

Giersbach, Walter Fisk (August 8, 1939—January 22, 2021)



Walt Giersbach, born in Chicago, IL, but raised in Forest Grove, OR and Montclair, NJ, joined the Grinnell community in the fall of 1957 with most of us. For his first two years, he resided in Smith Hall, where a classmate (Ron Hutchins) introduced him to the Easy Street Bar in Chicago and the music of June Christie and other jazz greats as well as motorcycling that prompted Walt to buy an Indian Warrior cycle. For the last two years, Walt “escaped” to live off-campus at the Gannaway House. For at least his first year he was a member of the Air Force ROTC unit at the College. He majored in Comparative Literature with a focus on English-journalism and was elected to membership in Sigma Delta Chi, the national professional journalism fraternity for men, which fit with his desire for a career in that field.

Although he said for our 50th reunion that graduation from Grinnell “found me woefully without direction,” he had spent the summer of 1956 working in the Chicago suburbs as a news reporter” and immediately after graduation, he returned to his New Jersey home and found a job “writing new copy and editing for the Mobil Travel Guides.”

“But, the Army draft was sniffing at my heels,” and he spent the next three years (1961-64) as a security analyst with the U.S. National Security Agency with assignments in South Korea and Taiwan.

After only six months back from those deployments, Walt “realized I’d left the best part of me behind in Taiwan”--the love of his life (Judy Hsiu-Yen Ho)-- and immediately returned to that country, where they were married. The two of them then came to the U.S. to live in New York City until their son, William, was nine and daughter, Lisa, was five, when they moved to Jackson, New Jersey. Soon thereafter, Judy’s family from Taiwan joined them to expand their family with Judy’s mother along with four nieces and nephews.

Professionally Walt pursued his dream of journalism with important positions in corporate communications for Western Electric, Studebaker-Worthington, R. H. Donnelley and Dun & Bradstreet until his retirement in 1999. As he said for our 50th reunion, he had “a three-decade career in corporate communications—PR, speech-writing, global publications, exhibits, media relations, and financial reporting.”

He also continued his passion for writing by “publishing two collections of short stories, (“Cruising the Green of Second Avenue” and “Cruising the Green, Vol. 2”), both of which

depicted daily life on New York City's Lower East Side in the 1960's. Other writings included two-score short stories, half a dozen historical articles, a score of short humor pieces, and numerous book reviews." Walt is remembered for his writing and ever-present wit. He was quick with a joke, a funny story or a tall tale.

In addition, Walt in his active retirement helped publicize the Connecticut Film Festival, managed publicity programs for Western Connecticut State University Haas Library, and moderated a writing group at the library in Manchester, NJ. He also was a board member of the United Church of Christ-Toms River, NJ.

Walt and Judy enjoyed antiquing, hiking, landscaping and traveling, especially to National Parks.

Walt had many fond memories of Grinnell. For our 50th reunion, he said the College "was useful for providing me with a broad exposure to the humanities, language and social sciences—less useful for the hard sciences to which I'm still manifestly indifferent. In this, it fulfilled its charter of providing a liberal education that's been a



foundation for my career, family life, and the greater circle of people I interact with around the world." For an earlier reunion, Walt said, "A few Grinnell classes (in journalism, languages, logic and the 'soft' sciences) have been yardsticks in helping me measure facts and situation against a larger body of knowledge. The fact that it is a small school with small classes made the 'take-aways' more meaningful." It also should be mentioned that he served as our Class Fund Director, 1978-2007 and as a member of our Class Committee, 2004-2010 and that his daughter "Lisa" is a Grinnell alumna ('91).

Walt is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, William and Andrea Tracey Giersbach; daughter, Lisa Giersbach, and son-in-law, Eric Kramer; and three grandchildren. Walt's wife Judy died in 2014.

Duane W. Krohnke