



Welcome to the memorial page for

Simon Bourgin

July 31, 1914 ~ August 20, 2013 (age 99) 99 Years Old

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 **Obituary**

 **Service Details**

He is survived by his wife's children: Walter (Susan) Arensberg and Ann Arensberg; and the children of his brother Frank: Marilyn (Roger) Israel, Claudia Sondonato and their children.

Mr. Bourgin returned to the small town of his birth three years ago from Washington DC, after an illustrious career that divided between his work as a journalist and as a public servant. As a journalist he was a reporter in Europe for Stars & Stripes newspaper during World War II, he covered the post war period and beginning of the Cold War in Europe for Life Magazine, and was the Los Angeles bureau chief for Newsweek magazine in the '50s. He then worked for the Rand Corporation, USIA, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Aspen Institute.

He was born to Russian immigrants in the northern Minnesota town of Ely. He was the youngest of three boys and his father ran the dry goods store in town. He attended the University of Chicago before going to Washington DC, a city filled with New Deal reformers, to pursue a career in journalism. Swept up by the fervor of New Deal activism, he wrote speeches for the both the Department of Agriculture and the Office of Emergency Management, before the United States entered World War II.

During the war he was assigned to the Ninth Air Force and became a correspondent for the legendary Army newspaper Stars and Stripes where his assignments took him throughout war-torn Europe. He eventually trained his focus on the immediate post-war crisis in Central Europe, the Balkans, and the dramatic Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe.

His coverage was not only political, but also focused on cultural and literary figures, many displaced by the war. His stories earned him the attention of Life Magazine, and after he left the military he became their Central European correspondent for over 10 years, a period of time during which he was based in Vienna and immersed himself in the dramatic stories of the region. He covered the Balkans out of Vienna, also providing broadcasts for NBC and CBS. Eventually he became Senior Advisor to the U.S. funded Radio Free Europe in Munich. He gained a particular appreciation for Hungary and developed deep friendships with Hungarians, some of whom he assisted in their flight to the West.

He returned to the United States to become the Los Angeles bureau chief for Newsweek Magazine, where his beat changed from geopolitics to the movie industry, California politics, local news, aviation, and the burgeoning area of science and technology. After writing a piece about the newly created RAND Corporation, he was asked to join the think tank as Assistant to the President.

This marked Bourgin's transition from the world of news and feature writing, to the world of public policy during a period of time when the United States first embraced its superpower status. He returned to

Washington, DC, a city that remained his home for the next 50 years, when Edward R. Murrow, whom Bourgin knew in London, became the head of the United States Information Agency during the Kennedy Administration. He asked Bourgin to become the Science Policy Advisor. Eventually, he was the point man on the space program, energy and the environment.

Bourgin came to know the early astronauts, arranging and then traveling with them during their international tours to Asia, Europe, and South America. Before he went on a mission to the dark side of the moon, astronaut Frank Borman asked Bourgin what he should say to an audience of one billion listeners on Christmas Eve. Bourgin suggested that reading the first lines of the Book of Genesis that described the creation of the world might be a stirring possibility. Borman took his advice and made history.

Following various jobs at the State Department and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, at an age when most men are content to collect their retirement, Bourgin took on a new challenge working as an advisory to former U.S. Senator Dick Clark who ran the international program at the Aspen Institute. Clark would take delegations of U.S. Senators and Congressmen to various parts of the world so that they could be immersed in policy matters of various countries. Bourgin's expertise in Central and Eastern Europe proved to be an invaluable addition to this program.

In his 90s, Bourgin completed his memoir, and when he was 96, the Ely-Winton Historical Society published his memoir: *Simon Bourgin, An Odyssey That Began in Ely*. By that time he had returned to his home town in Minnesota, a place he always insisted was his most important résumé entry.

When he received the lifetime achievement award from Vermilion Community College in Ely, Bourgin said, "Looking back, I was fortunate to have worked as a journalist during a time that encompassed the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, Senator McCarthy, the space race and men on the moon. I can only feel sorry for today's reporters who have to cope with what journalism has become and," he continued with a wry smile, "will never have the opportunity to have lunch with Marlene Dietrich."

Si's family invites his friends to a remembrance luncheon on Saturday, September 21, at 11 a.m., at Amici's in Ely.

Family arrangements have been entrusted to Kerntz Funeral Home.

[Service Information \(/obituary/Simon-Bourgin/services\)](/obituary/Simon-Bourgin/services)