



## Vojin Baic

February 19, 1929 - December 10, 2018

Vojin Baic, 89, of Traverse City passed away Monday, December 10, 2018 in Traverse City with his loving family by his side following a brief illness.

Vojin was born on February 19, 1929 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia to the late Milan and Sofija(Buljugic) Baic. He met the love of his life Mary “Pat” Patricia O’Brien at the Milwaukee Light Opera Company. The couple were married on November 24, 1956 in Milwaukee and together they raised five wonderful children.

Early in his childhood and adolescence, Vojin, often with his brothers, Nikola and Proka, spent much of his time participating and excelling at many activities and sports, including running, soccer, swimming, cycling, and especially skiing and rowing. Ultimately it was thru his travels with Yugoslavia’s national rowing team at the young age of 20, that Vojin made the difficult decision to leave his family to escape the oppression of communist Yugoslavia in 1949. He eventually emigrated to the US by way of Belgium and Germany and passed through New York’s Ellis Island in September 1950. In the following 20 years, he worked to eventually bring all of his siblings and mother to the United States with invaluable assistance from then US Senator, Robert Griffin, who was coincidentally from Traverse City.

Vojin proudly served his new country with honor in the United States Army during the Korean War. Spending most of that time in Japan, he felt very fortunate and was even able to strap on skis and a few race bibs, winning the Asian Military Games for the US Army.

Upon returning from his military service, and eventually settling in Milwaukee. Vojin resumed many of his competitive sports, but actively began to seek, develop, and hone his teaching and coaching skills. He became very active with the United States Ski Association (USSA) on a regional and eventually national level working with National and Olympic Team coaches and athletes traveling both domestically and abroad. He also briefly studied political Science at Marquette University before marrying and starting a

family.

Through many associations with a number of wonderful and influential people, Vojin and his growing family made their way to Grand Rapids for a brief 2 years. Vojin fell in love with the Grand Traverse area during several trips up north and in 1966 moved from Grand Rapids to their 6th street home in Traverse City for 42 years . He had accepted a full time job with the USSA's Central Division headquarters in town. The USSA moved its HQ to Chicago 2 years later and Vojin had no desire to move his family from paradise. It is here that he approached the City of Traverse City, and again with fortuitous support from many people, quickly worked his way from a non-position with the Parks and Recreation Dept. to becoming the Director of Recreation for 22 plus years. It is in this position that Vojin was finally able to fully realize his gift to teach, coach, and introduce people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds the benefits of sports, recreation, and an active lifestyle. He worked with many other like-minded people to start numerous programs, events, and clubs, including bicycling, cross-country skiing, swimming, triathlons, tennis, and many others. A Hickory Hills based summer day camp for kids, safety on the local beaches, and Senior Center activities were just as important to him as training national level athletes on cycling roads and ski trails.

In 1973, at the age of 43, Vojin was honored with the Traverse City Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Citizen Award in large part due to his vision and influence on the area's youth. After retiring in 1986, he continued to stay involved in his vision for the remainder of his life, often shouting words of encouragement at events everywhere. He found a great outlet to extend his community service thru his involvement in the Biederman Foundation as well as many other organizations.

Vojin enjoyed meeting many new friends and staff in the last 10 years at the Woodwinds Condos near the Leelanau trail and most recently at the senior apartments at Samaritas in Acme. Vojin attended Immaculate Conception Church when possible.

More than anything, Vojin loved his Family and the friends he met throughout his life. A hardcore fan of people (and the Green Bay Packers). Vojin laughed and joked endlessly with all, but maybe just a bit more with his grandchildren and great-grandsons and enjoyed following their activities. A devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and brother, Vojin was a beacon of light to many. He was a wonderful man and will be deeply missed.

Surviving Vojin are his loving children, Ivanka (Steve) Berkshire of Traverse City, Milan (Carrie) Baic of Williamsburg, Nickola (Anne) Baic of Boyne City, Maria Baic Weist of York

Haven, PA, Annie (Darrell) Pifer of Portage, MI; grandchildren, Erica (John) O'Hearn, Lindsay (Taylor) Ball, Brendan (Hannah) Baic, Nickolas and Ben Weist, Jennifer Pifer, Katie (Joey) Lioy: great-grandchildren, Traverse and Finnley O'Hearn, brother: Proka (Gordana) Baic; sister Maria Baic, and many other loving family members and friends.

Vojin is preceded in death by his wife of 60 years; Mary "Pat" Baic, his parents; father and mother in-law Chester and Viola O'Brien; siblings Nikola Baic and Olga Champt, grandson Christopher Paul Baic, and great-grandson Christopher Milan O'Hearn.

Visitation will be held from 4-8pm at the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home on Sunday, December 16, 2018. Mass will be held at Immaculate Conception Church on Monday, December 17, 2018 at 11am. Fr. James Hayden will serve as celebrant. In lieu of flowers, Vojin would encourage you to pay it forward and give some time to your favorite youth organization or memorial contributions may be directed to The Traverse Area District Library or Traverse Area Recreational Trails (TART).

Kindly share thoughts and memories with Vojin's family at <http://www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com>.

The family is being cared for by the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home.

# Events

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**DEC 16 Visitation for Family and Friends** 04:00PM - 08:00PM

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Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home

305 Sixth St, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

**DEC 17 Visitation for Family and Friends** 10:00AM - 11:00AM

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Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

308 Cedar Street, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

**DEC 17 Mass of Christian Burial** 11:00AM

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Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

308 Cedar Street, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

# Comments

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“ I am very saddened to learn of Voja's passing, as well as of Pat last year. We have known each other from my days at Interlochen, many years ago. A great and kind man. May both Voja and Pat rest in peace, and their memory be eternal. Deepest condolences to the entire family.

Milan Dukic with family.

**Milan Dukic** - December 22, 2018 at 06:38 PM

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“ Ivanka, feel free to share my email with family and friends who might need to ski in Quebec. Vojin would like that.

**John** - December 18, 2018 at 06:06 PM

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“ My sympathy and condolences to the Baic family. I met Vojin at a ski instructors certification exam at Ken Mar on the Hill in December of 1976. I attended many of his training camps after that and they were always an experience to be remembered. Vojin's energy and humor will be missed by all of us that were fortunate enough to have known him. I still hear his words of encouragement every time I ski up a hill "Russ, push the ski,,push the ski,, head up, head up."  
Russ Barkman Bend, Oregon

**Russell Barkman** - December 16, 2018 at 11:30 PM

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“ Milan, Carrie, and the whole Baic Family - Our deepest sympathy to your family; we know what it means to lose a beloved Father. He was truly one of a kind. Always an encouraging voice, a coach, a mentor - even to those whom he did not know. His Spirit will always be standing along the side of the ski trail, and we will hear his voice encouraging us to do our very best, and be our very best.

Amy Kostrzewa and Ken Roth

One of my fondest Vojin memories: VASA classic race, perfect tracks, nothing but sunshine and blue skies. I'm skiing along the long straight stretch just before the Rock aid station. There was Vojin standing along the side of the trail, shouting encouragement to me (and coaching me to use more double pole technique!). I had never had a ski coach, but there I discovered what it must be like to be mentored by one of the best. I still think of him there every time I ski that stretch of trail. Thanks Vojin- Amy K.

Amy Kostrzewa - December 16, 2018 at 05:15 PM

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“ Vojin was an inspiration to a great many, was a great contributor to Traverse City and will be sorely missed. Always looked forward to seeing Vojin at the golf course, never without a smile and a friendly word. Our deepest sympathy to his family.  
Ed and Bev Merchant

Ed and Bev Merchant - December 16, 2018 at 04:15 PM

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“ It is the loss of a mentor and true friend. The memories of training camps and ski races still remain strong. My sympathies extend to Milan, Nick and Ivanka and family. I am sure he is out setting ski tracks somewhere. Will never forget. Michael (aka Iron Mike) and Sean MacManus

Michael MacManus - December 16, 2018 at 02:58 PM

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“ As all others, I was inspired by Vojin and his enthusiasam for life and sport. It has served me well to this day, his words of encouragement and discipline. Yes , even those rainy ski camps were fun.  
My sympathy to all the Biac family. Ed Reid

Ed Reid - December 16, 2018 at 02:05 PM

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“ It was my first 50k Vasa, when I was struggling to finish those last painful hills when I heard from the side of the trail "Strong finish now, almost there". Through Vojin's words and heavy accent I was totally energized by the compassionate encouragement of this strong but kind man. I would later learn that entire Baic family embodied this spirit. While I will miss his chants that pulled me up those last hills, I will always think of Vojin when I attend an XC event and chant "Strong finish now, almost there...."

**Randy Kessler** - December 16, 2018 at 01:46 PM

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“ I have fond memories of dry land training with Vojin. Even when it hurt we had fun! I remember sitting on the Baic's front porch drinking green juice and hearing about the virtues of radishes after a particularly long workout. As lifeguards at Bryant Park, we would eagerly anticipate the bus full of campers that were getting invaluable exposure to swimming and water safety, thanks to Vojin and his vision. When I recall many seasons at Hickory Hills I think about Vojin and the numbers of athletes he touched in his career. Traverse City is fortunate to have had Vojin as a proud citizen.

**Tammy Hagerty** - December 16, 2018 at 09:32 AM

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“ Was a member of Ivanka and Vojin's High School Nordic team in the 90's- so many good memories and most of my high school friends came from the team. Every once in a while the thought would come to drop Vojin a note to thank him for the positive influence he and his family had on my life, guess I missed the chance. The time and effort they put into the team and skiers was amazing- summer training sessions, programs, camps at Nic's place up north... Their influence and introduction to the physical lifestyle led me to my major in college and my life direction since. My 11 yr old son is in the local nordic ski program here in MT, I can only hope he has coaches in his life like Vojin in mine.

**Clay Morrison** - December 15, 2018 at 11:05 AM

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“ I cannot even begin to express the amazing impact Vojin had on me and my family. Close to 30 years ago my family was very involved in the xc skiing community and Vojin was our coach. Needless to say he was inspiring, positive and made us feel that we could accomplish anything we put our minds to. And, he made it fun!!! I will never forget the night classes at Glenn Loomis school with Vojin to prepare us for cross country ski racing. Standing on the bleachers and swinging our legs for strength, doing exercises and playing peelo polo and getting in good shape while having a great time!!! Then Vojin also cheered on our children when they got involved in the ski racing children's circuit. His smile and encouraging words, and undying devotion to the sport and everyone involved will be a part of my life forever. I will miss seeing him at every event, every White Pine Stampede and every Vasa Race, but his smile and undying support will live on in our hearts forever. Thank you Vojin! I will never forget you.

Deb Johnson

Debra Johnson - December 14, 2018 at 09:57 PM

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“ Vojin is always in my head whenever I run or ski up a tough hill ...I hear him counting out a tempo "1,2,1,2,1,2 you cookie monster." He worked the high school nordic team so hard and we all loved him for it. It is truly a unique coach who can push you to your limit and make you laugh at the same time. He passed his light on to so many people I feel it will never go out. I will be honoring him on Sunday with a ski in the mountains of Idaho. Much love to the Baic clan, Amy (Tholen) Baldwin

Amy Tholen Baldwin - December 14, 2018 at 06:19 PM

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“ Positive energy emanated from Vojin. It rejuvenated a person to just be around him. I am so thankful that Vojin hired me to ref the Recreation Department's men's volleyball league which played at Willow Hill in 1980. Through him I met amazing friends I hold dear to my heart 38 years later. I treasure the encouragement Vojin gave me during my civil rights case as well as the memory of his amazing smile and sense of humor. Vojin, you taught us to pay (and play) it forward and we will do so in your memory.

Anne Morrison Perry - December 14, 2018 at 04:50 PM

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“ Vojin had an enormous positive influence on my life. The most fulfilling things I have done can be directly traced to him.  
How appropriate that Vojin would simply wish for us to "pay it forward and give some time to a favorite youth organization". In terms of paying it forward, Vojin had deep pockets. He seemed to have energy, jokes, kindness, and wisdom for thousands of us.  
When I was a teenager, Vojin gave me invaluable advice about focusing on a few priorities.  
His training principles (patiently build a cardiovascular base, add specificity and variety, and especially fun and creativity) have guided me for 40 years...and let me develop a love of sport so strong that I can't help but share it.  
There are so many funny stories involving Vojin...does anyone remember evening training at the Glen Loomis gymnasium, late 1970s, Vojin teaching us break dancing?  
Thank you Vojin and your wonderful family.

**John** - December 14, 2018 at 02:43 PM

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“ Vikings was a friend and inspiration to all 5 of my children and in that way a treasured friend to me. He will be missed.

**Sandy Lockwood** - December 14, 2018 at 10:50 AM



“ Vojin (not Viking) Darn smart phones!!

**Sandy Lockwood** - December 14, 2018 at 10:52 AM

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“ Since it is the Christmas season I would like to share one of my favorite childhood memories of spending Christmas Eve with my Uncle, Aunt and cousins. I would always look forward to Christmas Eve at Čika (uncle) Voja and Teta (aunt) Pat's home. The house was filled with Christmas cheer, my 5 cousins and feeling of love and family. The Christmas tree was decorated but bare of any gifts. My aunt would always prepare a wonderful meal. After the meal, my dad(Proka) and my uncle would gather the kids for an after dinner walk through the neighborhood as my mom and aunt cleared the the table and "had too much to clean" to be able to go on the walk with us.

As we walked the neighborhood it seemed that we always took a turn down the alley behind the home and my uncle would always point to the sky and say "I think I see Rudolph!!" It was actually the one blinking red light on the radio tower on Tower Hill west of town. We would all get so excited and hope that Rudolph would lead Santa to our homes. When we finished off our walk we entered their home with our mothers exclaiming that we just missed him! Looking into the living room we saw the Christmas tree surrounded by many gifts delivered by Santa.

I feel my uncle always delighted in the childhood wonders and excitement and this memory warms my heart every Christmas.

RIP Čika Voja.

**Olga Baic Topash** - December 14, 2018 at 10:05 AM

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“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



**BB** - December 14, 2018 at 09:11 AM

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“ Vojin was always kind and shared a smile whenever we met. He was a unique and special person.

Mickey Fivenson

**mickey fivenson** - December 14, 2018 at 09:03 AM

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“ I first met him in my Dad's Store, he would come in the play the lottery religiously every week. He always had a smile and a equally generous conversation. Everybody new him, what a gentle soul. He will dearly be missed!!!

Stacy Smith - December 13, 2018 at 01:39 PM

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“ Mary Lyon meeting Vojin for the first time before her VASA race, with her sister Morgan and Amy Powell. Our ski community is so much the better for Vojin and his presence. Mary now skis for Michigan Tech, but she can trace her roots back to what this man created in our community. My own love of nordic skiing can be traced back to a NMC class taught by Vojin and Ivanka circa 1980 and their encouragement to join in local citizens races. Thank you for your service and vision Vojin. You will be missed but not forgotten.



Ray Lyon - December 12, 2018 at 10:35 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Family



Nick Baic - December 12, 2018 at 11:11 AM

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“ 2 files added to the album Family



Nick Baic - December 12, 2018 at 11:10 AM