



John Baran

August 26, 1925 - February 19, 2019

John Baran passed to eternity on February 19, 2019 at home with his wife of 16 years by his side; after a life time devoted to the service, protection and education of others.

John was born August 26, 1925 in Gary, Indiana to Polish, Catholic immigrants, Peter Baran from Krakow, and wife Sophi, a first generation Polish American.

Survivors include his wife, Catherine Baran; daughters, Ila (Mike) Brady and Pam (Rob) Wendland; grandchildren, Ali Brady Noland, Brad Brady, Alex Wendland, and Ellie Wendland; great grandchildren, Willa Noland, Brady Noland, and Camden Brady; niece, Michele Baran; and nephews, Robert Baran, Jeffery Kurowski, and Randy Baran.

He is predeceased by four brothers and one sister.

John first attended Parochial Pre-school in St. Andrews Catholic Church where he loved drawing horses at age 5. He transferred as a second grade youngster to West Pulaski High School in Gary, IN. Throughout his Junior and Senior year she ran to school each day, ran home for lunch, and back to school again. In the summers he ran on the Indiana Dunes on the shores of Lake Michigan. He illustrated for his high school yearbooks. John excelled in

football, basketball, and track and field. He was elected captain of his Tolleston Indiana High School Raiders and named best player in his senior year. His dreams of pro football were shattered when he was drafted at the age of 18.

He wanted to become a pilot, which he passed all of the written tests but was rejected because of bad eyesight. So he was sent to Camp White in Jackson County, Oregon for Boot Camp. He trained 6 to 8 months in rifle orientation learning how to handle, clean, and shoot a M1 Rifle. Assigned to the 96th Infantry Division he ultimately shipped to Hawaii for jungle training and then to the Philippines just in time to fight under General Douglas Mac Arthur's "Philippines Liberation Campaign" during the Battle of Leyte. That battle lasted from October through December 26, 1944. During that time John helped carry out two soldiers from the battle field, under fire, for which he was awarded the Bronze Star.

He later was shot in the hip severing the sciatic nerve, he spent nearly a year in a full body cast. Nearly fatal, he lost consciousness where he was given his last rites from a priest but woke up in time to hear the chaplain. After that injury he received a Purple Heart leaving one leg paralyzed. On February 23, 1944 he was honorably discharged from the hospital as a 100% disabled combat wounded WWII Army Veteran.

John returned to Gary, Indiana and used his Veterans benefits to get a higher education. He commuted to The Chicago Academy of Arts for his initial arts training. Next he enrolled at Indiana University in Evanston, Indiana and graduated in 1951 with a Bachelors of Art Degree majoring in Political Science.

With his new found interest in politics, he returned to Gary to work for the Lake County Government as a county official in the police department and

later became a Gary City Parks Department supervisor for two years.

He met his first wife, Willa Brown, and moved to Little Rock, AR. Being a Little Rock newcomer he had no luck finding a local political job. So he applied to the Little Rock School district, where he was immediately hired. In 1957 John brought his family to Hot Springs where he was offered a position teaching secondary art education at the Hot Springs Junior High School. John's tenure within the Hot Springs Central Junior High annex building was a hugely successful one. He ruled his expansive basement level art studio classes with an awe-inspiring, no-nonsense attitude over three decade in which very few students ever disrespected his authority. During his teaching career he was President of the Hot Springs Classroom Teachers Association; President of the Garland County Teachers Credit Union; President of the Arkansas Arts Education Association; President and Founder of the Hot Springs Arts Center and organizer of the Military Order of The Purple Heart in Hot Springs.

John designed and built a hillside contemporary brick home for his family which now included a second daughter, Pamela. He began building as the contractor in early June, he hired a foreman and crew. John, himself, worked hard and finished the house in December of 1960.

His marriage to Willa had ended in 1972. He later married Melinda Hickmon who was a 9 year member of Hot Springs High School District board of education, city director, vice Mayor, and Mayor. John served two terms on the Garland County Quorum Court. They helped found and fund the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. They helped lead and financially supported Hot Springs bid for the acquisition of the original Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences. They led the founding and creation of the Hot Springs Hamasaki Sister City Program. John and Melinda's marriage came to an end in 1997.

Later on John met Catherine at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. They married September 14, 2003 and in the time they had with one another they shared each other's important values, unconditional love, and family. She enabled him to travel the world with her to see different countries while visiting all the important places still in John's memories. He appreciated her constant presence and total loyalty during their final years together. Their strong and stable marriage was the crown jewel in John's long life.

A Memorial Service will be held 11:00 AM Friday at St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

In lieu of flowers memorials may be made to St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Muses, and The Pocket Theatre.

Tribute Wall



“ *Mr Baran what can I say? Wow what a life he had. I had him as an art teacher in the late 60's Jr High. He was very strict, but such an awesome teacher. I wasn't the best art student but he made me love drawing. I think I had a little crush on him too! I too wish I had know his history and what he had been through, although I already had respect for him. He led such an exciting life and it made my heart happy that he found the love of his life and was very happy when he passed. I wanted to cry when I saw he passed 9 months ago but so happy I came across this or I would never have known about his Extraordinary life. RIP Sir John Baran you have had my admiration forever! Run you are now carefree and strong again! Prayers and best wishes to your wife and family you left behind. I know you will be waiting to you are reunited again. Barbara Jean Barham-Crom*

Jeanne Soper - November 13, 2019 at 12:39 PM

GT

“ *I WAS AN ART STUDENT OF MR BARAN'S AT CENTRAL IN THE LATE 60'S. AFTER HAVING READ HIS OBITUARY, HOW I WISH THAT I HAD KNOW HIS LIFE STORY WHEN HE WAS MY TEACHER. LOVE THE PICTURE OF HIM. WONDERFUL TEACHER , WONDERFUL MAN AND AN EXCEPTIONAL AMERICAN. REST IN PEACE MR. BARAN .*

GAIL TODD - June 03, 2019 at 05:31 PM

SF

I agree with all you said of Mr. Baran; I too wish I had known his story. Mr. Baran was my first art teacher. He inspired me to continue and explore various forms of art. Ila was a classmate. Deepest sympathy for your separation. Sharon Outler Freeman

Sharon Freeman - August 24, 2019 at 11:53 AM

TP

“ Remembering John Baran as a patriot, arts and cultural advocate, community supporter, innovator and a man of strength, determination and courage. Blessings, peace and comfort to Catherine, to his family and to all who feel his loss. John -- what a life well and fully lived. Imagining you are running free again, along the shores of Heaven.

Terry Payne - February 28, 2019 at 11:25 PM

MB

Terry--you've written a truly inspirational sentiment. Thank you so much.

Melinda Baran - March 01, 2019 at 10:32 AM

RF

“ John was an excellent art teacher and helped me develop a love of drawing. His classes were always fun even though he ran a tight ship. Years later I found out his bad leg and hip was the result of a sniper on Okinawa. He lived a full life and gave a lot of himself to others. We owe his generation a great debt for securing and maintaining the freedoms we enjoy today. Rest easy my friend, you have earned it. Ron Fuller

Ron Fuller - February 28, 2019 at 02:49 PM

DC

“ The delightful photo of John will remind us all of what a charming man he was and greatly loved by all in Hot Springs. He was one of the first new friends we made when we moved here almost 30 years ago. On any chance meeting of John anywhere in town he would light up any room he was in with his kindness. We were all better having known him. Peace and strength for his family in the days ahead. Dr. Martien and Deborah Carroll

Deborah Carroll - February 28, 2019 at 09:38 AM

IF

“ As a Hanamaki citizen who hosted Mr. Baran, the first Hot Springs delegation member, in September 1992, I would like to offer my deepest condolences. His presence and what he told about peace prompted to establish the Hot Springs-Hanamaki Sister City Program in the following year. I am very grateful for what he had done for the excellent program from the bottom of my heart. He is missed at the opposite side of the world as well.

Ichiro Fudai

Ichiro Fuda - February 28, 2019 at 02:04 AM

IJ

“ Ichiro Fudai, Hanamaki, Japan purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of John Baran.



Ichiro Fudai, Hanamaki, Japan - February 28, 2019 at 01:49 AM

JB

“ John Baran was the first person to put a pencil in my hand and tell me to draw. Everything I create today, be it architecture, scenic design for stage and screen, furniture,, or interiors, has its nascense in that simple act. I will always be grateful.

John Alec Briggs - February 27, 2019 at 11:58 PM



“ *Sacred Duty Spray was purchased for the family of John Baran.*



February 27, 2019 at 05:47 PM



“ *My deepest sympathy to Catherine, John's family, friends and those who knew and loved him. What a sweet and delightful man. John was a big part of my early memories moving to Hot Springs with my mother, Elizabeth King. He was very involved with the Community Players at that time and I served as a flower/rice girl when he and Melinda were married in the 70s, and remember decorating their car with rice bags for their getaway.*



Years later he and Catherine were a part of the St. Luke's group for a trip to London which my mother organized. Always the gentleman, he asked about my mother every time I spoke with him.

There are not enough gentlemen like him walking this earth. He will be sorely missed.

Lysa Lawless

Lysa Lawless - February 27, 2019 at 12:16 PM

JP

John was a true gentleman and when he entered the room his presence could immediately be felt. I did not have the pleasure of spending time with his lovely wife. I think we met while shopping. Catherine was a lovely lady. I do wish I had spent more time with them. May the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost give Catherine the peace she needs during this lose. God Bless the entire family.

Jo Ellen Pratt - February 28, 2019 at 10:30 AM

MB

Jo--thank you for remembering John. We'll all miss him--but what a life he lived, for sure!!

Melinda Baran - February 28, 2019 at 12:33 PM

MB

“ *Catherine, John's obituary is truly wonderful. And I love the photograph you selected of him. It was always a favorite of mine-- showing his real personality, his wry sense of humor, his strength of character and his very handsome self. You have honored his life, his service and his memory with inspiring and gentle words.*

Steve and I send our love and appreciation for all you and Ila have done to make his final years so happy and secure. Although we will, unfortunately, be traveling out of the country and not able to attend, my brother and his wife, Jim and Susan Hickman, who spent many happy times in John's home, too--will represent us at his memorial service on Friday.

We'll see each other again soon in Hot Springs.

Melinda Baran and Steve Rebach

Melinda Baran - February 27, 2019 at 10:10 AM