



## Peter L. Barnhisel

June 30, 1939 - December 9, 2024

Peter Leavitt Barnhisel passed away on December 9, 2024 at age 85, in his home in Corvallis, Oregon, next to his wife Norma, after a brief battle with metastatic melanoma.

Pete was born on June 30, 1939, in Portland, Oregon, and grew up in Klamath Falls. For a time when he was a small child, he and his sister Sally and their mother Maybelle “Babs” Barnhisel lived in a hotel in Seattle, while his father Arthur Howard “Barney” Barnhisel piloted a barge between Puget Sound and the Aleutians as part of the war effort. Barney would later serve with the OSS in Burma and China, and the rugs, antiques, and prints that he brought back from Asia were some of Peter’s most cherished possessions.

Barney, a realtor, built a tennis court and swimming pool and playhouse on their property along the Link River, and Pete always described his childhood in Klamath as idyllic. He wrestled and played safety on the Klamath Union High School football team, engaging in perhaps more than his share of teenage rambunctiousness with a group of friends who called themselves the “I-Rods.” He attended Stanford University, where he balanced his studies with frequent trips into San Francisco to see favorite acts like Dave Brubeck, Ella Fitzgerald, and Lenny Bruce, then served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific as a junior officer for two years on the destroyer U.S.S. Orleck.

Discharged from the service, Pete returned to Oregon and enrolled at the University of Oregon School of Law, graduating and passing the bar in 1966. That same year, he married another Klamath Fallsian, Norma Jean Jones, whom he met in Eugene—the two had not known each other back home.

Pete and Norma moved to southwest Portland, where she taught at Oak Creek Elementary School and he worked as an associate lawyer at the Spears, Lubersky firm downtown, across from what would later become Pioneer Courthouse Square. Their son Gregory Peter was born in December 1969, and soon afterward the family moved to Corvallis, where Pete started a new law firm with John Fenner. That firm, now known as Barnhisel Barlow & Stephens PC, is still thriving in its original offices.

Pete and Norma threw themselves into their new life, and welcomed a daughter, Stacy Jean, in January 1972. Both Pete and Norma were joiners, and through groups like Welcome Wagon, Timberhill Racquet Club, and the Assistance League they quickly developed a large network of friends that survives to this day. Both to promote his law practice and because he felt it was important to contribute to one's community, Pete involved himself in countless civic organizations: the Benton County Library, the Corvallis-OSU Symphony Society, the First Presbyterian Church, the Benton County Historical Society, the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, and the Oregon Coast Aquarium, just to name a few.

In 1990, Peter was named by then-Governor Neil Goldschmidt to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. His commitment to civic involvement found its greatest expression in his work for that commission, of which he became chair in 1994-5. Traveling across the state, he met with tribes, landowners, hunters, conservationists, and developers to try and understand how best to manage Oregon's native fauna. He often reminisced that meeting President Bill Clinton at the so-called "Timber Summit" in 1993 was one of the most memorable

moments in his life.

Apart from Norma, the law was his greatest passion. Work sustained him and energized him, and he relished the array of challenges and problems and satisfactions his practice (which specialized in probate, insurance, banking, trusts, and arbitration) provided. Pete never retired, and as of age 85 was still preparing for arbitrations and client meetings. He served his profession as a member of the Board of Bar Governors, the Board of Bar Examiners, and from 1989-92 as the lawyer representative on the Judicial Conference of the Ninth Federal Circuit—the governing body for the federal court system across the entire West. Although he was no fan of the judicial philosophy of Antonin Scalia, in his mind meeting that Supreme Court Justice at a Ninth Circuit conference rivaled his encounter with President Clinton.

But his devotion to Norma and his children, and eventually his grandchildren, was the defining fact of his life. Norma and Peter had a remarkably equal partnership and he deeply respected her intellect and judgment, and the two shared a passion for theater, especially musical theater. After Norma developed an illness later in her life whose effects were often wholly debilitating, Peter became her caregiver, and was in fact doing so up until six weeks before his death, when his cancer symptoms became too acute for him to continue. He also adored his children and their spouses and children, who loved to hear him tell “naughty Peter” stories about the trouble he got into in high school and college. The family gathered annually for vacations in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and Black Butte Ranch, Oregon.

Pete is survived by his sister, Sally, of Ventura, California; his son Greg, daughter-in-law Alison (Colbert), and grandsons Jack and Beckett, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and his daughter Stacy, son-in-law Josh (Haber), and grandchildren Harper and Milo, of Los Angeles. He will be deeply missed

by his family, his colleagues, his friends, the Corvallis and Benton County community, and the Oregon legal community.

The family requests that donations in their memory be made to the Benton County Library Foundation, the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, or the Benton County Historical Society.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

APR **19**. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (PT)

Benton County Library  
Main Meeting Room  
Corvallis, OR 97330

# Tribute Wall

JN

“ Peter was great

*The best*

*So sorry to hear this*

*My favorite high diver in college*

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**Jim Nagler** - January 25 at 04:27 AM

JG

“ Peter was the lawyer for my husband and me since we began our business, J.B. Good, Inc. in the early 80s. We always thought of Peter as a trusted friend, and I will miss him. Best wishes. Judy Good

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**Judy Good** - December 31, 2025 at 07:09 PM

RJ

“ I'm so sorry about Pete's passing. We shared a bench in the locker room at Timber Hill Athletic Club for over 34 years! What a wonderful man! He will be missed!

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**Randy Jones** - December 10, 2024 at 01:20 AM