

Ernest C. Kuhn Obituary



Ernest “Ernie” Clarence Kuhn passed away peacefully after a long illness on December 29, 2023, in Washington, DC surrounded by immediate and extended family members. He was 83 years old.

Though born and raised in Newark, Ohio, a place he returned to regularly throughout his life, Ernie was an avid traveler at heart who immersed himself in the history, cultures and languages of Southeast Asia and the Middle East over decades of devoted international public service and love of history.

He served as a tour director on excursions to Asia, Europe and the Middle East during his undergraduate studies. Upon graduating from Ohio State University with a BA in history, he joined the Peace Corps as a Volunteer to Thailand as part of Group VII from 1963-1965. He later served over 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer with the US Agency for International Development in Laos, the Philippines, Egypt, Indonesia, and finally in Washington, DC. An

extensive [interview](#) with Ernie as part of the Oral History Project covers his USAID career.

While serving in Laos he met his beloved wife, Phaythoune neé Sengchanh, who was by his side throughout his life and at the end. They were married in Sam Thong in 1969.

He was an adventurous traveler, avid photographer, bird watcher and fisherman. He freely provided photographs for a guidebook to Egypt, supported eagle conservationists in the Philippines, hosted a team of National Geographic wildlife experts for two weeks at his home, and competed in deep sea fishing competitions. He took his family on rugged weeks-long trips to discover and explore the countries they lived in including the terraced rice fields of Mindanao, the Sahara Desert in western Egypt, the Sinai, and Hindu and Buddhist temples on the islands of Java and Sumatra. He taught his daughters how to develop film in the dark room he built and supported their interests as budding photographers. He also greatly loved returning to Ohio during summer home leaves and spending time in the family cabin that his parents built with him and his brother when he was a teenager.

He had a passionate and deep interest in the history and culture of the places he lived—but most particularly Laos whose language, culture and history he loved and studied throughout his life. In recognition of his services to Laos, Ernie received the Order of the Million Elephants and the White Parasol from King Savang Vatthana in 1968, the kingdom’s highest knighthood order.

He provided authors and television productions not only his time but also photographs and film recordings about Laos. The [Ernest and Phaythoune Kuhn Image Collection](#)—a curated collection of photographs of Laos and Thailand during the 1960s-1970s—is available online at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries.

He is survived by his beloved wife Phaythoune Kuhn, daughters Christine (Jonathan) Kuhn-Patrick, and Kimberly (Brian Kaplan) Kuhn, grandchildren Imogen Kuhn-Patrick and Quincy Kaplan, sister-in-law Emily (Chin) Kuhn and nieces Bailey and Taylor Kuhn. Ernie was preceded in death by his parents, Joseph and Hallene (Fulke) Kuhn, and his brother, James Kuhn.

Ernie was passionately engaged in life, touching many lives across the globe. He will be deeply missed by family and friends. A memorial will be held on February 11 in Washington, DC. Condolences may be shared with the family on his memorial website at [ErnieKuhn.net](#).

