



Robert Joseph Ketelsen

December 18, 1933 - February 20, 2026

Robert Ketelsen, 92, of Batavia, Illinois, passed away peacefully on Friday, February 20, 2026. He was born on December 18, 1933, in Clinton, Iowa, to his parents, Leo Ketelsen and Catherine (Eagan) Ketelsen.

At just 17 years old, Robert proudly joined the United States Navy, serving his country during the Korean War with honor and dedication.

Following his military service, Robert worked as a sous chef at the Executive House Hotel in Chicago, but his love for adventure often led him to take months off at a time to travel the world. His lifelong love of travel ultimately led him to open his own successful travel agency, Monarch Travel, in Wheaton, where he helped countless others explore the world.

After retiring, Robert spent much of his time traveling throughout the Southwest. On one of those trips, he stopped at St. Mary Mission on the Navajo Nation in Tohatchi, New Mexico, intending to volunteer for just a day. That one day turned into nearly 20 years of devoted service to the mission and its people.

During his time there, he founded a guesthouse on the mission where he welcomed and supported homeless men struggling with substance abuse. Known affectionately as the mission's greatest "beggar," Robert tirelessly sought donations of food, clothing, and household necessities to serve those in need.

Robert was an Associate of the Franciscan Sisters of Clinton, Iowa, and an Affiliate of the Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, reflecting his deep faith and lifelong commitment to service.

Above all else, Robert was a devoted father, grandfather, and great-grandfather who cherished his family deeply. He led by quiet example, teaching the values of kindness, humility, hard work, and compassion. He took great pride in his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren and found his greatest joy in spending time with them, sharing stories, laughter, and life lessons. He was also a loyal friend to many, loved for his caring heart and wonderful sense of humor, and he had a special gift for bringing smiles to everyone he met. His steady presence, gentle guidance, and unconditional love will remain a lasting gift to all who were blessed to know him.

Robert is survived by his children, David Ketelsen (Mary), Evelyn Kelley (Joe Spears), and Chris Ketelsen; his grandchildren, Daniel Soto (Erin), Joseph Soto (Nicole), Cody Kelley, Taylor Ketelsen, Adrian Ketelsen, Finn Ketelsen, and Jackson Ketelsen; and his six great-grandchildren, Casey and Cami Soto, and Gigi, Vivi, Jovi, and Ari Soto.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Leo Ketelsen and Catherine (Eagan) Ketelsen, and his siblings, Elizabeth (Michalski), Leo, Richard, and James.

The family asks that you honor Robert's memory by cherishing time with those you love, extending kindness to others, serving those in need, and finding joy in each day, just as he did throughout his life.

A memorial visitation will be held from 5:00 P.M until the time of service at 7:00 P.M on Thursday, February 26, 2026 at Moss Family Funeral Home, 209 S. Batavia Avenue, Batavia, Illinois, 60510.

For those who wish, memorial donations may be made in Robert's honor to St Mary Mission and mailed to: St Mary Mission, P.O. Box 39, Tohatchi, New Mexico 87325.