

James Andrew Coogan

Born, 22 January 1913. Died, 19 October 1956, Age 46

**Prepared by Brother James Coogan, F.S.C.
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James A. Coogan was the fifth and last child of James F. and Margaret C. Coogan. Preceding him in the family were John Patrick (1 June 1900), Francis Joseph (4 April 1902), Margaret Mary (21 April 1905), and Mary Bridget (10 October 1907.) The first two children were born at Wishaw, Scotland, the second two at Fayette City, Pa., while James was born in Turtle Creek, Pa. A man of formidable size, he had bright red hair, a trait inherited from his mother's side of the family.



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Perhaps because he was the youngest child in the family or because of his mother's death when he was only 14 and the subsequent remarriage of his father, "Uncle Punkle" (as he was affectionately called) always seemed to be on his own. It was thought he attended Central Catholic High School for a brief time but little else is known of his early years. During the Depression, he served with the Civilian Conservation Corps and once mustered out took a long succession of jobs ranging from route manager for Rieck's Dairy, and then a similar position with Haller's Bakery.

We know that he was a security guard at Union Switch and Signal during WW II, salesperson for Planter's Peanuts in the Boston area. At another time, he worked for Islay's Dairy. Still again, he worked for Frank's Bakery and Jack remembers riding up hill and down dale with him through Braddock Heights. For much of his life he maintained residence with his sister Margaret Herzog at Woodlawn Ave. in Swissvale. To the best of anyone's knowledge, he ended his working years as cook for the Cleveland-Cliffs Company, managers of ore boat transport steamers on the Great Lakes. Whatever his avocation James was always one to be where the party action took place.

Jack Coogan remembers that James had been a member of the National Guard and recalls his getting off to summer camp from the Logan Armory in Oakland and once more from the East Liberty freight yard. He also recalls that James scooped ice cream at Bard's Dairy in Swissvale. In 1947- 48 James was a sales representative for the Fort Pitt Brewery, assigned to a territory in North Central Pennsylvania. This job necessitated his being away all week to return on weekends. On one of these, he took us on a tour of the Sharpsburg brewery where we were introduced to the brew master. When James was around happy times generally followed.

Jim was always in a good mood and fun to be with as well as being generous. On one occasion, he took us to the Circus at Forbes Field with Mom. And, at another time, he took Gertie out to the Old William Penn highway for a lesson when she was learning to use a new kind of gearshift attached to the steering post.

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Not infrequently, Uncle James appeared at holiday time, usually with gifts for the kids, but then he would mysteriously disappear from the scene for long periods.

When he had a car, he would take us youngsters for a ride, to destinations unknown. He could always get a rise out of his sister Margaret by running through red lights or causing the car to backfire.

James stood as godparent with Tess Quinn for Gertrude Anne Coogan in 1938. On October 3, 1941, he married his longtime girlfriend Catherine (Kay) Rankin. Bill recalls her as being a “real looker” but this marriage did not last for more than a few years. Nothing more was ever said of Kay nor did we see her again.

While in the employ of Rieck’s, (from whence he brought us samples of the salted pecans they used in their ice cream) Uncle James won a Schwinn bicycle for the highest number of new sales. He generously gave the bike to us so we all went to Jim and Kay’s apartment (they always had sweet rolls there) on Braddock Ave, across from the Swissvale firehouse. Jackie drove the bike back through Edgewood and Wilkinsburg to Homewood with Dad close behind. The bike was a godsend for we had only one car. It was this means of transportation that took us to school, work, and wherever else we wanted to go for years to come.

James lived a kind of maverick existence and as youngsters we were never told much of his whereabouts. Nor were we free to make an inquiry on the subject. While it was never mentioned, in retrospect it is possible to discern that Uncle Jim may have had an alcohol problem. Maybe this was why he had so many different jobs and a difficult time in settling down.

Word of his death at the Pittsburgh Hospital was passed along to his sister, Sr. Margaret Frances by her community members. These attended at the hospital on October 19, 1956 when he died at the age of 43. Death was attributed to a hemorrhage of varicose veins in the larynx.

James is buried at All Saints Cemetery (formerly Braddock Catholic Cemetery), in the same grave as his parents, Section A, Lot 83, B.