



John R. "Jack" Cole

AUGUST 3, 1930 – JANUARY 25, 2007

In 1957, he married Lois Martin, mother of four of his seven children, Michael, Patricia, Christopher, and Suzanne. The family resided at 4181 Haverhill in Detroit. Those were years when Jack taught his sons to play sports, dressed his daughters in pretty clothes, and waxed his prized red 1965 Olds 88 convertible. He loved teaching his kids how to "put the top down."

In 1964 he matriculated at Detroit College of Law. He had a college degree—it just wasn't an authentic one. Nevertheless, he attended as if nothing was amiss and his first semester grades were all "As" and "Bs." Unfortunately, someone turned him in to the Dean. While the investigation was ongoing, he continued taking classes. He always said the school hoped he would flunk out but he came in second in his class! Ultimately, the Dean "convinced" him to withdraw in lieu of prosecution. He often used to say he was not "President of the Dumb Club."

In 1966, he reached the zenith of his career when he was selected to head Michigan's Uninsured Motorist Fund for the Detroit area, quite a lofty job for someone only 36. Things were looking up in his personal life as well for in 1968, he married the love of his life, Sharon Vandecar, who brought along her son, Darin.

Incredibly, while Jack seemed on top of the world working for "the Fund," he resigned! He went into the aluminum siding business with his brother. Jack, Sharon, and Darin relocated to Columbus, Ohio much to the dismay of his children left in Detroit. Within a year, he realized the business was failing and returned to Detroit where he formed the State Adjusting Company. The family grew with the arrival of Robert. It was at this time they made the acquaintance of lifelong friends, Sandy and Bill Arlinghaus. It appeared they had little in common since the Arlinghauses were both pursuing PhDs at the time, yet there was a touch of magic between them and for many years they would gather for barbecues, sometimes as often as twice a week. At the same time, Jack continued his friendship with Big Bad John and even had the pleasure of introducing him to his wife, Carol, who was a friend of Sharon.

In 1971, Verna, with great drama announced "I'm buying you two a house!"



And so it was that Jack and Sharon relocated to the old homestead at 4015 Buckingham. It was there that Jack had his glory years, reaching the pinnacle of his intellectual powers and developing the charismatic personality that drew people to him. Sharon and he were blessed by the arrival of two more children, Holly and Anthony (Clayton). Never one to be satisfied with his current financial situation, Jack acquired a private detective license, an achievement of which he was extremely proud. He dissolved his adjusting company and formed IPS (Investigation, Photography, Surveillance) Services. As his older children were growing up, his younger children were still toddlers. He was excited about all of his children's activities. For several years he was the manager of one boy or another's Little League team, eventually perfecting his art when Robbie and Clay's team won the World Series. He did not neglect his girls either. He loved their dance recitals and was particularly mesmerized by a long-running performance of "Oliver" in which several of his children had roles.

Children inquiring about vacations and such were often chagrined by his favorite responses: "someday" and "we'll see."

Heartbreakingly, his marriage to Sharon dissolved in the late 1980s and Jack embarked on the sunset of his life. Eventually, he married Julie Renouf, his companion in his later years until she passed away in 2004. Jack's health failed rapidly though. Always a "tiger" (his expression for any particularly tenacious child) he battled cancer and a shattered hip in his last two years. Undefeated, in the end his wonderful heart failed and he passed on peacefully surrounded by family members.

Despite the many things Jack wished he had done differently, you must judge a man's life in its entire context. Little Jackie suffered extremely painful beginnings with the loss of both parents by age 13. He referred to his youth as one lived in a "concrete jungle." Mean streets, no money, blind ambition, fits and starts, failures, opportunities: his life was one struggle after another. He was driven by the raw power of a dream, and like that of *The Great Gatsby*, his seemed perpetually just beyond the reach of his fingertips.



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In December of 1980 Jack Cole called his Uncle Harry in Sudbury, Ontario: "Hello, is this Harry Cole?" "Yes." "This is Jack Cole." Silence followed. "Harry?" "Yes." "This is Jack Cole from Detroit." "Little Jackie?" "Yes, I'm Little Jackie." "You sound just like your father."

Those who knew Jack as "Little Jackie" are long gone. John Reddick Cole was born on August 3, 1930 in Detroit's Hutzel Hospital. His mother was a beautiful girl, Virginia King Cole. His father, Leonard Albert Cole, was a Canadian émigré. In those early days of the Great Depression, times were very trying. The 1930 census shortly before Jack's birth shows Virginia and Len living with Jack's grandmother, Lucy Virginia (Verna aka "Boom Boom") Sexton, at 12565 Pinehurst Avenue. Len's occupation as Jack always said was a mechanic for the Otis Elevator Company. However, Len also frequently ran afoul of the law and was often in prison. Jack kept quite a few of the letters his father wrote to him from prison, one of which exhorts him to get all "Bs" and he'll get a buck from Dad.

No explanation is given as to how a prisoner in Jackson would get his son a buck and it remains unknown if Jack got paid. Suffice it to say that from the time Jack was about two, he rarely saw his father at all. His last recollection of seeing his father was in 1938, when he was eight. Jack was raised in those early years by his mother who lived with her own mother.

Jack started first grade at St. Theresa School and remained there until the ninth grade: that took ten years. Jack liked to joke that he was given the opportunity to complete third grade twice. That's when he met his lifelong friend, John Burke, who was completing the third grade for just the first time. John, a year younger, shorter, but way tougher, always got the better of Jack in fights, so he taught his children to call his friend "Big Bad John." Jack had many stories about the tough neighborhood where he grew up and developed the mental and physical agility which allowed him to survive the fights (and the nuns). One Sister, Sabina, banged his head into a chalkboard. Remarkably he didn't hold a grudge against her. In fact, later, when she noticed him coming into school after recess with a couple bruises from his most recent scuffle, she kept him after school and taught him to box!

Jack had several different paper routes from the time he was 11. He was never without work from then until he retired. So while he never quite had enough money his entire life, he always had some. This led Jack to be the eternal optimist he was. Whenever faced with a challenging financial problem, he would say, "When my ship comes in, we're going to buy a boat." This was his idea of a great pun.

In September, 1943 disaster struck. His mother died of diabetes at the age of 31 while on a trip to Buffalo. Long deprived of his father (who had been deported to Canada by now), Jack was now left in the care of his grandmother. Times had gotten even harder.

Jack spent the tenth grade at Cass Tech with the idea of becoming a commercial artist. It's a shame Jack never became the artist he wanted to be, but ever the optimist, Jack embarked on a new ambition—he quit school to become a professional baseball player! There is no doubt he was a good, but not great, baseball player (he often recalled playing in the City League Championship game at Tiger Stadium in 1947), so later he cheerfully admitted to his children that his decision to quit school was, indeed, a mistake.

Jack held several jobs in these years that show his diversity and ambition. He worked on the Packard Assembly line and then tried his hand at selling ball bearings. He had the knack for sales but felt hemmed in by the rigidity of the job so he went where the money was: The Arthur Murray Dance Studio.

At the age of 21, Jack became their top dance instructor. One look at his legendary portrait and his charms for the ladies should be apparent. He was very fond of telling the story of selling a "Golden Lifetime Dance Membership" to an 81 year old lady! His conscience got the better of him though so he returned the money and was promptly fired.

In 1951 he married Peggy Shafer. He spoke very little of this marriage except to say she was a fine lady and he was sorry the marriage ended poorly. One thing complicated his marriage and life in 1953: the draft. Never had such effort been poured in to getting someone out of the military, he used to joke. His long hidden affliction, hyperhidrosis (sweaty feet), reared its ugly head and nipped at his sensitive toes. Those aware of the heartbreak of hyperhidrosis know that it effectively prohibits marching, a skill highly prized by the U. S. Army. So as his bunkmates went off to march, he went off to master ping-pong. (This true story was later adopted for the award winning movie, Forest Gump, but that --is where the similarity ends.) He was honorably discharged after four glorious months and returned to Detroit, but not before he earned his GED.

Around 1955, Verna revealed to him that he had a half-brother, Robert Cole, who was a Detroit policeman. Meeting Bob, Jack finally found in his older brother a man he could admire. Until Bob's passing, Jack talked of him as the greatest man he had ever known.

