



J. Bruce Baumann

March 4, 1943 - July 22, 2025

J. Bruce Baumann was an enigma.

With little formal training, his hair pulled back into a ponytail, Baumann looked nothing like a traditional photographer when he first joined a newspaper staff in hometown of Evansville, IN. Then he started taking stunning pictures, usually from a different perspective than his colleagues.

The hallmark ponytail, focus and passion for storytelling continued throughout his career as he became photo editor, women's section editor, then editor at newspapers across the country as well as a member of the National Geographic staff. In the process he left a lasting impact on visual journalism. Baumann, 82, of Bloomington, IN, died Tuesday, July 22, 2025, after a valiant fight against cancer. He leaves his wife, Mary Jane, a daughter, Jennifer Ann Baumann Malone (Robert) of Arnold, Maryland, and Joseph D. Poccia (Vanessa) of Raleigh, NC, who he loved like a son. He also leaves three grandchildren, Charlie Malone, Maddie Malone and Bianca Poccia, a brother Keith Baumann (Brenda) of Fairfield, IL, and a sister, Lynn Carter, of Chicago. While editor of the Evansville Courier & Press, Baumann once said, "My job is to stand in the middle of the newsroom, flap my arms and convince us all that we can fly." Baumann understood that success requires collaboration which could only be achieved by sharing his knowledge and inspiring those around him.

"We will remember him as a great mentor, great editor and a really big personality in visuals in journalism," said Steven Raymer, Indiana University

Professor Emeritus of Journalism and former National Geographic staff photographer. “His big contribution was to build photo staffs of people who went behind the scenes, behind the stories, behind the headlines to help people understand why things were what they were and say, ‘I see. Now how can I help do something for my community’?”

A competitive spirit fueled Baumann to approach each job from a different perspective than his peers. It started with the first photography assignment for his first photography course as a senior in high school. While his classmates were shooting a school bell tower from the ground, Baumann talked his way up a nearby church tower that gave him a different perspective looking down on the tower. A few years later, then a photographer with the Evansville Sunday Courier and Press, Baumann climbed up and balanced himself on the rafters over the basketball court in Roberts Stadium. From there he captured a scene with the ball about to go into the basket as coach Arad McCutchan jumped in the air with the scoreboard in the background.

Baumann understood that to build a collaborative staff, at times he had to be tough, gruff and ruffle feathers. But he revealed another side for those fortunate enough to get to know him.

“While he was a tough and frank driving force in the newsroom, he was a big teddy bear outside,” said Justin Rumbach, former Publisher and Editor of the Jasper (IN) Herald, recalling Baumann holding and entertaining Rumbach’s daughter for 30 minutes during a chance encounter outside the office.

“No matter where he worked, people rose to the occasion,” said Sue Morrow, photo editor for multiple publications and former editor and creative director for the NPPA News Photographers Magazine. “He fully believed in toughness and then get out of the way and let the people do their best work.”

“Photographers across the country still talk about their time working for you,” Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame member and photographer Melissa Farlow wrote Baumann recently. She worked for him at the Pittsburgh Press and also worked at the National Geographic. “Your belief in the power of visual storytelling, your fight for excellence, your willingness to take risks on people –

that is your legacy,”

Baumann was also loyal.

“He would fall on the sword for you even when you didn’t deserve it,” said Donald Winslow, whose career intertwined with Baumann’s after working for him in Pittsburgh and after Baumann recommended him for jobs at the Palm Beach Post, CNET’s Internet startup, and the NPPA’s News Photographers Magazine.

Morrow said Baumann always supported women. “He elevated women in roles as picture editors and photographers, putting them in positions where they could shine.”

Morrow said Baumann was one of the first photo editors to put his hands on design. “His style was to use huge drop caps in the first paragraph.”

Baumann was born in Evansville in 1943. He was not quite 2 years old when he lost his father, John Beyers, in World War II. Baumann was raised by his mother and stepfather, Gloria and Allen Baumann.

His connection to journalism came via his role model, his grandfather Hyman Skelton, who lost his job as advertising manager for the Evansville Press in a power struggle with the business manager in the late 1940s.

Baumann had planned to pursue writing, but he became fascinated with the magic of images appearing in the darkroom and the possibilities of photography (he had earned \$5 for that first picture of a bell tower).

Baumann joined the Evansville Sunday Courier and Press as a photographer and sports reporter when he graduated, working while he attended college. He left for photography jobs at newspapers in Dubuque, Iowa, and Mansfield, Ohio.

“He photographed everything from sports to fashion to breaking news,” said Charlene Tolbert, longtime colleague. “He went to tiny gymnasiums in small-town Indiana for that most Hoosier of all events — a high school basketball game. He went to Detroit in 1967 during the riots of the Civil Rights era to show Evansville what might be coming its way. And he did it all with great

good spirits and with an eye for the original.”

Baumann returned to Evansville repeatedly, first in 1964 as director of photography for the Sunday Courier & Press, in the mid-1990s as editor of the Scripps Howard book publishing arm, and finally as managing editor of the Evansville Courier & Press in the late 1990s. He

was named executive editor and then editor in the early-2000s, which he saw in some way as a vindication of his grandfather’s struggle.

Between those stints, his career took him around the world as a staff photographer for National Geographic magazine, where he also served as picture editor and designer, and to jobs at newspapers in Grand Rapids, Mich., San Jose, Calif., Pittsburgh, Pa., and Monterey, Calif. His storytelling spirit continued through his newspaper career and extended beyond retirement to his photographing and editing a free online magazine featuring his then home county of Posey (IN) that drew praise from around the world with hits from 73 countries.

Raymer and Baumann joined the staff of the National Geographic the same day in May of 1972, both arrived driving Porsche 914s (Baumann’s was blue, Raymer’s yellow).

Raymer said National Geographic was a difficult place for someone like Bruce who wanted to change things overnight. While the magazine had hired young people to change the look and direction of photography, Baumann was impatient.

“Baumann cut a wide swath wherever he went,” Raymer said. “He wanted it all and he wanted it now.”

One of Baumann’s first stories for National Geographic was on Khyber Pass in Pakistan, one of the most fought-over places in the world. “If you go into the area as an Anglo, you are likely to be arrested or killed,” Raymer said. “Yet he brought home a story. I don’t know how he did it and I’m not sure I would have done it.”

Bill Burleigh, member of the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame and former

chairman of E.W. Scripps, once said Baumann was a “brash and somewhat radical young photographer” who was a pathfinder, and he credited Baumann for his role in bringing two Pulitzer Prizes to the Pittsburgh Press.

Angus McEachran, the late editor of the Pittsburgh Press, had heard Baumann was “difficult to manage,” but he charged him with the task of redesigning and improving the newspaper.

“He delivered.” The redesign drew raves, not only from peers but, more importantly, from readers, McEachran said. “His recruitment was unbelievable. We landed two Geographic photographers and five or six other stars.” Along the way Baumann’s expertise in photography and design expanded into management and ultimately to other areas of the newsroom.

It didn’t take much of Baumann’s arm-flapping before members of staff after staff realized they were part of something special. Honors followed including his induction into the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame in 2011.

The Evansville Courier & Press had never been named a Hoosier State Press Association Blue Ribbon newspaper until Baumann became the managing editor and then the editor. Under his direction, the newspaper received that honor twice during his nine years of leadership.

These weren’t the first times his attention to excellence had earned him honors.

“He was the most awarded picture editor ever in the NPPA (National Press Photographers Association),” Morrow said.

“The newspapers he edited were recognized nationally. The photo staffs he managed were widely considered the best in the country. Young editors, including myself, looked to his newspapers for ideas and inspiration,” said John Rumbach, former longtime publisher and editor of the Jasper Herald, who coedited a book on the Jasper Herald with Baumann.

Baumann was the National Press Photographers Association Region 4 Photographer of the Year in 1968 and 1969 while at the Sunday Courier & Press, and in 1970 while working for the Grand Rapids Press in Michigan. He

was a national Picture Editor of the Year International (POYi) four times. He was runner-up to the National Newspaper Photographer of the Year 1970 and Missouri Penny Award women's editor of the year in 1972.

He received NPPA's highest honor, the Joseph A. Sprague Award, in 1992, an NPPA President's Award in 1973, the Jim Gordon Editor of the Year Award in 2005, the John Durniak Mentor Award in 2007 and, after he retired, the Clifton Edom award in 2010. Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame member Alan Horton once said, "For many of Bruce's most successful years, he looked more like a maverick –with his beard and ponytail — than a buttoned-down executive. And, at meetings (even those at corporate headquarters), he would interrupt to say exactly what was on his mind even to his ultimate boss (me)."

Along the way, Baumann willingly shared his knowledge and vision, creating and directing the San Jose Conference and the Pittsburgh Conference, both interdisciplinary seminars and workshops for newspaper journalists and university students, for 12 years.

In 1989, when asked for help in setting up a scholarship for picture editors, Baumann suggested instead the formation of a picture-editing workshop that would train large numbers of picture editors in an intensive program, using the talents of the best picture editors in the country. The Stan Kalish Picture Editing Workshop, now known as The Kalish, came to life in 1990. Baumann served two years as director. The workshop is now housed at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y.

Baumann's journalistic passion continued after retirement in 2007, teaching photojournalism, newsroom leadership and picture editing at Southern Illinois University. He also started a free online magazine focused on the stories of his beloved Posey County.

"He found a lot of good things - humanity and beauty in an area that was overlooked," Raymer said. "One of his greatest strengths was he could find a story anywhere."

Horton once said Baumann was "that rare combination of world-class talent

(as photojournalist, photo editor, page designer, writer, editor, motivator and teacher) and intense and contagious passion – passion for readers, colleagues, fairness, accuracy, ethics and, most of all, powerful storytelling.” “Bruce never lost his enthusiasm or big personality,” said Bob Gwaltney, former Evansville Courier & Press photographer.

Recently Winslow found himself trading medical stories with Baumann in their last phone conversation the day before his death.

“He’s not accustomed to losing. He was a fierce competitor and was used to winning.” “He loved Posey County,” Winslow said. “I’ve always said when Bruce dies, he won’t go to heaven, he’ll go to Posey County.”

A celebration of Baumann’s life will be scheduled at a later date.

Tribute Wall

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“ *The sun has set
The day has ended
But your loved ones memories, will live on in many hearts.
Fly high with the angels, Bruce.
Until I see you on the other side. 🕊️ 🕊️ 🕊️*

Joyce Rodgers - July 31, 2025 at 12:09 PM

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“ *My condolences to Jenny and Joseph and their families. I don't believe I ever met either of you, but I heard Bruce and Alison speak of you both many times. I was in a small writer's critique group with Alison, and we met frequently out at the farm. (Joseph, I GREATLY liked your artwork on the barn. Also, I have in my files some paper copies, Word documents, and audio recordings of your mom's writings. If you are ever in Indiana and would like those materials, please feel free to email me at acnellis@twc.com.)...I think of Bruce and Alison often when I sit in my kitchen, for I have one of his photos that Alison gifted each of our writer's group members with one Christmas -- a picture of lakes and rolling hills in Posey County -- hanging above my table. Because I knew the both of them for a number of years, they are inextricably linked in my mind. After Alison's passing, I was fortunate to have also met Mary Jane once, when Bruce introduced us over a meal at the Deerhead tavern. I recall Bruce telling me prior to that meeting that Mary Jane was one of the kindest people he'd ever met. He was lucky to have had two such exceptional wives. And the world was fortunate to have had a man like Bruce who gifted his multitude of talents to so many.*

Caroline Nellis - July 30, 2025 at 10:06 PM

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“ He was a mentor to a long list of photojournalists during his career and I was one of the many of which he left an indelible mark and continue to be part of the shadow of his legacy.
Condolences to friends and family... hats off, rest in peace.

Randy Dieter - July 30, 2025 at 07:29 AM