



Richard Louis Benesh Jr.

March 16, 1935 - March 17, 2020

Obituary

Brodhead – Richard Louis Benesh, Jr. lost his battle with cancer and died peacefully on Tuesday, March 17, at the Monroe Hospice Home in Monroe, Wisconsin, one day after his 85th birthday. He was born in Oran, Iowa, the last baby to be delivered at home in that community, on March 16, 1935, the son of Richard Louis and Kathryn (DeRoos) Benesh. He married Michele Telford Riter on January 16, 1988, in Rock Rapids, Iowa.

Richard (Dick) wore many hats during his career. He enrolled at Iowa State University as an engineering major, but dropped out after a year because he also wanted to take literature and other humanities courses and they didn't fit into the engineering curriculum. Because of his affinity for languages, he was accepted into Air Force Intelligence and trained as a Russian specialist during the Cold War years. Stationed in Germany, he determined to learn German while there and was invited into a Stammtisch, which is a group of German men who meet in a pub weekly or bi-weekly. They spent the first hour of each meeting teaching Herr Benesh German, and when he traveled to Germany decades later, he was often asked where in Germany he was born. Upon his return to the U.S., he attended the University of Northern Iowa and got his teaching certification, after which he was the first high school Russian teacher in Iowa, teaching Russian and German in Waterloo. After earning his PhD in German at Iowa, he was a German professor at both Coe College in Cedar

Rapids and at the University of Iowa.

Next he joined the Vista program and spent time on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana, and subsequently spent many years working with Indian tribes in Nebraska, and later in Wisconsin, where he was in charge of all of the Ho-Chunk casinos until they transitioned from bingo halls to hard core gambling, when he no longer wished to be involved.

Dick was also the CEO of a couple of small businesses in Iowa that manufactured educational materials, and then began his own business as a consultant for economic development to small towns and Indian tribes. During that period he spent a lot of time in Washington, D.C. working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

When he moved to Wisconsin, he worked with the Ho-Chunk and later accepted the German position at Beloit Memorial High school, where he worked until his retirement in 2006. He said it was the best job he ever had. His beloved students agreed and have held regular gatherings to honor Dick over the past 14 years. He said that all he wanted on his gravestone was, "He was a teacher."

Dick loved photography, travel, music (especially classical and Dixieland jazz), building things, writing poetry, and cats. He and Michele exhibited their photography at art shows through the Midwest for about 25 years and received many judges' awards. They organized groups of travelers for tours in Europe for many years.

Dick was also very involved in church and community groups. As a member of the Brodhead Congregational UCC church, he was a member of the church council, the Pastoral Search Committee, and the Land Use Committee. In the community, he was Project Administrator for the Pearl Island Recreational

Corridor project and was a major advocate for the covered bridge at Putnam Park, which thankfully he got to see installed, and also had a dream of seeing a large waterwheel installed where the Mill Race flows into the “tail race” and then into the Sugar River. This project is in the works and he will have to observe it from above. He was also president of the Decatur Lake and Mill Race Association (DLMRA).

Dick is survived by his wife of 32 years, Michele, his mother-in-law, Jacqueline Telford, his children Jeff (Allison) Riter, Chad (Cindy) Riter, Aimee and Brian Fish, Joseph Benesh, and Jared Benesh, his 7 grandchildren, Brogan, Bailie and Benjamin Riter, Hunter and Conner Riter, and Anna and Kirsten Fish, his nephews Olof and Martin Nordberg, Rob (Mandy) Telford, and their children, Seth and Kole and countless former students from Beloit Memorial who meant the world to him.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Richard L. and Kathryn Benesh, his sister, Kathy Nordberg, his brother-in-law, Robert Telford and his father-in-law, Charles Telford.

A celebration of life will be held on Saturday, June 17, at the Congregational UCC Church in Brodhead, E 201 23rd St, at 1:00. Refreshments and reminiscences afterward will be at our daughter Aimee's house, W465 Red Cedar Lane, Brodhead WI.

Tax exempt memorials may be directed to the Brodhead Area Foundation for funding the water wheel (P.O. Box 35, Brodhead, WI 53520), the Congregational United Church of Christ (E201 23rd Street, Brodhead, WI 53520), or the Rapids Theater Restoration Project, a project near and dear to his mother-in-law's heart, (1002 South Tama Street, Rock Rapids, Iowa 51246).

To send flowers to the family or plant a tree in memory of Richard Louis Benesh Jr., please visit our floral store.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

JUN 17. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

UCC Congregational Church
E201 23rd Street
Brodhead , WI 53520

Tribute Wall

DW

“ Don And Brenda Wahl lit a candle in memory of Richard Louis Benesh Jr.



Don and Brenda Wahl - June 13, 2023 at 11:54 AM

MS

“ A Memorial Tree was ordered in memory of Richard Louis Benesh Jr. by Mark Spreitzer. Plant a TreeMichele and all of Dick's family,I'm so sorry for your loss. It was such an honor to have the chance to get to know Dick. This tree seems like a fitting memorial.Peace and love,Mark Spreitzer

Mark Spreitzer - May 10, 2021 at 10:47 AM

TH

“ A Memorial Tree was ordered in memory of Richard Louis Benesh Jr. by Terry and Hanny. Plant a TreeDick will remain in out hearts forever and this will be a lasting memoryTerry and Hanny

Terry and Hanny - May 10, 2021 at 10:47 AM

ES

“ Two Memorial Trees were ordered in memory of Richard Louis Benesh Jr.. Plant a Tree

Expression of Sympathy - May 10, 2021 at 10:47 AM

KG

“ Dear Herr Benesh, I met you in the halls of Beloit Memorial High School and you were such a character! We clicked quickly with our humor and personalities. You helped me with my college decision and always shared life wisdom and experiences. You were a big grump one second and the kindest human the next! You did always notice people and beauty in the ordinary. May you rest in peace and your family find comfort.

Kelly Gosa - April 03, 2020 at 08:35 AM

RP

“ Thoughts and Prayers to all of his family. The "Professor" as we all called him at the YMCA pool was a great guy. We will remember his stories and his music that he loved to hear in the early mornings while swimming. I will forever miss him calling me the winner, when I would tell him how I wish I would have done this or that with my life. He would always tell me it was never too late to go back to school to learn at any age. Rest in peace my friend.

Robin Pardus - March 26, 2020 at 05:22 PM

KT

“ Our hearts and prayers go out to his family. Dick touched the lives of everyone he encountered in a very special way. His stories of past experiences & new adventures will always be remembered. From all of us at the Kobussen Buses Ltd family to the Benesh family, we offer our deepest condolences.

Kobussen Buses Ltd - Brodhead Terminal - March 26, 2020 at 11:54 AM

JH

“ No words can truly describe Dr. Benesh. I had both the honor and privilege of being one of his many German students. I have many fond memories of Herr Benesh from the stories he shared, to “Muh de super Katze” to Herr Benesh’s curse (Die Lorelei poem), to our Germany trip. One such memory took place there. The group had an opportunity to explore the local village and meet up back at the hotel. Around dinner time we had headed back and outside at a table sat Herr Benesh and his wife. He had one leg resting up on a chair and an ice bag on his ankle. When we inquired as to what had happened. Herr Benesh had said, “A taxi tried to run me over but, I got him even worse.”Mein herzliches Beileid. I wish your family peace to bring comfort, courage to face the days ahead, and loving memories to forever hold in their hearts.

Jason Hersey - March 22, 2020 at 10:32 PM

JW

“ Herr Benesh was one of the greatest teachers and inspirations in my life. I will never forget getting to go to Germany because he helped push me to raise my portion of the cost. The many school trips with the German club were some of the best days of high school for me. I will always have stories to tell to my friends and my children about this amazing man.

Joshua Wehrle - March 22, 2020 at 10:30 PM

NI

“ Herr Benesh was a one of a kind. His true calling and passion was to teach and reach into the hearts of many who needed it. 💕 He touched my heart and saw me. He had faith in me, and taught me to have that same faith in myself. He believed in my artistic talents. He also made going to Germany, which was a once in a lifetime opportunity, a reality for me. He knew I was going through a lot of emotional turmoil as a teenager, and gave me good advice, and was always there to listen. One day when we went for a walk by the river to talk about life, death, and everything in between that was bothering me. He told to look over at a duck swimming in the water, he said to me “do you see that duck, that duck is swimming like hell beneath the surface to keep himself afloat, but other people would never guess by how effortlessly he is gliding across that water.” He proceeded to tell me “and when that duck gets wet, he lets the water roll right off his back, it doesn’t bother him one bit, he could care less if it’s raining, or what have you, his feathers are naturally made to keep him safe and dry so he doesn’t get wet and drown.” Then he looked at me and said, “Be like that duck Nicole” 🕊️💕 He had such a good balanced soul, and knew what REALLY matters in this life. Fly free my friend, you will be missed by so many you left such a profound impact on. 🕊️ Thank you. 🙏

nicole185630@gmail.com - March 22, 2020 at 03:36 PM

KZ

“ I knew Dick thanks to our tours that he, Michele and I planned always for at least ten months (rather for a year) and then tried to carry out as well as possible to please all travellers that Dick and Michele invited to travel with us. He was a great leader and he had integrity. He was one of the last real man and gentleman that I knew. It was always a pleasure to see him, to meet him, to spend time with him, to give him a kiss on his cheek - he was a great inspiration to me and a huge source of wisdom for me. He was kind, gentle, wise, patient and considerate. He knew when to talk but also knew when to listen and he listened well and he knew what to say and what not to say or not immediately - he knew how to wait and find the right time. I will miss him a lot. I will always miss him! I loved you, Dick. Sincerely, Karolina xx

Karolina Zadrazilova - March 22, 2020 at 12:47 PM

BB

“ I knew Dick as an artist/photographer who was always a wonderful addition to the Art on the Lawn art fair in Rockford. It was my distinct pleasure to have him and his delightful wife, Michele, present. An enormously talented gentleman, he never failed to brighten my day. May his memory be forever a blessing.

Barbara Berney - March 21, 2020 at 07:40 PM

CD

“ My favorite memory of Herr Benish was when we went to teachers conferences for our children, Matt and Ellie Dressler. He told me what a great job Ellie was doing, then turned to Matt, pointing in his face...He said " But this one, I am very disappointed in (my thoughts were, oh no, he's failing German 😞 and I asked why), he should be getting an A+, but he's only getting an A. Well, I completely understood why he felt that way because Matt adored him and loved the German language, but hated putting anything on paper. I of course was relieved Matt wasn't failing and jumped for joy because he was getting an A. Matt knew what Herr Benish's expectations were of him and highly respected him. We as a family, my husband, Steve, Matt, Ellie and I will always have him close in our hearts. He was a wonderful man and the BEST teacher on earth. Praying for you and your family, Michelle. Cindy Dressler

Cindy Dressler - March 21, 2020 at 07:10 PM

GL

“ I'm so thankful that I was given the privilege of placing a prayer shawl around his shoulders a couple weeks ago, and getting a big hug. We're all going to miss him. Prayers for everyone.

Gloria - March 21, 2020 at 03:06 PM

BK

“ Richard was a great teacher mentor and friend he tutored me when I was in second grade I had problems in math and reading and if it wasn't for him I would have never excelled in math like I did he tie me to read fast. His ways of teaching really helped a lot he made everything into a game or fun. He put it in a way where things were easy to understand..When I first turned out was going to have an older gentleman as a tutor I was dreading it and I thought this is not going to be fun and it will be boring. But after a few sessions with him totally change my mind. He had a great sense of humor I will never forget him he made a huge impact on my life that I will truly be grateful for the rest of my life.

Ben Karr - March 21, 2020 at 02:38 PM

DL

“ Dr Richard (Dick, Herr) Benesh) was a iconic figure in the halls of Beloit Memorial High School and wherever he taught and interacted with others. His style and methods of communication reflected compassion, understanding, and a genuine care for his students. His passion for teaching was obvious when you see how students respond to him. When I asked Dick to work with our expelled students he was more than willing to share his wisdom, patience, positive example, and humanity with some of our more troubled and needy young people. In summary, this is the man that everyone knew....a genuine person of character, integrity, and love for his fellow man. Doc....you will be missed.

David Luebke - March 21, 2020 at 01:06 PM

JD

“ I had the great good fortune to travel with Dick and Michelle on the last 5 European trips. Even though I live in Ohio (originally from Milwaukee, but taught in Beloit in the 70's), I drove to WI every time to join the travel group. Always a wonderful trip filled with like-minded travelers. It wouldn't have been possible without Dick and Michelle. My deepest condolences to Michelle and their families on Dick's passing. He led a most fulfilling life, something to emulate.

Judy Loeser Delahoyde - March 21, 2020 at 01:03 PM

JH

“ A great teacher and supporter of our football program. May God comfort the family during this difficult time.

John Heineke - March 21, 2020 at 12:55 PM

MB

“ I am very sad to hear Dick Benesh has left us so soon as I figured him to hit a hundred years before he even started to get old. I can still hear his voice each morning in the school mail room still and his corny jokes echoing at Suds. I don't believe anyone who knew him ever forgot him and I know his students loved him so. Long time, no sea indeed. My sympathies go to you Michele and all the family.
Mary Anderson Bell

Mary Bell - March 21, 2020 at 12:19 PM

CM

“ That is SOOOO Richard! Love it! Thanks for creating and posting this!

Cindy Miller - March 21, 2020 at 11:32 AM

MP

“ Dick will live on through the many lives he touched and influenced, including my son's and my own. A singularly unique human being the world will miss, but not soon forget. I am fortunate and a better person, as is everyone, thanks to "Herr Benesh.”

Mark Preuschl - March 21, 2020 at 10:29 AM

TM

“ Dick was a unique individual, a true Renaissance Man. He would engage with you in a conversation and you never had to guess how he felt about that particular topic. Besides being my colleague at BMHS, we shared other connections with Dick. He took our youngest son to Europe on a German class adventure. We bought two cats from Dick's mother, who was a Maine Coon cat breeder. Dick and Michelle framed several Grant Wood prints for us from our shared Iowa backgrounds. Dick will truly be missed and will not be forgotten by anyone who had the pleasure to know him.

Tom and Joan Michels - March 21, 2020 at 10:07 AM

JA

“ When I was a kid, I went through some pretty horrible things and as a result I had to be tutored at home for a little while. The man who walked through my front door at one of the darkest, most terrifying times of my life was none other than this man. I can honestly say that had he not been the one who took that gig, I'd likely not be here to type this comment. I've thought about him often during the ensuing 30-plus years, but this obituary is the first time I've seen his face since those tutoring sessions. His story makes a lot of sense to me in retrospect. Rest easy, Mr. Benesh and thank you.

Jason - March 21, 2020 at 12:46 AM

DJ

“ Herr Benesh remains larger than life in the annals of BMHS folklore and history. He was not only a teacher, he was an exceptional teacher. The love and adoration his students will always have for him is telling. I never had him as a teacher, but you could not walk by him in the halls without feeling the wisdom he held. Rest in peace

Dr. Tom Johnson - March 20, 2020 at 10:29 PM

BM

“ A special person isn't great enough to describe this gentle soul who became our brother at Cong. UCC and obviously anyone else whose life he touched. A life well lived.

Bruce and Amy Mills - March 20, 2020 at 09:27 PM

JS

“ Herr Benesh was one of my favorite teacher (along with Mrs Benesh) and was a legend among my friends and classmates. I remember, in the beginning of the semester, he told the class that he had kittens and if they were not all gone, we would all fail. So I got Ushi, and every pta meeting until I graduated, I brought her in to see him. Muh!

Joana Stenulson - previous student - March 20, 2020 at 08:50 PM

JC

“ I'm so sorry to hear of his passing. He was a wonderful person, very kind and patient. I had a hard time in school and he reached out to me and the experience was so positive and comforting that it stayed with me all these years. Because of the kind of person he was I think he could see things, even people in a different light. He could see passed my mask and said just the right things to change my thinking. I often wondered what happened to him. He was one the few people that was truly kind to me at that time in my life and I never got to thank him. So if u can hear me- Thank you! My condolences to the family and friends. I knew he was one of a kind but this obituary just really shows what a talented, well rounded and compassionate person he was. We are all lucky to have had him in our lives. Rest peacefully Mr Benesh 🙏

Jaymie Carpenter - March 20, 2020 at 08:01 PM

AS

“ A candle was lit in remembrance

Ashley Frederick-previous student - March 20, 2020 at 07:59 PM

AS

“ Oh herr benesh.. where ever do I start? You were a wonderful man who would help anyone!! Even though you were so serious in German class you always laughed afterwards. Don't dare fall asleep in his class!! Lol you helped me at a young age with what I needed most from a bad home.. you were always a listening ear for me. Although I didn't get see you after high school I came and visited you the last 2 days and I know u knew I was there. I will miss you and cherish every memory I have. Rest easy! I will see you on the other side!!

Ashley Frederick-previous student - March 20, 2020 at 07:58 PM

EF

“ Herr Benesh will always hold a special place in my heart ❤️ Die Meisterliste publication, classical music, photography, duck feathers, tobacco pipe, Germany/Austria/Switzerland trip & my all time favorite-lots of growling at disrespectful people! 😊 RIP Doctor Benesh

Erin Jensen -former student & friend - March 20, 2020 at 07:36 PM

DR

“ Had the wonderful experience of traveling scuba diving with Dick and Michelle. What a lovely couple to spend a vacation with. They were outstanding photographers both above and below water! So lucky to have spent time with these two. Dick was fascinating to chat with! RIP Kind Sir. My sympathies to Michelle and your family. 🙏

Debra and Mickey Rykowski - March 20, 2020 at 07:10 PM

PB

“ Dick Benesh was a dear friend and advisor. I wanted to share this piece my team made with him, featuring the "curmudgeon" as a grocery store shopper. You will be missed, Dr. Benesh. -Patrick BodellSynqronus Communications

Patrick Bodell - March 20, 2020 at 06:29 PM