

James Montgomery Dodds

James Montgomery Dodds, 90, of Sacramento, California, passed away on Thursday, June 4, 2026, after a long, adventurous, and exceptionally well-lived life. Jim packed an unreasonable amount of living into his 90 years and had no intention of slowing down until aggressive cancer made him stop.

Jim was born during the Depression in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on December 21, 1935, to Torrence and Caroline Brigham Dodds. They moved west, and he grew up in Encino, California, graduating from high school at Midland School in Los Olivos in 1953.

Midland School was a turning point. As he later put it, it was where “I made mistakes that had consequences, grew lifelong connections, and gained the skills I needed to lead a successful and impactful life.”

Jim married Polly Parker on June 18, 1958—the first of three marriages to each other, each on a June 18th. As Jim often explained, “We tried divorce, but it didn’t work out.” Jim outlived Polly by several years, losing her to Alzheimer’s Disease 65 years after their first marriage.

Jim graduated from Stanford University in 1959 and USC Law School in 1962. He studied Russian at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. He remained fluent and could engage in lively conversations with Russian-speaking cab drivers for the rest of his life. Most people use cabs for transportation; Jim saw them as opportunities for international diplomacy.

Jim practiced law in Southern California until 1983, but his true passions were Polly, his three young daughters, and bicycling.

Jim’s deep love for bicycling began in 1947 when his grandmother gave him a used touring bike that let him roam throughout the San Fernando Valley. He kept bicycling for the next 79 years until just a couple of weeks before his death. He felt fully alive on a bicycle, a mode of transportation that allows you to see the world more slowly and intimately than car travel. As an adult, he bicycled thousands of miles: sometimes with a group, sometimes with friends, sometimes solo, around the western and New England states, the U.K. and Europe, as well as in China, Vietnam, Australia, and Central America.

When Jim retired from the law in 1983, he and Polly moved to Nevada City, and he became deeply involved in the community. He had inexhaustible energy for finding one more board, commission, committee, or worthy cause that needed attention. If there was a meeting, he went. If there was a board, he was on it – and if there was an opportunity to chair the board, well, someone had to do it.

He was devoted to Trinity Episcopal Church, served with the Nevada County Housing Development Corporation, was a Past Master of the Masonic Lodge, board president of the Nevada County Land Trust, and on the Nevada County Grand Jury. He chaired the Nevada County Planning Commission and was a board member of the Nevada Theatre Commission.

He longed to play the piano with style and grace, so he acquired a long-neglected Steinway, had it tuned, took lessons, and persistently mastered all three movements of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata."

In 2012, Jim and Polly moved to Sacramento. He was delighted by the American River bike trail where the primary hazards were merely squirrels and pedestrians, not logging trucks and steep hills. He enthusiastically joined the Sacramento Wheelmen and became its president while also cycling with the Sacramento Bike Hikers. He took up golf and fine cooking, proudly serving his piquant cabernet reduction sauce over succulent roasts.

He and Polly joined St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Carmichael, where he served on the Vestry and Finance Committee, was a lay reader and usher, organized the men's breakfast group, and checked on homebound parishioners. Deeply concerned about homelessness and food insecurity in our society, he cooked meals for hundreds at Loaves and Fishes and worked at River City Food Bank.

After losing Polly to Alzheimer's, Jim found a partner in an old friend, Kitty Williamson. She brought love, joy, and an unbounded sense of fun into his final years. They found wonderful ways to share their passions for hiking, bicycling, and travel.

Jim leaves a legacy of love, generosity, curiosity, service, determination, adventure, and resilient participation in life. He showed us it's entirely possible to keep moving, keep learning, keep serving, keep laughing, and keep getting on a bicycle right up to the end.

Three daughters survive Jim: Deborah Dodds and her husband, Greg Smith, of Stonington, Connecticut; Pamela Dodds Eggert and her husband, Steve Eggert, of Sacramento, California; and Elizabeth Dodds Ott and her husband, Kevin Ott, of Golden, Colorado. Eight grandchildren also survive him: Nicholas Smith and Katherine Smith; Caroline Eggert, Elizabeth Eggert James, and Julia Eggert; and Charlie Ott, Christina Ott Bahr, and Samantha Ott Delaney. He leaves his first great-grandchild, Benjamin Bahr. He is also survived by his partner Kitty Williamson of Carmichael, California.

A celebration of Jim's life will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 17, 2026, at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 2140 Mission Avenue, Carmichael, California. The burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Midland School in Los Olivos, California, or St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Carmichael.