



H. Byron Earhart

February 21, 2026

Harry Byron Earhart, age 91, passed away peacefully at home in San Diego, CA, with his sons

holding both his hands.

Byron was born in Aledo, IL the third child and only son of Kenneth Harry Earhart (1911-2008)

and Mary Louise (Haack) Earhart (1912-2008).

He grew up in Havana, IL, where he met his high school sweetheart, Virginia Margaret Donaho.

They were married September 2, 1956, a few years after graduating from Havana HS. He

attended Knox College (1953-56) and the University of Chicago (1956-62), where he studied

under Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa. A Fulbright Scholarship sent him to Tohoku

University in Sendai, Japan (1962-65) to conduct field research under Ichiro Hori. He received

his PhD (U of Chicago, 1965) and joined the faculty of the Department of Comparative Religion

at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, MI) in 1966. He was the recipient of a

Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award from WMU (1981), a Distinguished Faculty Award from the

State of Michigan (1982), and the Philo Farnsworth Award for his video, "Fuji: Sacred Mountain of Japan" (1991). Named professor emeritus (2005) by WMU, he taught adjunct courses until 2018. He authored several books covering different aspects of Japanese religiosity, was creator and series editor of the ten-volume *Religious Traditions of the World* (1986), and contributed numerous articles, abstracts, and book reviews to scholarly journals. His seminal textbook *Japanese Religion: Unity in Diversity* (1969, 5th revised ed 2014) was continuously in print for over fifty years. Over thirty prestigious academic grants and fellowships allowed him to regularly conduct academic research in Japan, spend a semester teaching in Korea (1973), and join one of the first groups of Americans invited to tour the People's Republic of China (1978). His professional memberships included the American Academy of Religion, the Association for Asian Studies, and the American Society for the Study of Religion. After he and Virginia moved to San Diego in 1999, Byron enjoyed traveling, gardening, tennis, and bridge. Retirement allowed him to return to a desire of his youth, writing and publishing several novels as well as a memoir of his WWII childhood experiences, *At Grandma's House*. Survived by sons Kenneth (Florence Fong) and David (Susumu Kamimura) of San Diego, CA, and Paul (Mary Minor) of Portland, OR; grandchildren Michelle Bearheart (Jack Bearheart) and

Adrienne Earhart of San Diego, and Bryce and Dylan Earhart of Portland, OR; and great-grandchild Asa Bearheart of San Diego. Predeceased by his wife Virginia and sister Sylvia Heye, he is survived by sister Rosemary Watson of Havana, IL and numerous nephews, nieces, grandnephews, Visitation will be held at Hurley Funeral Home, in Havana, on Monday, April 13, 2026, from 12:30, until 1:30 p.m., followed by graveside services at Laurel Hill Cemetery, in Havana.

Cemetery Details

Laurel Hill Cemetery

1105 E Laurel Ave
Havana, IL 62644
(309) 543-2986

Previous Events

Visitation

APR 13. 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM (CT)

Hurley Funeral Home - Havana
217 North Plum Street
P.O. Box #648
Havana, IL 62644
(309) 543-2244
<https://www.hurleyfh.com/>

Graveside Service

APR 13. 1:45 PM (CT)

Laurel Hill Cemetery
1105 E Laurel Ave
Havana, IL 62644
(309) 543-2986

Tribute Wall

NJ

“ *Niwano Family, Tokyo, Japan purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of H. Byron Earhart.*



Niwano Family, Tokyo, Japan - April 10 at 01:07 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of H. Byron Earhart.*



April 09 at 12:09 PM

CK

“ *So sorry for your loss. Byron was a year ahead of me in school we were on the Havana year book staff. Him the editor- in-chief and I was the junior editor moving up the next year He was a great person to work with. He will be missed. So sorry losing your parents so close together enjoyed working with your mom at the telephone switchboard too. Great people. Prayers to the family.*

Carol Fisk Kolves - March 13 at 06:33 PM

KN

“ I very much enjoyed your father’s book about growing up at Grandma’s House in Havana. I, too, grew up in Havana and knew some of the same people as he and could relate to most of what he wrote about. Reading his obituary, I found we have much more in common. I lived and taught in San Diego for over 35 years. I live in Hawaii now and have many Japanese friends who have introduced me to many Japanese customs, foods and religions.. I recently returned from a very enjoyable visit to Japan. Also, my nephew’s son is soon to be a senior at Western Michigan University. Small world! Sorry I missed meeting your father. He sounds like a very interesting man and a life well lived.

Kristine Nuding - March 03 at 04:39 PM

LH

“ Larry And Mary Hundt sent a virtual gift in memory of H. Byron Earhart



Larry and Mary Hundt - March 03 at 08:29 AM

DE

“ David Earhart lit a candle in memory of H. Byron Earhart



David Earhart - March 03 at 03:58 AM

PE

“ *Paul Earhart lit a candle in memory of H. Byron Earhart*



Paul Earhart - March 03 at 03:56 AM

DF

“ *One of my finest memories was when Byron and Ginnie invited me to go with them to Japan for 21 days! Byron introduced me to many of his gracious friends along with their life style and traditions. Byron was an expertise of Japanese culture and immersed me with knowledge through mesmerizing experiences. Rest in peace my dear friend (and Ginnie) with a life well lived.*

Dianna Felke - March 02 at 07:41 PM