



## Leonard Rudolph Barnes

December 28, 1919 - May 12, 2014

Traverse City - Leonard Rudolph Barnes, 94, of Traverse City died Monday, May 12, 2014 at Munson Medical Center in Traverse City.

Len was born on Sunday, December 28, 1919 to Leo and Anna (Frost) Barnes in Boyne City, MI. During grade school in Grand Rapids, MI he observed a classmate's father, outdoor writer Ben East, leave for work with a fly rod or hunting rifle in hand, and realized that the writing life would be for him. He attended high school in Cadillac, MI, where he spent his teen years hunting and fishing with his father and friends.

He entered the ROTC in 1941, and during WWII served two years as a member of the U. S. Army on the Aleutian Island of Shemya as editor of the Post newspaper, radio station manager and president of Williwaw Tech, an on-duty education school for 3500 students. He was honorably discharged at the rank of Captain. On October 17, 1953 he married the former Ellen Cutright in Detroit, who was his lifelong travel companion, interpreter and photographer at times. Under his tutelage Ellen learned to operate a double reflex camera and the old Bell and Howell movie camera.

Len was a 1943 journalism graduate of Michigan State University and managing editor of the Michigan State News when it became a daily. MSU and the University College of Communication Arts named him a Distinguished Alumnus for his award-winning travel articles.

For 26 years, Len was editor of AAA's monthly travel magazine, Michigan Living and the author of its feature column 'Dining Out in Michigan' for 35 years. He was the creator in 1961 of the Auto Club's "Bring 'Em Back Alive!" traffic campaign and the Holiday News Service which offered live road condition information to drivers over 167 radio stations. He is past president of the Society of American Travel Writers and the Council of Writers Organizations. His travel for AAA Michigan Living took him to more than 130 countries and all 50 states. He made many fishing films with the late Mort Neff and George Pierrot.

Len served 13 years on the Michigan Travel Commission, including two as chairman and travelled as a member of Governor Blanchard's commission on China. He was president of the Michigan Chapter of the Circumnavigator's Club, a member of the board of directors of the Detroit Zoological Society and president of the Detroit Press Club. He founded the Midwest Travel Writers Association and was president of the Michigan Outdoor Writers Association.

In 1974, Len was named a Michigan Ambassador of Tourism and served on the Detroit Bicentennial Commission 1975-76. In 1975 he was one of 38 members of the Society of American Travel Writers selected to travel the world to invite foreign visitors to attend U.S Bicentennial celebrations. He later co-chaired the SATW's annual meeting which drew 250 members to Michigan for ten days in the fall of 1985.

In 1978, the Michigan Legislature adopted a resolution recognizing Len as "the voice of travel and tourism across Michigan and the Midwest" and as a pioneer in the promotion of Michigan's tourist industry. Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum also honored his contributions to the travelling public.

In retirement, Len was a member of the Traverse City Elks Lodge #323.

Len is survived by his wife of 60 years, Ellen; children, Hilary Barnes (David Ortland) of Seattle, WA, Julia Barnes of Amsterdam and Stephen Barnes (Kathi) of Traverse City. Also surviving are his nine granddaughters Kathryn Speyer (Justin), Alyson, Elizabeth and Eleanor Ortland; Leah and Shira Wolfe; Sarah Seekamp (Robert), Katie Fielder (David) and Melissa Barnes, and three great grandchildren. Len was a storyteller and an engaging public speaker whose good nature and appreciation of a fine meal and a great martini will be missed by all.

A gathering of family and friends will be held later in the year.

Memorial contributions in his name may be directed to the

SATW Foundation at <http://www.satwfoundation.org> or to the

AAA Len Barnes Michigan Fund Award, a MSU journalism scholarship at <https://tinyurl.com/lkb6xqe>

Please share your memories of Leonard with his family by way of his online guest book at <http://www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com>.

The family is being served by Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services. A celebration of his life will be planned for July...

# Comments

---



“ As Bill Semion says, under that editor veneer was a kind-hearted softie with a ready smile. Whether it was his soulmate George Pierrot or in the retirement years following Up North with wonderful Ellen, Len loved life. I believe it loved him back. Len was a tireless ambassador for SATW, passionate about travel writing and his beloved AAA Michigan Living. I lived for Len's dispatches from afar and his always colorful restaurant reviews. To know him personally and professionally, through the Free Press years, was a true privelege. A Beefeater martini toast to a good man. Sleep well, Len.

Rick Sylvain

Rick Sylvain - June 02, 2014 at 09:06 AM

---



“ SATW and the SATW Foundation have lost one of its greatest friends. I didn't know Len well but can call up his memorable laugh. The dedication he showed to the highest travel-journalism standards was -- and will remain -- renowned. --Martha Steger

Martha Steger - May 26, 2014 at 07:03 AM

---



“ Remember Len well from the old days on the Michigan Travel Commission. Goodbye my friend and God speed. Thanks for all you have done for tourism.

Sid Baker

Sid Baker - May 25, 2014 at 11:17 AM



“ RIP Mr. Barnes.....as a AAA family member for many years, my father Joe Ratke spoke so often, and so highly of you.... say hello to him from us....Ratke Family

Bill Ratke - May 25, 2014 at 01:22 PM

---



“ Thank you Mr. Barnes. From the time I could read I would wait for my parent's AAA Magazine to come so I could read your column. You took me places that I will never see, but I imagined I was there through your stories. I loved the restaurant stories and whether Ellen liked or disliked something. I've missed you since you retired and now I know where you are..in Heaven travelling up there. My sympathy to everyone who loved him.

**Cindy** - May 23, 2014 at 01:06 AM

---



“ Len was a dedicated journalist, a delightful storyteller, and a sweet gentleman. We're grateful for his contributions to SATW. I will miss him.  
Elizabeth Harryman  
Travel Editor, Westways magazine

**Elizabeth Harryman** - May 16, 2014 at 08:43 PM



“ It was LRB, or as we called often called him, "Lerb," who ultimately hired me away from the 70-hour work weeks of the newspaper business to give me the best job I ever had, as a staffer and later, as senior associate editor, of what he almost single-handedly created, Michigan Living, at the time one of the best travel magazines in existence. He like to appear the gruff editor-in-chief at times to us underlings, but underneath you could always tell he had a much kinder side, and as he grew to know you, he let that side show more and more. One of the most innovative media people I've ever met. He told me once he could have been president of AAA, but chose not to, for that would have meant cutting down on his travel and writing career, and after his taking umpteen dozen cruises, visiting countries from India to Indonesia, and more, and being able to write about it, I totally understood. We often commented about his unique, curt writing style--one example, he'd eschew use of the word "and" as much as possible, with his signature "coffee hot, strong \$1.95" that often appeared in his "Dining Out" columns, which i also was able to contribute to a few times. Both the magazine business and AAA Michigan have changed, and it's perhaps fitting that the man who always signed off his notes with "--LRB" has signed off for the last time now. A great life, well-lived. What more could one ask?

Bill Semion

AAA Michigan Living, 1975-2004

Freelance writer

**Bill Semion** - May 18, 2014 at 10:01 AM



“ Just noticed Mr. Barnes obituary in Crain's this morning. Brought back years of memories of hearing his voice on WJR Radio.

**Bill Martin** - January 09, 2015 at 09:02 AM