

# Honoring JOHN SNOW

## THE WAY TO 100

WORDS BY LISA STAMOS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA M. BARRETT

**J**OHN SNOW is best known in Barrington as the founding principal of the then-new Arnett C. Lines Elementary School which opened in 1978. There, his keen insights on teaching children—having raised six of his own—and his gentle manner brought calm and joy to thousands of students. He retired from this, his final career position, at 64. Yet he was a substitute teacher until age 90.

Snow's career path began when he was recruited by the U.S. Air Force at 18, following high school graduation. It was March 1942 when he got the call. Earlier, while still in high school, military personnel came to his school and counted how many men there were, telling them that, "18-year-olds would not be drafted, but don't go anywhere." It was the middle of World War II. Snow was going to be trained as a bombardier, but then the needs changed, and he was sent to train as a gunner. He enjoyed the travel brought by his time in service.

Once returning as a civilian, Snow pursued his interest in art, and attended The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was there he met his beloved wife Ann. "I was 6'2" and she was 5'11," he said. They married in 1951 and had their first child the next year. "She was in the fashion school there," Snow said. "Ann was wonderful, an outstanding mother, homemaker, and cook." The couple were married 63 years before her passing.

"The secret to a great marriage is finding a good woman," Snow says. "She was incredibly organized, keeping to-do lists. And when I retired, she looked at me and said, 'We're not going to do lunch.' So, she took a job at Roslyn Road School as a teacher for students, mostly Asian, whose second language is English." Snow fondly recalls how their family did things together, like going to the beach after church.

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## THE GOODNESS OF MAYBERRY

John Snow was born in Batavia, Illinois—at home. There’s a family story about how his mom, Lydia, who immigrated from Sweden at age 8, had asked his dad, Oren, to make a fire on the day he was born because of the temperature. It was June 6, 1924. Snow later wrote to former WGN-TV meteorologist, Tom Skilling, to check the fact. Sure enough, it was in the 30s that June day.

Snow grew up in Batavia and had an idyllic, Mayberry kind of childhood. His mom didn’t go to college, as most women didn’t at the time, but Snow says she was bright and very good at playing bridge and doing crossword puzzles. Dad was the family cook, and for work, was employed by his father at TW Snow Construction. The firm was hired to build railroad bridges and water towers associated with steam engines. Things were good until the Great Depression. Railways halted. “It was in 1932 that it hit home for us, and it was problematic for my dad. He didn’t know how to get another job, and like so many in that era, turned to drinking. After a trip to Chicago, he never returned home,” Snow recalls of his loss at age 12.

Summer days were spent on bikes, and at the city water-filled quarry where everyone swam. Back in those days, children could leave the house for an entire day, and parents didn’t worry. People looked out for each other’s children, fed them lunch, and treated them as their own. Today, Snow says the most important thing as a parent is to tell young people to find themselves. “Don’t get stuck doing something [for a job] that you hate. It’s not worth it,” he said. All six of his children did just that—they found livelihoods that they enjoy.

## A CAREER IN EDUCATION

While teaching art in Elgin at a junior high and Elgin Community College, Snow was also traveling to DeKalb to further his career. While working on his master’s degree at Northern Illinois, Snow met with a superintendent at Hickory Hill School in Carpentersville as part of a research project about how districts were dealing with what he calls mushroom communities. “Homes were sprouting up everywhere, and quickly,” he explains. At the time, Countryside Elementary and Sunny Hill Elementary Schools were still a part of District 1, in 1956. The superintendent asked when he would complete his degree, and would he consider a school opening for a principal job at Sunny Hill. He took the job. He would finish his degree later.

The years at Arnett C. Lines School were happy ones for Snow, and his thousands of students. “The kids were wonderful, and it was an extremely positive experience for me,” Snow said. “I finished my master’s at the University of Illinois and was tapped by Dr. Finley, the superintendent of Barrington High School and the village schools. Finley rerouted Snow’s possible interview at a Lake Forest School and brought him on board to open the Arnett C. Lines Elementary School. “Fox Point and other new bursts of housing east of Ela Road drove the need for a new school,” Snow said. It was the post World War II housing boom.

The students were great, parents were super, and there were outstanding teachers during his time there. There were no class-period bells. Snow allowed the students to come into the building when they wanted. If they weren’t ready, they’d stay on the playground. That kind of respect gave students a way to build their self-confidence.

When asked what’s missing in schools today, Snow hesitates, but answers candidly. “I believe that parents have taken over. Of course, a parent’s input is vital, but like a household, someone needs to be in charge, and I don’t see the schools assuming that role anymore,” he said. For him, times have changed.

“I feel extremely lucky that I found a profession that I enjoyed and loved, and found a degree of success in,” Snow said. His leadership and kind manner was something his students and teachers enjoyed, too.

Today, Snow lives on his own, cooks his own meals (his favorite is using his crock pot), and he still drives. He plays bridge with his friends who warn fellow players, “that he is really good.” His greatest philosophy is that there is no room for hate. “What good does hate do?” he asks. And he adds, “Life is a banquet. Get out there and enjoy it.”

## HERE ARE WORDS FROM ALL OF JOHN SNOW’S SIX CHILDREN.

### Andy Snow, SON

The thing I admire most about my dad is how gracious and appreciative he is of even the smallest thing. Whatever you did for him or gave him was always the best. For example, he’s always sharing books he likes and thinks I might, as well. I always want to reciprocate, but he literally reads everything. I finally found one I was sure he hadn’t read. It was a book by one of his favorite comedians, Steve Martin, with illustrations by one his favorite cartoonists, Harry Bliss. Sure enough, he had not read it and was effusive in his appreciation given the combination of Martin and Bliss. You would have thought I just donated a kidney he was so happy.

The thing I remember most about his parenting was he always allowed us to be us. We were entitled to our opinions and ideas. Friends would come to dinner and find us disagreeing with our father about some topic of the day. Later they would say, “I can’t believe you were disagreeing with your father.” Well, in our house that was OK. Likewise, he was always supportive of what we wanted to do. I remember I was maybe 4 years old, and my older brothers, Pete and Jack, were running off the end of a pier on a lake we were visiting one summer. I said, “I want to run off the end of the pier like Pete and Jack.” He said, “OK. Will you be able to swim back like they do?” because at the time I could not swim. I said, “Well, I will walk back.” He asked, “How will you breathe?” I said, “I’ll take a few steps and come up for air and go back down.” He said, “Then give it a try.” So, I did, and I learned to swim that day.



**I loved and appreciated how my parents would always hold hands no matter where they were. They showed us all the meaning of true love.**

— Matt Snow, Son





### **Pete Snow, SON**

Patience and tolerance—these are two of the most important skills I have learned from my dad—especially when dealing with children. For example, what if someone loses their car keys in the sand at Devil’s Lake. Or someone learning how to drive runs over a boulder and damages the car to the point where it needed to be towed. None of my kids did anything like that, but I did! Thanks to my dad, I learned to use these skills when raising my three children.

### **John (Jack) T. Snow, Jr., SON**

Having John Snow as a father was one of the greatest blessings of my life. His sense of humor has infected me and my siblings our entire lifetime since we were children. It’s still evident today. At his recent birthday celebration, I’m standing with him and a family friend having our picture taken, when he blurts out, “Mark, why do you have your hand on my wallet?”

One of the things that fascinated us was his memory of past students or

the parents of students. And this happened all over the world, from remote Canada to the Virgin Islands. It didn’t matter if it was a student or a parent from the 1950s or the 1990s, we never once heard him say, “I’m sorry I don’t remember.” What’s funny about that is that at home he would look right at us and then address us by three of the other siblings’ names before he could think of our correct name.... As always, he had a solution...we all became “Fred.” He would look at you and point and then say, “Fred come here.”

This brings us to my favorite Snow family story. An acquaintance named Denny worked at a clothing store in Elgin. One year dad took the younger siblings (Andy, Bart, Matt, and Kate) to the store for the new school year. Denny tells me that dad was walking around the store yelling to each of the siblings things like, “Hey Fred, did you see the Levi’s are on sale,” or “Hey Fred, these sweaters are on sale.” A little bit later dad is talking to Denny at the cash register. Denny tells me that he asks my dad “Which one is Fred?” And dad replies, “They all are.” At which point my sister Kate walks up to ask dad a question and he points at her and says to Denny “And she’s Frieda.”



Each year, the family gets together for its annual golf outing in early June, to celebrate John Snow's birthday. They play at Bonnie Dundee, In East Dundee, his favorite course. From left: Andy Snow, Jack Doherty (Kate's son), Therese (Dan's fiancée), Dan Snow and John Snow, (Pete's twins), Peter Snow, Bart Snow, John Snow Sr., Scott Joslin (my husband) Kate Snow, and Matt Snow. Below: John Snow and Bonnie Dundee Golf Course turned 100 this year.

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**My mother and father were loving, patient, and full of humor. We did not have a lot at a young age, but we had each other, and we always had a good time.**

– Bart Snow, Son

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**Katherine Snow, DAUGHTER**

My dad has a way of making people feel special. Growing up, my siblings and I always had friends over at the house and he made every friend feel that they were his favorite. He does that by finding out about them, asking questions, listening and accepting. He would invite door-to-door salesman in the house and pick up backpackers to hear their story. For our birthdays he would spend the day with each child. Often, my brothers would invite a few friends and they would all go to a Cubs game. My birthday was in December, so I always asked to go have lunch, just me and dad, beside the giant Christmas tree at Marshall Field's in downtown Chicago. He thought nothing of waiting an hour to give me my birthday wish. He would always tell me, you're my favorite daughter, to which I'd say, I'm your only daughter. ☺



Life is a banquet and  
meant to be enjoyed,  
but some folks are  
starving. Ride your  
bike. Go to the  
beach. Find things  
you like to do.

John Snow

