attending OU and earning her PhD in English Literature. They married on June 18, 1966. They celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary this year.

Smiley was awarded a two-year post-doctoral fellowship research position at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. He co-authored 15 publications in scholarly journals. Smiley and Nancy were the first couple to graduate at the same time with doctorate degrees from the University of Oklahoma in August of 1968. He worked as a Professor of Chemistry at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma where he became a tenured professor and taught organic chemistry for 28 years.

As his children grew, Smiley became a distinguished scout leader, earning the Silver Beaver Award, for his service in the Muskogee, Oklahoma area. He participated in Wood Badge for several years (an advanced, national scouting leadership course) and took a troop of scouts for treks to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, three times.

Smiley had many hobbies, but his two most endearing and long-lived hobbies were gardening and woodworking. He was a prolific producer at both. Sometimes he had pounds of green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, butternut squash, zucchini, okra, and more to share. He was the most skilled woodworker and, over the years, gathered a voluminous collection of more than 20 kinds of wood. Mainly using laminating and box joint techniques, he delighted family and friends with many small and large, beautifully crafted items.

Smiley brought his joyful and determined energy to all aspects of life, family, friends and the communities where he lived. His love, his garden vegetables, and his always available helping hands will be missed. His legacy leaves an indelible place in our hearts and the hearts of many.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his brother Edward Irelan, and his nephew, Todd Irelan. Smiley is survived by his wife, Nancy Irelan, his sister, Alice Whittington, his children, William (Bill), James (Jim), and Kathleen (Kate) Irelan, his grandchildren, Claire Lewis, and Chance, Vivien, and Brodie Irelan, his nieces, Linda Whittington and



In Loving Memory of

John Ralph Smiley

Irelan

*He was the mildest of men, and most
beloved. Kindest to kinsman, and
keenest for glory.*

— *Beowulf*

Date of Birth

*December 8, 1935
Albuquerque, New Mexico*

Entered into Rest

*August 30, 2025
Castle Rock, Colorado*

Funeral Ceremony

*Saturday, September 27, 2025
Ten O'clock in the Morning
Walker Funeral Chapel
Shawnee, Oklahoma*

Officiant

Steve Kelly

Speaker

Jim Irelan

Musical Selection

Nessun Dorma

Final Resting Place

*Fairview Cemetery
Shawnee, Oklahoma*

Pallbearers

<i>Jim Irelan</i>	<i>Ken Whittington</i>
<i>Kate Irelan</i>	<i>Paul Labadie</i>
<i>Chance Irelan</i>	<i>Reuben Ferguson</i>