



Charles Cole

January 26, 1951 - April 28, 2026

Charles Clarence Cole 75, passed on April 28, 2026, at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston.

Charles was given a diagnosis of prostate cancer around six months ago and dealt with the news and subsequent treatments with quiet strength and courage throughout his illness.

Charles was born in Waukegan and raised in Zion, Illinois. Along with his sister Shirley, he lived with their Aunt Ednora "Nonni" Kinder Smith, after their mother Gertrude died while they were both very young.

Charles attended Zion-Benton Township High School and was a good student, developing interests in music, art, and fashion and working behind the scenes in theatre. He was the first one of his friends with access to a car, which allowed them to explore Milwaukee and Chicago where they went to the Art Institute and found concerts at the Kinetic Playground and the Quiet Night. They didn't exactly fit in, as they were part of the hippie movement and were just learning who they would become. Charles and his good friend Michael worked at a book distributor in Zion and kept in touch after high school. Charles was the trailblazer, moving to Evanston where he began his career as a tailor learning fashion design and alterations, much of which was self taught.

Charles moved to Chicago and started Second Cycle, repurposing jeans into new garments at a storefront on Broadway in Boys' Town, the first of three major business ventures. This was a wonderful time, where he developed lifelong friendships at the Great Showing Machine (GSM) where many a party was had!!

Charles visited Milan and Rome, Shelter Studios In LA and Hollywood. He was into house music- he knew Frankie Knuckles and celebrities we don't even know!

Charles ran Caliber Leather out of his apt/studio around Ardmore and Ridge, specializing in leather coats and fur goods. He had a strong gay clientele, and made leather kilts, chaps, vests , and sashes for the Chicago and International Leather Competition. His business continued at the Lost Colony Art Studio, where the legendary Alley store is now located. Charles' skills were amazing and he loved his work, but it was a struggle.

His circle of friends keeps growing as we meet each other for the first time!
His memory is surely a blessing!

Special thanks to Michael (Humberto Echavarria) Scalzo, Catherine (Vanlear Willams) Perkins, Gary Page, Mark Thomas, David Boyer, Harrison Fried, and Helen Kane for being there for Charles and each other.

Charles was the fond, cool "Uncle Charles" to Tim Bonner, Henry and Tiffany Gaston, Trent Robinson, and Anthony, Keisha, Rhonda, Tommy Jr., John Cole Jr., and others.

Preceded in death by parents Clarence Cole and Getrude Kinder Cole;
siblings Albet Davis, Mary Harris, and Eugene, Thomas, Johnny, and Shirley

Cole; nephews Vincent Harris and Parnell Graham; and his faithful companion, Nightwatch the black cat.

Charles has given the gift of sight by donating his corneas through Eversight Vision

God bless you Charles for sharing your spirit and creativity. Your memory will live on through your friendships with the many people you met and touched along the way!

Celebration of the Creative Life of Charles Cole: Sunday, June 21, 2-5pm, Touché, 6412 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60626.

Arrangements by Inclusive Funeral Care 773-318-1305 or www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com.

Upcoming Events

Celebration of Life

JUN 21. 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM (CT)

Touché
6412 N. Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60626

Tribute Wall



“ *As we committ our brother to the ONYX Omega Chapter I remember his talents well. He was our go to to design the ONYX Colors when we began the club in 1995, of which the original colors are enshrined at the Leather Archives & Museum. He also designed the first backpatch for my contest the Leatherman of Color. He was an expert craftsman and a wonderful soul who will be greatly missed. I remember taking ideas to him and the design would emerge! He was a legend in our community. May the ancestors receive his spirit for he was one of a kind....an old school tailor. Ashè.*

*Mufasa Ali
ONYX Founding Father
Mufasa's Pride Productions Founder*

Mufasa Ali - May 08 at 10:07 AM



“ *Charles Cole.
Another ONYX legend.
Caliber Leather.*

My first leather specialist. My first experience walking into a leather shop and truly feeling what leather culture looked and felt like in real life. One of my very first pieces of leather came through his hands and his craft.

Rest well, Charles.

May you find peace with the ancestors. And may we continue to carry the culture forward in a way worthy of your contributions.

Sir 'KG' Smith - May 08 at 09:07 AM

WS

“ Charles was such a sweetheart. I was gifted a pair of leather chaps and a vest that I needed taken in, and I visited him in his studio space just off Belmont Avenue. I had known of his work for many years, but had not had the opportunity to meet him until then. He was so sweet, complimented me on the look, and made sure that I was happy with his work when I returned a week later to pick them up. If people asked me who to go to for their custom leather work, I always said "Charles Cole of Caliber Leather is your man." I know his passing will be felt by many in the Chicago and International leather communities. Thank you for sharing your talents and creativity with us, and your lovely smile and kindness. May his memory be a blessing to all who knew him.

*William "Rubberwilli" Schendel
Mr. International Rubber 2003*

William Schendel - May 06 at 08:39 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Team Inclusive Funeral Care - May 02 at 10:54 AM



“ 5 files added to the album Memories Album



Team Inclusive Funeral Care - April 29 at 07:56 PM