

# William A. Sabin

By Strong Funeral Home & Cremation Center

BRISTOL (Jan 6): After a two-year struggle with cancer, William A. Sabin of Bristol died peacefully, with his wife beside him, at Cove's Edge Nursing Home, on Jan. 1, 2009.

Bill was born in Paterson, N.J., on May 29, 1931, the son of David Sabin and Esther Goodman, who migrated to the United States in the 1920s from Bialystok, a town on the border of Russia and Poland. Bill's uncle was Dr. Albert Sabin, who invented the oral polio vaccine.



Bill grew up in Passaic, N.J., and then went to Yale, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1952. In 1954, after a two-year service in the Army, during which he was stationed in Munich, Germany, he returned to Yale as a graduate student in English.

While at Yale he met his future wife, Marie Noonan, also a graduate student in English, and they were married in 1958. They began their life together in New York City but soon settled in Montclair, N.J., where they raised five children and lived for 32 years. Since 1997 they

have lived happily in Maine.

Bill received an master's degree from Yale in 1956 and went to work as an editor, first for Pitman Publishing, and then for McGraw-Hill, both in New York. While at McGraw-Hill he held the title of editor in chief, and subsequently of publisher, of professional and reference books. He also became the author of "The Gregg Reference Manual," a comprehensive guide to grammar and style and a project to which he devoted his life after taking an early retirement in 1991.

The book is widely used in business and professional circles. Bill was master of the rules but also a proponent of flexibility. If anyone presented him with a complex grammatical dilemma, he would quietly suggest that the same idea could be expressed a simpler way. For an analogy to good writing, he often told the story of the visitor to New York who gave the cabbie the exact fare but no tip. When the taxi driver still held out his hand expectantly, the visitor inquired, "Isn't that correct?" To which the cabbie replied, "It's correct, lady, but it ain't right." Bill insisted that good writing had to take into account more than what was merely correct. In fact, he was so emphatic that a good writer should follow his instincts, that once, when he was speaking at a business education meeting in East Lansing, Mich., the local newspaper described him as "the Dr.

Ruth of grammar and style." Bill worked tirelessly at refining and updating the content of his book; he was finishing the 11th edition two days before he died.

In addition to his love for words, Bill was also a passionate lover of music. In the metropolitan area he subscribed to the New York Symphony and the Metropolitan Opera; in Maine he was an enthusiastic supporter of Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, the Salt Bay Chamber Fest that comes every August to Damariscotta, and above all, of the locally based Daponte String Quartet. An accomplished pianist himself, he particularly enjoyed playing the romantic ballads of the 1950s, the compositions of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Rogers and Hart. In 2001 a friend recorded his playing, dubbing the CD "Martini Time."

Friendship was in itself another passionate pursuit. He was interested in the lives of all whom he met; he was generous in helping anyone in need. There are many who will miss his vast array of amusing anecdotes, his frequent, impromptu telephone calls, and his continual barrage of humorous e-mails.

Bill was predeceased by his sister, Florence Sabin Stern.

He will be gratefully remembered and celebrated, mourned and deeply missed by his numerous friends and all his relatives, and especially by his immediate family.

Bill is survived by his wife, Marie, his spouse of more than 50 years; his daughters, Margaret of Montclair, N.J., and Kate of Rohnert Park, Calif.; his sons, Chris and Jim of Rohnert Park, Calif.; his son John, his daughter-in-law Kathy, and his two granddaughters, Dyani and Brook, all of Oberlin, Ohio; his niece Jamie Stern Connolly, her husband, Michael, and their sons, Jon and Alex of New York City; his nephew Mitchell Stern, together with his wife, Christine, of Long Island, N.Y.; and his brother-in-law Lou Stern of Passaic, N.J.

The family plans a memorial in the spring, open to the public, which will celebrate his life.

Memorial donations may be made to the Genesis Community Loan Fund in Damariscotta; the Daponte String Quartet in Bremen; the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Mass.; or Cove's Edge Nursing Home, 26 Schooner St., Damariscotta, ME 04543.

Arrangements are with the Strong Funeral Home and Cremation Center in Damariscotta.