



John Vincent Byrne

May 9, 1928 - January 11, 2024

John V. Byrne, beloved husband, father, grandfather, scientist, educator, administrator, and artist, passed away at home surrounded by family on January 11, 2024.

John truly succeeded at life. Many will remember him as the 12th president of Oregon State University, a position he held from 1984 to 1995. (Web addresses for the OSU press release and the OSU Foundation tribute follow this obituary).

We remember him as John, Dad, Grandpa, and Bop. John was born May 9, 1928, in Hempstead, NY, the only child of Frank E Byrne and Kathleen (Barry) Byrne. He grew up a commuter's ride away from Manhattan in Rockville Center and then Chappaqua, New York, a wooded township with rocky outcrops. Sometimes mischievous, always memorable, childhood outdoor adventures led to a lifelong passion for geology, rocks, and nature. He received degrees in geology at Hamilton College and Columbia University and earned his PhD in marine geology at the University of Southern California.

During his second term in graduate school at USC, John met Shirley O'Connor. Dared on by his friends, he boldly approached her and said, "I can't think of a subtle way to meet you. Do you mind if I try a direct approach?" She missed her next class. They married in 1954 and were best friends and

spouses for over 69 years. With a grin and a twinkle in his eye, John would tell you it seemed longer, but that is because they did so much! They both loved the outdoors, music, art, books, travel, and their many friends. They even became licensed pilots for a time.

While the rocks in New York State led to John's academic degrees and career, his passion for the physical earth and the great outdoors was a recreational interest as well. It was one that he and Shirley shared and instilled as a value in their four children - Donna, twins Lisa and Karen, and Steven, all born within a five-year period. Starting when the kids were very young, the Byrnes took summer tent-camping vacations, often to the Oregon coast or the Cascade mountains. Closer to home, John would take his children exploring in MacDonald Forest, or drive the family station wagon to the top of Mary's Peak to play in snow (before front-wheel drive).

The family skied and canoed, went kayaking and white-water rafting, and snorkeled in tropical waters. John even learned to ride a unicycle (which he accompanied by singing circus music), and rode dirt bikes (think Motocross) with son Steven.

John was a lifelong artist. While he always insisted he was not a "birder," his artwork tells a different story. He and Shirley travelled widely on five continents in pursuit of viewing new birds -- a highlight of a trip to the Galapagos was "trying to figure out which of Darwin's finches were which." John's drawings captured the birds and scenery. He always had a sketchbook and the couple's many travel journals document their explorations with words and illustrations.

Later, he painted in acrylic, especially after he retired and became active in the Imagine Coffee Painters Group. His works appeared in art shows in Corvallis, and he covered the refrigerator with miniature bird paintings. For

many years, each Christmas card featured one of his birds. Friends know that Shirley is a pianist, but John also had a deep connection to music. He played the saxophone, loved jazz and classical music, and was a strong supporter of classical music in Corvallis.

He served on the OSU-Corvallis Symphony board as treasurer, and he chaired the group that raised funds for OSU's fine Steinway concert grand piano. In addition, he was one of the founders of COPI (Corvallis OSU Piano International).

John enjoyed other people and looked forward to meeting with the "Formerlies" (all "formerly" some role at OSU or in the Corvallis community), the "ROMEOs" (Retired Old Men Eating Out), and the "ROGUES" (Retired Old Guys United Electronically). He and Shirley have been active in their Readers Group for twenty-nine years. John was reading at least two books when he passed, and the bookshelves in his home are a tribute to a life well read. Raising funds for the Valley Library at OSU was a particularly proud achievement.

Through all of this, John was at heart an educator. He taught from a place of love for knowledge, science, learning, and for sharing his passion with his students. Early in his academic career, he was honored to receive the Lloyd Carter teaching award, and later was awarded an honorary doctorate at his alma mater, Hamilton College. He was humble and witty and had a keen curiosity, a sharp memory, and a mischievous smile.

Family events always included laughter. John was preceded in death by his daughter, Lisa Kay Barnhardt. He is survived by his wife Shirley, daughters Donna Byrne and Karen Byrne (Mike Dickey), son Steven Byrne (Holly), and grandchildren Adiv Paradise, Liat Paradise, Lauren Byrne, and Quentin Byrne.

A celebration of life is planned for Spring 2024. Meanwhile, to honor John's memory, the family suggests contributions to the OSU Foundation, particularly the following funds: - John and Shirley Byrne College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences (CEOAS) Endowment Fund - John and Shirley Byrne OSU Library Support Endowment Fund - Shirley and John Byrne Music Scholarship Endowment Fund - Shirley and John Byrne Piano Series Endowment Fund Links: OSU Press Release: <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/john-v-byrne-oregon-state%E2%80%99s-12th-president-dies-age-95> OSU Foundation Tribute: <https://fororegonstate.org/stay-informed/impact-stories/detail/byrne>

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

APR **14**. 2:00 PM (PT)

CH2M HILL Alumni Center
725 SW 26th St.
Corvallis, OR 97331