

## Charles Robert “Bob” Berg

**BIRTH** 1 Apr 1943

Watseka, Iroquois County, Illinois, USA

**DEATH** 8 May 2019 (aged 76)

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan, USA

**BURIAL** Floral Hill Cemetery

Lovejoy Township, Iroquois County, Illinois, USA

**MEMORIAL ID** 199125535



Photo added by Glenn Berg



Added by Harry L. Williams



Added by RWCNAC

Bob Berg, 76, of Detroit, MI, passed away on Wednesday, May 8, 2019.

Born April 1, 1943, in Watseka, Illinois, Berg, the eldest of four children, grew up on farms in central Illinois and later earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Wesleyan University, where he wrote for the college newspaper, the Argus, working his way up from a sports writer to the paper's editor by the end of his senior year.

After college, he held reporting roles in Iowa and Nebraska before landing in Lansing where he headed up a state capitol bureau for United Press International, covering Gov. William G. Milliken and Michigan State University sports.

Berg later became state capitol bureau chief of Panax Newspapers and by 1977, was hired in the public affairs office of Milliken, the longest-serving governor in Michigan history.

Berg held the role until Milliken left state government in 1982.

The following month, Berg was hired as press secretary to Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, the city's first black mayor.

David Ashenfelter, a former Detroit News and Detroit Free Press reporter and longtime friend of Berg's, said Berg was a presence in Detroit and a top-notch press officer.

"Bob had a way of being able to get things done that ordinarily would be difficult," he said. "He was the only press secretary for Coleman Young that lasted. I was around for four of them. ... He had a special relationship with Coleman Young."

Ashenfelter said he'll remember Berg as a great friend, outstanding person and exceptional press secretary.

"Those of us who knew him, worked with him and enjoyed his company are going to miss him."

Berg wound up serving Young for 11 years, through several city crises and

scandals. Berg left in January 1994 when Young retired.

Berg said his years working with Young, both before and after he left office, had a particular impact on him.

"I'm a kid who grew up on a small farm in east central Illinois," Berg said earlier this year in an interview with Ashenfelter, who observed four decades of Berg's career. "The chance I had to come to Detroit and work closely with Mayor Young for all those years, looking over his shoulder and learning on literally a daily basis about race, urban issues, politics, and life, in general, had a profound influence on me that has continued until today."

Both Milliken and Young, Berg said in a recent interview, "were deeply committed to the idea that holding office is a public trust."

"Both men had a fundamental commitment to creating equal opportunity at all levels and to confronting and solving urban issues," he said

Bill McGraw, a veteran journalist who covered City Hall for the Detroit Free Press during a portion of Young's two final terms, said Berg was calm, treated everyone with respect and was trustworthy.

"I couldn't have more respect for him as both a person and the mayor's spokesperson," McGraw said. "He was a low-key guy and that was one of the reasons for his success. He always was in the background."

McGraw recalled Berg defended Young and the city in the face of attacks locally and beyond.

"He was a major defender of Detroit," he said.

After Young left office, Berg opened a public relations firm in the city with the help of former public relations executive Marcie Brogan.

In 1998, Berg and Georgella Muirhead, who had worked with Berg as director of Detroit's Public Information Department, joined forces to form Berg Muirhead and Associates in Detroit.

They later sold the firm in 2016 to two of their long-time employees, Peter Van Dyke and Marilyn Horn, who continued their legacy. Berg stayed on, offering counsel.

Van Dyke on Wednesday said Berg was a mentor "to everyone he came into contact with."

"He did everything in his power to help others be better at what they did," he said. "That includes me."

Berg, he said, advised top political and business leaders and, to those who knew him, "he became your moral compass."

"Bob is known for being one of the most trusted advisors that one could ever ask for," Van Dyke told The News. "Bob is one of a kind. You don't find somebody who is so humbly in service of others like Bob. And it's a huge gap in our community to have him not with us anymore."

During his years in Detroit, Berg worked to form a partnership between the Detroit Public Schools and his alma mater, Illinois Wesleyan University, in

which the college became the only non-Michigan university to participate in DPS' Wade McCree Scholarship Program.

Berg was honored in 2014 by New Detroit, Inc., with a John Rakolta Jr. Leadership in Race Relations Award and was recognized in 2018 by the Urban League of Detroit as one of its Distinguished Warriors.

When he wasn't working, Bob was an avid runner and cross-country skier and was extremely proud of his 1973 Porsche 911T.

He served on the boards of the Coleman A. Young Foundation, which provides college scholarships to promising students; on the board of the Roeper School, a private school in Birmingham for gifted children; the Detroit Police Foundation; the Detroit Urban League board and the board of CATCH, which helps ailing children at Henry Ford and Children's hospitals. He also was a member of Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Asked how he would like to be remembered, Berg said: "As somebody who in some ways made contributions and left the world a little bit better place."

Berg is survived by his long-time partner, Wanda Brock, three children: Erik of Portland, Oregon, Melanie Berg of Lansing and Lola Kristina Gibson-Berg of Detroit, daughter-in-law Shannon Berg of Portland, and four grandchildren: Hayeden of Lansing and Charlie, Fran and Ingrid of Portland.

He also is survived by a sister, Karen Dolan, of Western Springs, Ill; and brother, Glenn, of Cissna Park. A third brother, Richard, died in 1960.

Visitation will be held on Monday, May 20, 2019 from 9am-11am, at the Cissna Park United Methodist Church in Cissna Park, IL. Funeral Services will follow at 11:00 am with Minister Molly Spence-Hawk officiating.

Burial will follow at Floral Hill Cemetery in Hoopeston, IL.

## Family Members

### Parents



Carl Gilbert Berg  
1911–1985



Dorothy Joyce *Veatch* Berg  
1916–1998

### Siblings



Richard Carl Berg  
1945–1960

**Created by:** Harry L. Williams

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