



## Mark Joseph Garrison

May 27, 1930 - January 1, 2026

Mark Joseph Garrison (May 27, 1930 – January 1, 2026), born in Kokomo, Indiana, died peacefully in Haverford, Pennsylvania, at the age of 95. He was curious, thinking, humble, creative, innovative, and persevering, no challenge was ever insurmountable; his love of nature was a core element in his life. Mark used to say that he had three careers – diplomat, foreign policy center director, and blueberry farmer. He mentored, motivated, and inspired countless people throughout his life and throughout each of his remarkable careers.

This obituary was written by, and from the perspective of, his children and their families: Mark E. Garrison and wife Marsha, Ardmore PA; Eric Garrison and wife Becky, Richmond VA; Sarah Garrison and wife Jane Bedell, Bronx NY; posthumously, Libby Behrens, who died in 2013 at the age of 63, and surviving husband Bret, of Courtenay BC Canada; nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren who loved him deeply; and in loving memory of his wife of 63 years, Betty Garrison, who died in 2012.

When asked towards the end of his life what Mark was most proud of, his response was “growing things, like blueberries”. Indeed, he and Betty “grew” a loving family; grew many things on a blueberry farm that they created (the Rocky Point Blueberry Farm) that is still a beloved summertime tradition in Warwick, Rhode Island; helped to grow the careers and lives of many people;

and helped to grow a foreign policy institution at Brown University in Providence Rhode Island that contributed – and still contributes – to promoting a just, peaceful and prosperous world.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the Community Musicworks <https://communitymusicworks.org/mission/> or Rhode Island Community Food Bank:  
<https://rifoodbank.org/>

Mark's ashes will be joined with Betty's in a private ceremony; there will be a celebration of life memorial service in Rhode Island at a future date.

Read more about the life and careers of Mark Joseph Garrison:

Growing up in Kokomo, Indiana

The depression of the 1930's occurred during Mark Garrison's formative years in Kokomo. His family was poor and struggling but not destitute. He has written that he never felt poor growing up, due to the love and support of his parents, older sisters and older brother. In Kokomo Mark showed early signs of the innovation and creativity that characterized his later life. The Garrison Chemical Company was his creation, supplying a wide range of chemicals (even relatively dangerous ones!) in small quantities to mail-order customers. In a courageous move, his family bought and moved to an apple orchard east of Kokomo in 1947 (the Garrison Orchard), and as a teenager Mark helped out on the orchard - learning how to build things and whetting his appetite for growing things and deep appreciation and love of nature.

Mark Garrison graduated from Kokomo High School in 1948. Over the next few years he married Elizabeth (Betty) Myers, started a family, earned an MA from Indiana University in Bloomington and an MA from Columbia University in New York City. In 1955 he was hired as a Foreign Service Officer in the

State Department, in Washington, D.C. and Career Number 1 officially started.

### Career Number 1: Diplomat

Mark Joseph Garrison served for 25 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, during which he rose to become a distinguished expert on the Soviet Union and made important contributions to reducing the risk of nuclear war and to the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union . As a diplomat, he served at many posts including Hong Kong, Sofia Bulgaria, Prague Czechoslovakia, and Moscow, then the capital of the Soviet Union. There were many memorable times throughout his distinguished career, but some do stand out. He helped with the reopening of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Sofia (1960-1962) after many years of no relations with Bulgaria, bringing along his wife Betty and four kids to a challenging country. His assignment to Prague started in January 1968 which was the beginning of the so-called "Prague Spring", that introduced reforms which removed some of the restrictions imposed by the communist government, and introduced the notion of "socialism with a human face." The Soviet invasion of August 1968, unfortunately, put an end to the Prague Spring. During the invasion Mark played an important role in keeping Washington updated with the latest from Prague; he also chased some Russian soldiers out of an apple orchard located on embassy property, and helped put out a fire in the embassy that started from the burning of classified material.

Another career highlight occurred in Moscow where he was the deputy chief of mission and charge d'affaires during the Carter Administration. He was in that role when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The ambassador at the time was former president and CEO of IBM Thomas J. Watson Jr., newly appointed. A friend later characterized Mark's dealing both with the situation and with an inexperienced ambassador; he described him as a sturdy oak with lofty branches able to adapt and change, to reach out and

touch people, but with a trunk that is immovable and deeply rooted. It is fair to say that this is a good way to characterize Dad's entire life.

Ambassador Tom Watson and his wife, Olive, became close friends with Mom and Dad, which led to their next career.

Over the course of his State Department career, Mark Garrison became one of the top US experts on the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. A colleague describes accompanying Mark on many visits to the State Department. His expertise was so widely and deeply respected in the State Department that, even years after his retirement from the Foreign Service, dozens of top officials would put their work aside when he entered the building to hear his briefings and tap his thoughts. He never took public credit for his work, but he played a massively important role in US foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. A State Department colleague has stated that he and Dad were "...members of a cadre of professionals that can look back on its role in ending the Cold War with pride."

During his years in the Foreign Service, when assigned to positions in Washington, Mom and Dad were not content to be just another suburbanite couple. They bought a 50 acre, run down farm in West Virginia in 1965, and promptly named it the Flying Bullfrog. Dad's father, also Mark Garrison, had passed down a saying: in response to someone expressing a wish that began "if only...," he would answer "yes, and if only a bullfrog had wings, he wouldn't bump his ass when he jumped." The farm, although a farm in name only, provided many fun and exciting weekend adventures for our family.

Career Number 2: Foreign policy center director

Mark Garrison retired from the Foreign Service in December 1980, following the electoral defeat of Jimmy Carter. Mom and Dad left Moscow on December 17, 1980, after many rousing and heartfelt farewells from friends and

colleagues from the embassy staff and staff from other foreign embassies, the Russian Foreign Ministry, journalists, businessmen, and even some Russian unofficial artists. They flew to Logan airport in Boston and boarded a Bonanza bus, to take them to Providence Rhode Island and a new life.

In Providence, with support and funding from Tom Watson and support from Brown University, Mark founded the Center for Foreign Policy Development – CFPD, known affectionately by his kids as the “Mom and Pop Foreign Policy Shop”. This small, inauspicious Center was established to work on nuclear arms control and U.S.-Soviet relations; the stated mission was to “promote a just, peaceful and prosperous world through research and teaching.” The CFPD attracted talent from some of the best and brightest minds to focus on critical issues of the day, and eventually grew into the Watson Institute and, more recently, into the Watson School of International and Public Affairs at Brown University. Along the way, CFPD and the Watson Institute developed and implemented a number of programs that were designed to not only influence policy makers in government but to also educate the public about those same policies and potential policy choices (e.g. the Choices Program). Over the years other programs were developed including one to study the need for and purpose of the MX missile, the Mutual Security project which worked with Soviet partners to identify ways to avoid nuclear war, the Cuban Missile Crisis program which sought to extract lessons from that near-disaster crisis, and many others.

Mark invited Sergei Khrushchev (son of Nikita Khrushchev, former leader of the Soviet Union) and his wife, Valentina Golonka, to come to Brown in 1991 for a one year stint as a Senior Research Fellow. Sergei not only became something of a fixture at CFPD and the Institute, he and his wife became friends with Mom and Dad, sharing interests in Russia and gardening, and Sergei would frequently invite Dad to have a sauna in the basement of his house in Cranston, Rhode Island.

Mark retired from the CFPD in 1993, wanting to devote more time to Career Number 3.

Career Number 3: Blueberry Farmer (Overlapped with Career Number 2)

While busy with the CFPD, Mom and Dad also managed to find time to purchase land, design and build a house, and start a blueberry farm. They purchased several acres of land in Warwick, Rhode Island with a view of Narragansett Bay and (unfortunately) the Rocky Point Amusement Park with its noisy patrons (the amusement park closed in 1994, and Dad worked with the City of Warwick and the State of Rhode Island to help create what is now the Rocky Point State Park). Dad took a course in "designing your own home" at the Rhode Island School of Design, and designed a spacious and partially solar-heated home with an in-law apartment and plenty of space for visiting children and grandchildren. Mom and Dad acted as their own general contractor to save money; construction started in September 1983 and they moved into the house in April 1984 – followed by a lot of work by them on the interior.

Creation of the Rocky Point Blueberry Farm, partially to lower taxes and partially to cater to Dad's dream of becoming a gentleman farmer, faced some significant challenges related to the overgrown, swampy area designated for blueberries. After much work clearing and draining the designated area, 2200 blueberry bushes on two acres were in place and by 1991 the farm opened to the public as a you-pick-it operation. After unsuccessfully discouraging birds from helping themselves with scary balloons, Dad designed and implemented a unique system for placing netting over the entire blueberry patch.

For the next 20 years the Blueberry farm became a beloved attraction to residents of Warwick and further afield, achieving a record of 13 tons of

blueberries sold in the best season. Beehives and a cider mill added honey and apple cider to the available produce to be purchased. Grandchildren spent many weeks in the summertime helping out, including the less popular chore of helping to install the netting. Not satisfied with just blueberries, Dad started a grove of pawpaw trees – the fruit of which became popular with customers.

In 2011 the blueberry farm was sold to new owners. Before finalizing the sale, Dad worked to turn the farm into a conservation easement in perpetuity. Under the subsequent proprietorship of another family, the Rocky Point Blueberry Farm is still producing blueberries and pawpaws when in season and is still a beloved Warwick attraction.

Before moving from the farm, instead of simply buying a new house, Mom and Dad found a vacant lot in Cranston, RI, near Stillhouse Cove with a (closer than Warwick) view of Narragansett Bay. They then designed and built a house to meet their needs. Mom, after a nine year battle with ovarian cancer, died in 2012 after moving into the Stillhouse Cove house.

Mom and Dad were consummate and indefatigable travelers - after Mom's diagnosis of advanced ovarian cancer in 2003, they traveled to China (after spending months studying Mandarin), New Zealand, New Mexico, the Grand Canyon, and New Orleans (to name just a few).

In many ways, Mark was a true Renaissance man with a Hoosier pragmatic bent. He designed and built two homes; he designed and built a garage for his John Deere tractor; he designed and built a green house using recycled plate glass from a construction site. Rather than buying a new farm truck, he built an oak bed on a rusty Toyota pickup and “tinkered” to keep it working. Until a couple of years before his death, he was a keen reader and astute observer of politics and thought - AI, Lucretius' *The Nature of Things* , poetry, and CRISPR gene editing were just a few of his later interests.

Mark's love of nature was a core element in his life; from his teenage years on the apple orchard in Kokomo, Indiana; to the weekend family farm in West Virginia; to the Rhode Island blueberry farm, honey bees, apple trees, vegetable garden and pawpaw grove; to his garden at Stillhouse Cove and his leadership in restoring the park and salt marsh across from his house; and, finally, to sitting and watching the Delaware River in Hankins, New York.

### Life After Betty

After Betty's death, Dad continued to travel, including a cross country drive (at age 85), a trip along the Erie Canal, an ambitious trip to India, Nepal and Bhutan (at age 89), a Hudson River trip, and many others. With a friend, he started a book club in 2015. In the words of one of the book club members, "Whatever the book, he was consistently the best prepared reader in our group. Mark could always be relied on to identify the core lessons of our assigned reading, using his copious notes to refer us to page and paragraph as necessary". He also joined a men's group that met periodically to discuss issues of the day. Dad affectionately referred to the men's group as the OWLs (Older, Wiser Liberals).

Dad developed deep friendships in Rhode Island, where he provided companionship and counsel to many. A comment from one of those whose career he helped establish says a lot about Mark Garrison and his lasting effect: "What I feel very sure of is that you changed the lives of many people in very important ways - both on a grand scale and close to home with the friendship and mentoring that you provided to so many. How can I (and all of us impacted by you) ever thank you!"

Despite significant losses – Betty and Libby - Dad continued to find quiet joy in life and maintained a wonderful sense of humor. Towards the end, he told us that he was never bored, because he had so many great memories that he

could call on to keep him company.

Although Mark Garrison deeply enjoyed nature, his pragmatic side would certainly insist that flowers would only be for the living. Two organizations that he contributed to in the past are: Community Music Works of Providence and the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.