

Oregon Nature Writer Barry Lopez Dies at 75

By Scott Laird

Famed author and essayist Barry Lopez passed away from cancer on December 25, 2020 at the age of 75.

Lopez, who was born in New York and raised in California, had lived in Oregon since 1968, where he and his wife Debra Gwartney, made their home near Finn Rock along a secluded stretch of the McKenzie River. Much of their property was damaged in the Labor Day wildfires, including the complete loss of an outbuilding containing Lopez's vast archive of books, awards, notes, and correspondence from the past 50 years. "The fire was a blow he never could recover from," Gwartney told NPR. He was in hospice care in Eugene at the time of his passing.

"On Christmas Eve morning, he woke up and said, 'It's a wonderful morning. How is everyone?' Barry entered nearly every day with joyful optimism, including his last ones," wrote his wife on his webpage following his death.

Lopez won the National Book Award in 1986 for *Arctic Dreams*, based

on the five years he spent working as a biologist in the Canadian Arctic. His other works include, *Of Wolves and Men* – which explores man's complex relationship with wolves – and his final book, *Horizons*, published in 2019. He was a regular contributor to numerous magazines and other publications.

Lopez's writing often featured and documented the landscapes and natural history of the places he traveled, along with man's influence on his environs. He was known for his literal and descriptive prose, and his advocacy for conservation, ecology, and environmental protection.

"In the face of a rational, scientific approach to the land, which is more widely sanctioned, esoteric insights and speculations are frequently overshadowed, and what is lost is profound. The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life," wrote Lopez in *Arctic Dreams*.

"It was against a backdrop of these broad strokes – taming the wil-

derness, the law of vengeance, protection of property, an inalienable right to decide the fate of all animals without incurring moral responsibility, and the strongly American conception of man as the protector of defenseless creatures – that the wolf became the enemy," he wrote in 1978's *Of Wolves and Men*.

Known for his penchant for isolation and privacy, Lopez recently began writing, touring and lecturing about his concerns for global climate change

and the loss of species world-wide. "Only an ignoramus can imagine now that pollinating insects, migratory birds, and pelagic fish can depart our company and that we will survive because we know how to make tools. Only the misled can insist that heaven awaits the righteous while they watch the fires on Earth consume the only heaven we have ever known," wrote Lopez in an August 2020 essay.



Vernonia Equality and Racial Justice – Fighting For Everyone in Vernonia *continued from page 6*

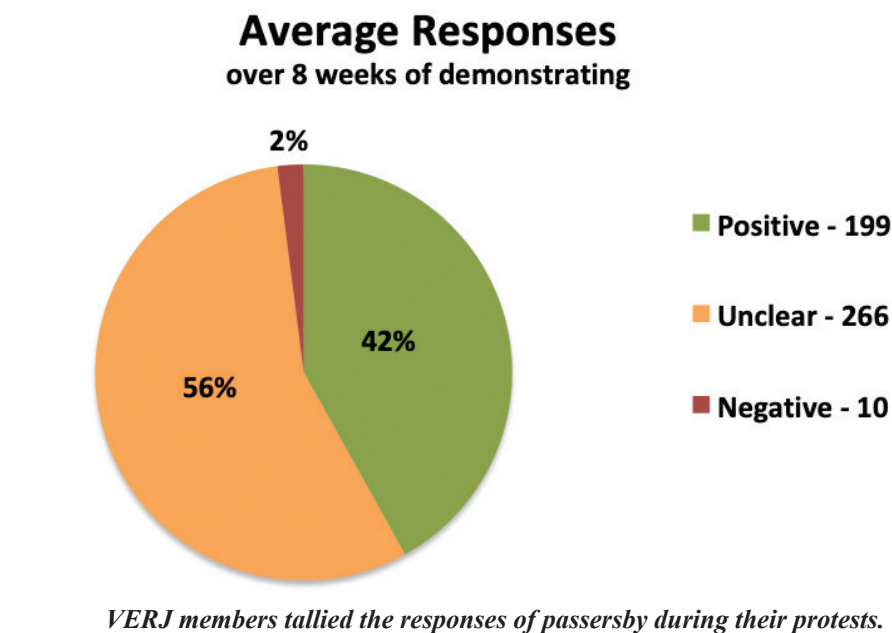
considers a hate crime to be offenses motivated by bias toward race, ethnicity or ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and gender identity. Nationally 60% of hate crimes are based on race.

Oregon has been part of this trend. According to a report on Oregon-Live on July 15, 2020, Oregon saw a 125% increase in reported hate crimes between 2013 and 2017, the sixth largest increase by state in the country.

A recent Think Out Loud program on Oregon Public Broadcasting, on December 9, 2020 highlighted recent events in Oregon, and featured Candace Avalos, a Portland State University student advisor and co-founder of the Black Millennial Movement, who was among several black leaders in Portland to receive letters threatening their lives, sent to their home addresses.

Fighting for equality and justice locally

The death of George Floyd, captured on video and viewed by millions, ignited a response in many people who had never considered racism to be their fight, and motivated a number of people to get activated and take on the challenge of changing our country. That was true in Vernonia. "Several years prior to seeing the George Floyd video, I had personally been spending time learning about racial inequality issues in the U.S.," says Aiuto, who is originally from Wyoming and moved to Vernonia several years ago with her now husband, a Vernonia native. "I had been reading and educating myself, and then I see that video and I was struck by the casual way those police officers watched him die. I know in Vernonia that isn't exactly our problem, but whether you're white or black, live in a rural area or in a city, it's something that everyone should be upset about and should stand up against, because that shouldn't happen to any American. So that's how it



started – just wanting to take a stand against something so egregious."

For Warfield, his past experiences played a part in how he chose to engage when the protests started in June. "Before, when I went out to protest, there was an inner anger. We were going out to address it, one way or another. We were going to take a stand. You had to have that kind of attitude in those days because it was kind of rough. It was the first time America was getting their front door rattled. It was different now, but the tone was still there, because all of the division that Trump had okayed. It was different because the media is more open now. People were more willing to put the camera on it and say 'See this!' It got put in America's face, undeniably. You couldn't have scripted a better or worse example to be able to say, 'This is what is wrong with America.' And it was plastered across everyone's screen. And people had to deal with it. People had to take a position on it."

Warfield says he was hesitant at first to get involved in the local protests. "I have a long history of being involved in these types of things, but it was interesting to be out here in old Vernowhere,

and be almost 80 years old, and thinking, 'What am I going to do? I'm an old horse but I hear the bells ringing, and I want to put on my harness and pull.' I was going to sit this one out and watch this time. I've been on the front line before and paid my dues. But when I saw Corrie and a few other people out there I thought I needed to go out and repre-

sent. I'm one of the few black people in this area. So I committed to just show up and be a black presence and help validate it."

Warfield did much more than just validate it. Instead he became a voice of experience and wisdom, and a mentor to the younger members of the group – a leader who offered tangible examples and ideas about how to create change. "I didn't want to get in the way, but I wanted to provide support," he says.

The positive community response to seeing people standing on Bridge Street in a town park holding signs promoting racial justice was encouraging, says Aiuto. "Especially because, at the same time, there were all sorts of things going on in Portland that involved violence, vandalism, and clashes with police. People had a lot of strong feelings about what was going on in Portland, and yet we were still getting positive responses." Aiuto notes that VERJ made a conscious decision at the very beginning to not march through

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