



Larsen Kent Bowker

May 30, 2026

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1936 – 2026

Larsen departed this life on May 30, 2026, surrounded by loving family in the warmth of his mountain home. He was 89 years old.

Larsen was born and raised in Alexandria, Nebraska, where his father's quiet sense of mystery and his mother's passion for telling stories imbued the surrounding hills, trees, and rivers with an aura of Arcadian myth and legend. He was educated at Kearney State College (now the University of Nebraska, Kearney), the University of Wyoming, and the University of Rhode Island, where he earned a Ph.D in English Literature. Teaching was a passion for which he demonstrated a unique talent, not only as an instructor in English at Cozad High School and Hastings College in Nebraska and at the University of Rhode Island, but also as a professor of English literature and the varsity tennis coach at Virginia Tech for twenty four years.

As the Virginia Tech tennis coach, his passion for excellence, eye for talent, and "Hate To Lose" mentality helped him recruit and develop the best scholar-athletes the program has seen to date. With dogged perseverance and athletic discipline, the team grew to be nationally competitive. His passion for the sport and the university program was instrumental in the development of

and fundraising for the Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center, the first indoor tennis courts in Southwest Virginia. For his contributions and record of achievements, Larsen was inducted into the Virginia Tech Athletic Hall of Fame in September 2024. Larsen was also a ranked tennis player in his own right, having won the Mid-Atlantic Lawn Tennis Association (now the USTA Mid-Atlantic Foundation) championship for men under 45. In 2023, he was inducted into the Foundation's Hall of Fame.

While Larsen's natural athletic ability was often described as "poetry in motion" on the court, he was also an accomplished poet. Larsen published several collections of his poems, and his work has appeared in such publications as *The California Quarterly*, *West Branch*, *The Midwest Poetry Review*, *Cottonwood*, *Parnassus*, and *Confluence*. Critics have praised his poetry as "[seeking] to reclaim something of that slow drama and texture of lives lived before speed took away their individuality" while "reading his poems makes you feel as if you are walking in radiant grace of afternoon light in autumn."

Larsen reveled in the "middle child's freedom" to explore and invent himself: a poet, tennis player, music aficionado, book collector, and wine enthusiast. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, the former Jeanette Turner, his children Michelle and Dane and their spouses Joseph Fortier and Douglas Sun, and his grandchildren Sam and Sara Fortier.

A celebration of his life will be held at a date and place yet to be determined.