

James Kenneth “Ken” Baker
May 6, 1930 – December 14, 2025

James Kenneth “Ken” Baker, a zoologist whose interest in cave animals began as a student at the University of Texas at Austin, died on Dec. 14, 2025. He was 95.

Born on May 6, 1930, in Lindrith, New Mexico as Kenneth Stanley Jacks, Ken was adopted in 1937 as James Kenneth Baker. After his adoption by James Alvin Curtis Baker and Ruth Nell Moore Baker in 1937, Ken and his sister Sandra lived in Corpus Christi, Texas. He graduated from Corpus Christi High School in 1948 and attended Baylor University from 1948 to 1950. After four years of military service in the U.S. Navy from 1951 to 1955, he used the G.I. Bill to attend UT Austin and The University of Texas Institute of Marine Science, Port Aransas, where he obtained a full major in vertebrate zoology with minors in vertebrate paleontology and chemistry.



Describing his career’s beginnings at UT Austin, Ken wrote, "... I wrote my first papers, interestingly enough, on cave animals and visited Carlsbad Caverns. A friend who worked there as a ranger invited me for a weekend visit in the summer of 1958 to see parts of the caverns not opened to the public.

“During the visit I met, fortuitously, the Chief Park Naturalist,” Ken wrote. “When he learned of my interests in caves and cave animals, I was invited to apply for a job as a park naturalist. I did, and was hired to start after completion of my summer studies”

Ken also received a grant to study cave swallows in Mexico. His interest in and love of nature began as a child enjoying butterflies and birds in his yard and at the family farm along the Texas Gulf coast. He would keep caterpillars) in his room, waiting for the larvae to form a chrysalis and emerge as butterflies after metamorphosis.

Ken's tours of duty as park naturalist, chief park naturalist and research biologist with the former Office of Natural Science Studies, National Park Service included Padre Island National Seashore, Carlsbad Caverns, Joshua Tree, Death Valley, Channel Islands, and Hawaii Volcanoes National Parks. He wrote Management Plans for perpetuation of endangered species and eradication of non-native invasives. Other studies were of flora and fauna used by indigenous people of each park, including the Mescalero Apache of Carlsbad Caverns.

He published widely in science journals, including his first paper in the September 1957 issue of The Texas Journal of Science on the description of a new species of a blind cave salamander.

His article, [Fossilization of Bat Skeletons in the Carlsbad Caverns](#), was published in the Bulletin of the Speleological Society, Volume 25 (1) - January 1963.

Other published works were featured in art and historical journals, including The Journal of South Texas (e.g., *The Gonzales to San Felipe Road in Texas, 1827-1828* (2013)). He had a long-time interest in Lavaca County history and friendships with [Washington Green Lee Foley family descendants](#), working with them to organize a family reunion and restore the [Woods Family Cemetery](#) near Moulton, Texas.

After retiring from the NPS in 1981 while in Hawaii, Ken sailed to the Pacific Northwest on a 27-day, 3,000-mile voyage in a 36-foot Angleman/Davies gaff-rigged ketch. He eventually harbored the boat in a marina at Brinnon, Washington and moved ashore to a home on the Dosewallips River, not far from the marina and close to Olympic National Park. Between 1983 and 1990 Ken worked part-time for two years as a horticulturalist at Whitney Rhododendron and Azalea Gardens in Brinnon, and for five years as a fulltime biologist at the Coast Oyster Hatchery in nearby Quilcene.

Returning to Texas in 1990, Ken owned and operated the Eyes of Texas Gallery in San Marcos, focused on 19th century Victorian era British art. Ken self-published six fiction works using the penname, James Kaye between 2000 and 2016.

Among other endeavors, Ken earned a Silver Badge from the Soaring Society of America for gaining more than 10,000 feet above release in a sailplane and was a certified scuba diver in Hawaii with dives of an hour duration and to depths of 150 feet. He was commodore of the Hilo Sailing Club in Hilo, Hawaii in 1977; and executive secretary of the Slocum Society in Hilo in 1978. At Padre Island National Seashore, Ken built and sailed a 13-foot sloop around and across Corpus Christi Bay and back.

Ken is survived by his wife of nearly 30 years, Cathy Baker; two daughters, Kathy Davis and SueAnne Fowler (husband Jimmy); four sons, Gary Moore Baker (wife Teresa), James Morgan Baker (wife Lisa), Mark Christopher Baker (wife Bridgette), Jeff Hamilton Baker (wife Doranne) and their mother Martha Baker of Houston, daughters Kerri Lynn Harpole (husband Nate Taylor) and her mother Ilisa Peralta of O'ahu, Blanca Nidia Baker-Marcus (husband Bradley) and Herika Chavez Baker; along with 17 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

Ken is preceded in death by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J.A.C. Baker of Corpus Christi; and his sister Sandra Jane Allee and her husband, Ross Allee. Cremation and arrangements were with Pennington Funeral Home in San Marcos.

References

- Oregon Live and Legacy.com [Obituary](#)
- [Pennington Funeral Home](#)