



Barclay "Barney" Brantingham

February 26, 1932 - May 29, 2025

For decades in his column, he wrote the real-time narrative history of Santa Barbara, then in real-life became a community hero by choosing journalistic principle and ethics over a job he loved

Barney Brantingham, a great journalist who embodied Santa Barbara the way Mike Royko did Chicago, Jimmy Breslin New York and Herb Caen San Francisco, died last week, his family announced Monday. He was 93.

Like those big-city newspaper brethren of his era, Barney captured the human stories, sentiments and spirit of his town, pounding out a real-time history of Santa Barbara on deadline, day-after-day, year-after-year, in his must-read "On the Beat" column.

In lovely send-offs, Jean Yamamura and Josh Molina both detailed his life and long career as what used to be called a "newspaperman," in their obituaries in the Independent and over at Noozhawk, respectively. Please check them out.

Goat tacos and ties. As a personal matter, I knew Barney as a colleague who became a good friend. I had great respect for his journalistic chops, high regard for his well-earned standing as a community icon, and great admiration for his warmth, compassion and basic human decency as a man.

As the historic morning paper's well-established marquee attraction, Barney was a little suspicious of me when I showed up as the new suit in the newsroom in 2002. By the time he'd led me through the sensory delights of my first Fiesta that summer, however, introducing me to goat tacos and getting me to lose the tie, we'd formed a professional and personal connection that would last for nearly a quarter-century.

Unlike other star columnists I've known, Barney always tipped off the city desk when he had a scoop they might need to chase; if we needed a little extra scope and oomph on a sensitive local story, he was always glad to rewrite his column onto Page One; when a matter arose that required some special diplomacy (the owner of the paper's engagement to her longtime paramour, comes to mind) Barney would find a deft way to make it work in "On the Beat."

Barney truly loved his city, almost as much as he loved his job. So it was a shock when he walked into my office on the morning of July 6, 2006, to inform me that he'd decided to resign, along with four senior editors and me, over a series of internal events that had made staying at the paper untenable.

Barney didn't have to do that. At that point, he had not been directly affected, influenced or impacted by the internal turmoil that had touched the editors (I remember being surprised that he even knew that we were planning to leave – but he was that kind of reporter). He had decades invested in his position and his high status in the community, and no one would have blamed him, or even looked askance, if he'd just kept his head down, pounding out his column until the storm had passed.

Barney had too much integrity for that.

He sincerely cared about the traditional values that underlay the trustworthiness of his craft, the without-fear-or-favor principles that built and

nurtured credibility with readers, his audience, the people of Santa Barbara, who he truly loved. He wouldn't betray them by pretending that everything inside that historic building on De La Guerra Plaza was all right.

So he gave up the best job he ever had, drawing a line in the sand about what was permissible to meet his high standards for our work, and what was not.

Barney's resignation was like a giant jolt across the community.

Truth be told, no one would really have cared all that much about a batch of mostly anonymous editors quitting over some obscure "Code of Ethics." When Barney walked out the door — voluntarily, confidently, certain of why he was doing it — and then explained clearly why he had — people in Santa Barbara suddenly took notice, understood why it mattered, and began to protest and push back.

Tears and Chi-town deli. There's a short, sad scene in the documentary "Citizen McCaw," which tells the story of the 2006 "meltdown," that shows Barney speaking to a rally in front of the newspaper building a few days after his resignation. Midway through his speech, he starts to cry, weeping openly, a raw demonstration of the sacrifice he made for his profession, for his community, and for the rest of us.

A few months after that day, Barney and I, with our spouses, were in Chicago together to accept an ethics award from the Society of Professional Journalists for our collective actions at the paper.

He took us to one of his favorite home town delis, and we had a few laughs; I don't remember much we talked about; but I do remember marveling to myself that there was not a glimpse on his part of looking back. Barney was

unwavering and unshakably secure that he'd made the right and morally correct decision by quitting.

That belief gave me – and a lot of other people — a lot of strength through a lot of bad months and years in all that followed the meltdown.

For that, for Santa Barbara, and for your friendship – thank you, Barn...

RIP, old friend.

Cemetery Details

Santa Barbara Cemetery

901 Channel Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93108
(805) 969-3231

Events

Details are pending.