

## Laurence James "Larry" Lieberman

February 16, 1935 - May 30, 2024

Laurence James "Larry" Lieberman of Loveland, Colorado, passed away peacefully in his sleep on Thursday, May 30, 2024, at the age of 89. His family traveled here to be close to him in his last days, and their love lightened the way for his passing, in Fort Collins, ending a years-long battle with Alzheimer's disease.

Laurence was born on February 16, 1935, in Detroit, Michigan, the only child of Nathan and Anita (Cohen) Lieberman who co-owned a five and dime store. Larry grew up working in the store, along with his parents and other co-owners of the family business.

Despite this early business experience, Larry had a lifelong passion for the arts. As an adolescent, he achieved expertise in piano playing, which he continued to enjoy into his final years. But he lived for his writing. He dedicated his life to portraying his observations of the world in poems, and he became one of the rare people able to support their family as a poet. His greatest loves beyond poetry were his family, teaching, and traveling, especially in the Caribbean.

Laurence grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and graduated from Detroit Central High in 1953. As a high school student, Larry was the captain of the golf team, and he is said to have been in the top three performing students in his class.

The other two were his neighbors and best friends - they grew up together, sharing a healthy competition that helped them all excel.

He attended the University of Michigan where he won the prestigious Hopwood Award for poetry, received a Bachelor's in pre-med and English and a Master's Degree in English.

While attending Michigan, Laurence met a fellow student, Bernice Braun, at a house party. Bernice was helping clean up glass broken by a fellow party guest, and Laurence noticed her kindness and beauty. They were married in Chicago Heights, Illinois near her parents' home on June 17, 1956, at Temple Anshe Sholom.

Moving to California from Michigan, he first published poems in national magazines while in a PhD program for English at UC Berkeley. He left Berkeley and taught in the English Department at Orange Coast College for four years in Costa Mesa, California. Their three children, Carla Miriam, Deborah Eve, and Isaac Herbert, were born in Newport Beach during this time.

In 1964, the family of five moved to St. Thomas where Laurence was hired as the founding member of the English/Humanities Department at the College of the Virgin Islands, now the University of the same name. During this time he continued writing and publishing his poetry. His nonprofessional interests included music and movies, skin diving and spearfishing. These activities were the inspiration for many of his poems.

In 1968, on the foundation of his teaching and publishing success, he was hired with tenure by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), as a full professor in the English Department. Though leaving behind the tropical island paradise of St. Thomas, he did so both because it was a terrific career

move and, with the proximity to his wife's parents in Chicago, it allowed his children more regular visits with their grandparents. He would return frequently to the Caribbean throughout his life.

At UIUC, Laurence taught poetry and English classes and was the editor of the University of Illinois Press Poetry Series until his retirement forty years later. His whole-hearted dedication to, and love for, teaching inspired the careers of many future poets. Larry would frequently listen to music for his own inspiration while writing, and he became a music connoisseur with an encyclopedic knowledge, and collection, of classical music recordings.

Laurence traveled the world, including a year-long trip to Japan in 1972 with his family, on Sabbatical from UIUC, after winning a National Endowment for the Arts grant. The sabbatical resulted in many published poems including the book GOD'S MEASUREMENTS. He returned to the Caribbean many times exploring the cultures, and writing poems about almost every island in the region.

In addition to Japan, Hawaii, and the Caribbean, his other travels included much of Western Europe and US states from coast to coast. He traveled alone for work, doing poetry readings all across the country and in England, and he traveled with his family for pleasure - camping, on cruise ships, and on road trips to visit extended family in Chicago, Florida, & Arizona. Later, when his children moved all around the country, he frequently visited them and his grandchildren in California, Colorado, and Washington State. Throughout his travels, he would take notes using multi-colored felt pens, filling the pages of his notebooks at all angles, then returning home to mold those notes into his many books of published poems. These notebooks have been memorialized in portraiture of Larry sitting in front of one of its pages magnified tenfold.

Larry was a generous man who took great pleasure in picking up the tab when going out with family and friends. In addition to camping, swimming trips, and horseback outings, he loved taking his kids to the movies, after which they would rate and review the films while driving over to enjoy hot fudge sundaes at Baskin Robbins. This process was fun and lively, and helped teach how to take one's feelings about a piece of art, analyze them critically, and effectively communicate those analyses to others. Larry was teaching his children language and thinking skills not unlike the ones he used in writing his own books of poetry criticism, like *The Achievement of James Dickey*, though perhaps even more like his favorite film critic's reviews - Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker* magazine.

Larry was a consummate wordsmith with a massive vocabulary, but he was not a snob who "wouldn't suffer fools." On the contrary, he spoke in a natural vernacular, never using his speaking skill to try to appear superior or highfalutin'. Instead, he used language to teach, to connect, and to share the depths of the human soul and psyche as he felt and understood it. He had a playful nature, a quick wit, and he loved wordplay - making wisecracks, crafting puns, and keeping people laughing right through his final years. After retirement from UIUC, Laurence and Bernice continued to live in Urbana-Champaign until 2020 when they moved to Fort Collins and then Loveland, Colorado, to be closer to their daughter Deborah and family. Laurence is preceded in death by his parents.

Those left to cherish his memory are his loving wife of 68 years, Bernice, in Loveland; their children C. Mira Lieberman of Seattle, WA, Deborah Lieberman & husband Jonathan Friedman of Fort Collins, CO, and Isaac Lieberman & wife Margaret Finnstrom of Los Angeles, CA; their grandchildren Mariah Danielle, Dylan Laurence and Jesse Asher Lieberman, Ayla Faye and her husband Samuel Woodward, Ursula and Oscar Deser Friedman; and their great-grandsons Yosef Elisha and Ephraim Charles Woodward.

He will be sadly missed by all who had the opportunity to meet him and be a part of his life. Contributions may be made in his honor to Pathways Hospice Inpatient Center (<https://pathways-care.org/give-now/>) or Dementia Together ( <https://dementiatogether.org/give/> )

# Cemetery Details

## Roselawn Cemetery

2718 East Mulberry Street  
Fort Collins, CO 80524  
<http://www.fcgov.com/parks/roselawn.php>

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

JUN 4. 12:30 PM (MT)

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Fort Collins, CO 80524  
<http://www.fcgov.com/parks/roselawn.php>

# Tribute Wall

SK

“ I’m so sorry to learn of Larry’s passing. Thinking of you all, especially Bernice.  
Susan Kapacinskas

Susan Kapacinskas - July 29, 2024 at 04:25 AM

IL

Thank you, Susan, for your kind words!

Isaac Lieberman - October 17, 2024 at 04:03 PM

TH

My apologies for being so late to respond to this. I was unaware of Larry's death. He edited two of my books of poetry for University of Illinois Press, and was a dear friend and "colleague" in the strange world of poetry. I am saddened by his departure. Homage to his spirit and its journey, and such peace to the family as you may find.

Terry R Hummer - October 13, 2025 at 09:45 AM

IL

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Isaac Lieberman - July 14, 2024 at 04:10 PM

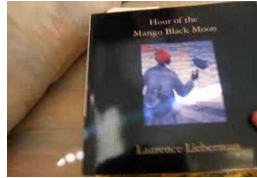
IL

“ [https://www.smilepolitely.com/arts/chatting\\_with\\_master\\_poet\\_laurence\\_lieberman/](https://www.smilepolitely.com/arts/chatting_with_master_poet_laurence_lieberman/)

Isaac Lieberman - July 14, 2024 at 04:03 PM

MF

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall

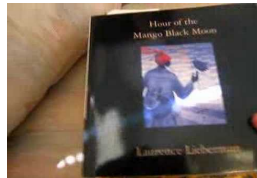


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**Margaret Finnstrom** - June 04, 2024 at 06:20 AM

MF

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



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**Margaret Finnstrom** - June 04, 2024 at 06:15 AM



*Oh, Dylan, I've just found out about your grandfather's passing. He was such a wonderful teacher for me - so kind and so dedicated to teaching. His course taught me so much! God bless you and your family. I'll miss Larry a lot.*

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**Todd Wilson** - November 12, 2024 at 07:31 PM