



## John O. Anderson

February 16, 1928 - August 17, 2021

John passed peacefully on August 17, 2021 at the age of 93 in his home in Santa Barbara with his devoted wife Rita by his side. He leaves behind Rita, his wife of 71 years and four children: Pat Barry (Bruce), Steve Anderson (Marti), Jeffrey Anderson (Cindy), and Christy McElwee (Jim). He also leaves a wonderful legacy of nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

John was born and raised in Bessemer, Michigan. Prior to attending college, he was in the U.S. Army occupation forces in the Pacific. He then graduated from Michigan Technological University in Houghton, MI in 1951 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He also earned a master's degree in Engineering Mechanics from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. He began his professional career at General Motors Research in Detroit, MI as a research engineer working on crash tests and suspension systems. In 1960, he and his family moved to Santa Barbara to GM Defense Systems developing gyroscopes for inertial navigation. As co-founder of Polar Research Laboratory Inc., he combined his love of nature with science and engineering doing advanced underwater acoustic research and designing and deploying weather data buoys for the Navy and the National Science Foundation in the Arctic and open oceans.

When John asked Rita to marry him, he told her they would travel the world together and they did. John was an avid reader: from science periodicals to Louis L'Amour, he passed on his love of reading. His enjoyment of the outdoors was shared through numerous family camping trips across the country exploring National Parks. John, his sons and grandsons, often backpacked in the Sierras, and off-roading in his 1995 red jeep at Joshua Tree and Red Rock Canyon was always a highlight. John will be remembered by all who knew him as a gentle man, a true gentleman. Husband, Dad, Grandpa, Great-grampa we love you and miss you.

John's family will gather to remember his remarkable life. Memorials can be given to Hospice of Santa Barbara or Visiting Nurses of Santa Barbara in his name.

# Tribute Wall

SA

“ *Dad always loved his many camping trips to the mountains and to the deserts. Sharing those grand adventures with him are some of my fondest memories. They now help to comfort me.*

*Throughout my life, Dad was always a true inspiration and my hero. I miss you, Dad. I love you, Dad. Happy trails.*

*Your loving son,  
Steve*



---

**Steve Anderson** - September 25, 2021 at 07:31 PM

“ Reflections on John Anderson

*My decision 5 decades ago to ask Pat (John and Rita's eldest child) to be my life partner has proven to be the best single decision of my life. An unexpected benefit, was gaining John and Rita as in-laws.*

*Over countless gatherings and growings of family they have been active and engaged participants and when my parents passed around ten years ago they filled a gap that was seemingly irreplaceable.*

*Now John is gone and what we are left with is the essence of a man who can best be described as a gentle man in the truest fashion. John's calm approach to life was multifaceted and came out in numerous ways: getting asked a really embarrassing question by a grandchild at a dinner that sent most of us (immature) adults under the table in fits of laughter, yet John answered without a hitch in his quiet and calming manner. The story of him caught in an arctic blizzard on a snowmobile that turned into a white out, him losing a glove off his hand in the gale force wind, and never letting off the throttle so he could keep his Eskimo guide in sight despite the fact that he knew he might lose his hand to frostbite. His love of the outdoors and the many camping trips and the extended backpacking trip into the Sierra Mountains at a 10,000 foot elevation when he was in his 80's. And finally near the end, his acceptance of his situation while confined to a bed in the living room of their Santa Barbara home. And to a person, the nurses and care staff all remarked on how John was kind, gentle, and a joy to be around. The essence of the man.*

*I am both a scientist and a Christian. I have no problem reconciling approaches that to some might seem irreconcilable. If nothing else, when we think about life, we have to understand that neither matter nor energy can be destroyed, they simply change form and have continued to do so since the moment of creation. We are literally and fundamentally a part of eternity.*

*And just by chance, if there is such a thing, I came upon this excerpt in a book I was reading near the end of John's journey. I simply can't come up with words that more eloquently describe my feelings about John's approach to life.*

*From the book "This Tender Land."*

*"There is a river that runs through time and the universe, vast and inexplicable, a flow of spirit that is the heart of all existence, and every molecule of our being is part of it. And what is God but the whole of that river.*

*When I look back at the summer of 1932, I see a boy not quite thirteen doing his best to pin down God, to corral that river and give it a form he could understand. Like so many before him he shaped it, and reshaped it, and shaped it again, and yet it continued to defy all his logic. I would love to be able to call out to him and*

*tell him in a kindly way that reason will do him no good, that it is pointless to rail about the twists and turns of the river, and that he shouldn't worry about where the current will take him, but I confess that after more than 80 years of living I still struggle to understand what I know in my heart is a mystery beyond human comprehension. Perhaps the most important truth I've learned across the whole of my life is that it is only when I yield to the river and embrace the journey that I find peace."*

*Rest in peace John. You were greatly loved.*

*Bruce Barry*

---

**Bruce Barry** - September 20, 2021 at 06:22 PM

“ My Grandpa - Part Three

*My list of memories with my grandpa are long and beautiful, just like his life.*

*-My sisters' and my only trip to Universal Studios with ET and the Jaws ride.*

*-Sharing steaming bowls of soup at Split Pea Andersons.*

*-My daughter Claire handing him a flower and kissing his cheek at his 90th birthday party.*

*-The way his voice sounded when he said "Hi Luke" whenever we FaceTimed.*

*-His true interest in any project my son Jack was working on.*

*-Enjoying wine margaritas, the size of fishbowls, at his favorite Mexican restaurant.*

*-The feel of his soft shirt and strong hugs.*

*-The way his eyes lit up when he saw my mom (his eldest daughter).*

*-The ways his shoulders would shake with silent laughter when watching a funny movie.*

*-Seeing how much he loved my grandma just by watching him watch her.*

*-My grandpa watching with a wave and blowing a kiss every time I pulled down their driveway heading back toward home.*

*-Slow dancing with him to the song Midnight Train to Georgia at a dinner party before my cousin's wedding.*

*-Never doubting for one second the love he had for his entire family.*

*My grandpa was a kind man with a gentle soul and the brain of an absolute genius (not to mention movie-star handsome), and he was mine. I have been blessed by him through every season of my life, and I will continue to be, through his legacy of his love and the family that he and my grandma created. So how do you say goodbye to someone who has been a constant in your life? I don't think you fully do. It is the grief of missing mixed with the joy of having had, and the knowledge that because we know Jesus it's not a forever goodbye. It's an "I love you grandpa. I miss you. I'll be seeing you again."*

---

**Sanna Hansen** - September 20, 2021 at 12:30 PM

## “ My Grandpa - Part Two

*I had a work trip at one point that took me to Santa Barbara. Instead of staying at the hotel offered to me it was a no-brainer to stay with my grandparents instead. Borrowing their little Honda and heading down the hill to the conference during the day, and back home at night to enjoy dinner and talks about life, work, and travel with my grandparents. Fueled by some of the boxed red wine my grandpa always kept in the cupboard.*

*After love comes marriage, then a baby in a baby carriage. I was actually 5 weeks pregnant when Luke and I made a trip to Santa Barbara to visit my grandparents. The plans had originally called for wine tasting but instead we spent our time at the beach and enjoying dinners out with my grandparents and my uncle and aunt. When that baby finally came, I started my tradition of visiting my grandparents the week before Presidents' Day, which was also my grandpa's birthday. Jack was just over four months old when we went for the first time, and the kids and I continued the tradition for a week every year with our last being February 2020, coming home just two weeks before Washington State came to a standstill with the first COVID case.*

*Our visits were filled with trips to the Santa Barbara Zoo (the best ever!), the beach, the aquarium, restaurants, and reading and playing with my grandparents. A toy drawer was (and still is!) always stocked with items to explore and when the kids were really little, my grandpa was a constant fixture in front of the bouncer or highchair that they kept at their home, singing, talking, and smiling his sweet smile at the babies. As they got older, he was always game to play battleship, watch my son Jack build Legos (they shared a strong love of engineering!), admire my daughter Claire's baby dolls, and read read read! He was even a good sport about learning how to play the Nintendo Wii, and always found real moments to connect on a deep level with our kids in areas that interested them. At the end of the day, it was always back to the dinner table set with a beautiful blue tablecloth, enjoying a delicious meal from my grandma, sipping a glass of red wine, and then topping it off with coffee and my grandma's famous carrot cake that she made for him from scratch for his birthday every year.*

*My grandparents also had a tradition of traveling our way every year once the great grandkids entered the scene. It was usually right around Halloween, so they got to experience the excitement of costumes and candy trading with their 9 great-grandkids, and my son Jack's birthday on Halloween, our very own Jack-o-lantern! My grandpa would find a cozy spot on the couch during the craziness but was always happy when someone came and found him. In fact, those are some of my very favorite moments with him. That sweet smile an invitation to come over and cozy in. He was definitely a quality time person, and that time didn't have to always be in motion or verbal, it could be simply being, together.*



## “ My Grandpa - Part One

*How do you say goodbye to someone who has been as constant to you as the sun rising each morning and setting each night? My grandpa has always been there. Always been a part of my life. Maybe not in the same house or even state, but he has been there all the same. My early memories of my grandpa are typically set in Lake Siskiyou – a beautiful campground and lake where we would have a family reunion every summer with my mom’s side of the family. Tent camping, campfires, winding bike rides, chilly swims in a mountain lake, epic plays put on in the evenings by me, my sisters, and our cousins. My grandpa was always there. Usually drinking coffee out of a mug. A lot of times reading. Always with a kind word and a twinkle in his eye.*

*Fast-forward several years to when I really fell in love with reading as well. My grandparents lived in California and my parents, sisters, and I were in Washington state, but we made a point of seeing each other multiple times a year. There was still that Siskiyou trip, but my grandparents would also come our way once or twice a year, and we would road trip to their house in Santa Barbara. Days were spent adventuring, afternoons we talked a lot about the amazing travels my grandparents went on, but the evenings were shared cozied up right next to my grandpa as close as I could get, both with books in our hands. From my perspective, he was a man of consistency, and one thing that was a given was that he wore the softest button-down shirts. This fact made the cuddled/cozied up reading experience even sweeter. Those moments were always just the best and my grandpa had a subtle way of showing that he loved it too, by scooting in a little closer.*

*I also loved hearing the stories about his family growing up. How I was named after his mom Sanna, whose family moved to the United States from Finland. I learned early about his tender side, how he called his little sister who passed away too young “his dolly.” Looking at pictures of him and my grandma, both so beautiful, young, and in love. About his adventures with his company in the arctic.*

*Of course, I continued to grow up, but my grandparents stayed right there next to us, sharing our life’s adventures in a very real and present way. They took all of us on a 7-day cruise to Mexico to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary when I was 19 and a freshman in college. That was the same year I met my future husband Luke and I remember showing off my tan in the dining hall that Fall wondering if I might catch his eye.*

*When I turned 21, my twin sis and two of our best friends went to Santa Barbara over the summer. We stayed with my grandparents, and they took us out on the town. In one memorable afternoon we went into Santa Barbara wine country, my grandma tasted wine with us and my grandpa served as our distinguished chauffeur and at one point a get-away driver. That year we were all into the show *The Bachelor* and it happened to be starring Andrew Firestone. My grandpa took*

*us on a detour and parked us right in front of the Firestone Mansion gates and took a picture of us pretending to climb up and over. Lots of laughter, one skinned knee, and memories that to this day make my heart feel full.*

*I mentioned that boy – Luke- that I wanted to show off my Fall tan to while in college and foreshadowed that he would one day become my husband. On the day of our wedding, like so many other momentous ones in my life, my grandpa was there. Quietly strong, dark, and handsome in his suit. Ready to dance and celebrate with us.*

Sanna Hansen - September 20, 2021 at 12:28 PM

SH

“ *I wrote down some of the amazing memories I have had with grandpa...including here broken into three parts due to length!*

Sanna Hansen - September 20, 2021 at 12:27 PM

KM

“ *So many amazing memories of Grandpa spending time with his family. We love and miss you Grandpa.*



Kristen Miller - September 15, 2021 at 11:40 PM

KM

“ *Celebrating Grandma's birthday with Grandpa and our family💙.*



Kristen Miller - September 15, 2021 at 11:29 PM

TW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Terra Weeks - September 14, 2021 at 10:45 PM

PB

The saying goodbye photo spot after a visit. Dad in his Tilly hat...

Pat Barry - September 15, 2021 at 07:50 PM

PB

“ 12 files added to the album Memories Album



Pat Barry - September 13, 2021 at 07:01 PM

SA

I added a few of my favorite pics with grandpa! It was so sweet to think back on the memories.

Sanna - September 15, 2021 at 04:59 PM

“Dad has worn many hats for me as Dad, Grandpa to our three daughters, and Great-Grandpa for our eight grandkids, and as a friend and support to all of us. As a little kid I remember saying every weekend, "It's Saturday, Daddy is gonna be home!" Steve and I would push the red couch into the middle of the room and our engineer Dad would teach us how to make paper airplanes and we would have a battle with the couch between us.

*I remember him driving Steve and I from Detroit to Bessemer, MI, a nine hour drive. Mom was pregnant with Jeff and flew. We were in a very long line for the ferry and I had to pee and he said, "Well, Pat, you'll just have to go in your pants." All the while Steve was painting his arm with a banana. I think I must have held it, but I remember his patience and realistic take on things.*

*Our family camping trips instilled a love for camping in all of us kids. We had a tent so big we thought of it as the circus tent. We travelled the country with that heavy thing and dad, being the engineer that he was, had the car cubed out to the max. There were just enough spots for each of us kids. Not all the places would be considered legal by today's standards but it gave whichever kid needed some space to perch in a solo spot.*

*As I got older I needed my Dad in a different way. I remember a breakup with a boyfriend that left me in tears late at night and Dad listening to me and then giving me some words of comfort. He didn't try to fix anything. He just let me know he was there for me and that things would get better over time.*

*As a Grandpa, I have wonderful memories of our annual Lake Siskiyou family camping trip. It was a time to connect as an extended family and for the cousins to spend time together. The kids would perform plays for the adults and Mom and Dad got to just enjoy their family.*

*As a Great-Grandpa, one of the sweetest legacies is his sharing books with all the grandkids. He was not afraid of Pinkalicious! All books were fair game. And all the grandkids are voracious readers. Mom would buy a new book for each kid whenever they visited and dad read to each child as they cozied up to him in his soft flannel shirt.*

*One of the greatest character traits of dad was to be an encourager. Whatever endeavors or obstacles I've faced over the years, he gave the message that I was capable and could do it and he was there for me. He was a blessing as a Dad and friend and I will miss his calm presence and droll smile. He was a true gentleman and a man of his word. I miss him and will always miss him. But he and I both know that we will meet again.*