

- [Donate](#)

## Your Reading List

Search Rewire.News

Use quotes to search for exact phrases. Use AND/OR/NOT between keywords or phrases for more precise search results.

## “How May I Help You?” Baird Bardarson, MD: Loss of a Champion

Nov 22, 2010, 7:54am [Marcy Bloom](#)

Dr. Baird Bardarson of Seattle and Whidbey Island, Washington, was a true champion, pioneer, humanitarian, and heroic abortion provider. His loss cuts very deeply for our community of abortion providers.

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Linked In](#)
- [Email](#)
- Permalink
- [Instapaper](#)
- [Print](#)

## Trending

- [Today](#)
- [This Week](#)

1. [Where Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden Stand on Reproductive Rights](#)
2. [Why Florida’s Forced Parental Consent Law Will Hit Immigrant Families Hardest](#)
3. [Don’t Fall for the John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh Jedi Mind Trick](#)
4. [I’m a Proud Abortion Provider. Here’s Why.](#)
5. [Should I Crowdfund My Abortion?](#)
6. [The TikTok Abortion Video Didn’t Actually Show Abortion, but This YouTube Video Did](#)
7. [Texas Foreshadows How Trump’s ‘Gag Rule’ Will Destroy Teens’ Access to Contraception](#)
8. [Anti-Choice State Lawmakers Want to Criminalize Abortion Through Nullification](#)

1. [Don’t Fall for the John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh Jedi Mind Trick](#)
2. [The TikTok Abortion Video Didn’t Actually Show Abortion, but This YouTube Video Did](#)
3. [Anti-Choice State Lawmakers Want to Criminalize Abortion Through Nullification](#)
4. [I’m a Proud Abortion Provider. Here’s Why.](#)
5. [Where Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden Stand on Reproductive Rights](#)
6. [‘You Don’t Even Treat Animals the Way I Was Treated’: Pregnant and Incarcerated](#)
7. [Biden Gets Support From One of the Last Anti-Choice Congressional Democrats: Campaign Week in Review](#)
8. [Texas Foreshadows How Trump’s ‘Gag Rule’ Will Destroy Teens’ Access to Contraception](#)

## The Breach

[A podcast about pregnancy and drug use, Native people and tribal sovereignty. It’s a story nobody has told beyond a small community, but one everybody needs to hear.](#)

There are many losses in life, but some are more painful than others. The passing of a pioneer, humanitarian, and heroic abortion provider cuts very deeply for our community of abortion providers. For those who did not have my joy and privilege of knowing and working with a true champion, Dr. Baird Bardarson of Seattle and Whidbey Island, Washington, I will do my best to describe this amazing man and visionary physician.

Dr. Bardarson lived a long, accomplished, and fruitful life and filled his 84 years with joy, wit, skill, love, laughter, hard work, play, family, friends, and wisdom. His *Seattle Times* obituary describes him as a pioneer abortion provider, champion sailor, and community activist, but that description is really only the beginning. He was married to his beloved wife Peggy for 59 years and was always surrounded by women, both professionally and personally, as they had five accomplished daughters. Dr. Bardarson loved sailing and won many honors and trophies with his sailing prowess. He and his family loved cruising for pleasure in British Columbia in their sailboat “Bright Star”; in fact, that was a summer family activity for thirty-one years. There is no question that Dr. Bardarson knew how to live passionately and enjoy life to the fullest.

And a key part of his passion was that he also knew how critical it was to take on important social issues. He was always deeply concerned about the equitable provision of medical care to all those in need and worked for access to care for poor patients using public assistance in the King County region south of Seattle. When abortion became legal in Washington state in 1970, Dr. Bardarson began to provide first trimester procedures at his Renton office. He was no stranger to this critical women's right and women's health need, as he had been the only physician who had enough stamina and guts to defend another doctor who was performing safe, but still illegal, abortions at the local hospital in the late 1960s. Further, he and Peggy, who was then president of the Renton NOW chapter and who had lobbied in the state capital, had been active in the struggle to liberalize Washington state's abortion law through a vote of the people. When the law did pass in 1970, it was the first time that an archaic and dangerous abortion law had been changed by a vote of the people! Truly~this was an incredible accomplishment moved forward by many dedicated people, including Baird and Peggy Bardarson.

In the 1970s, Dr. Bardarson had a busy general practice, but his interest became increasingly focused toward safe abortion provision because of the overwhelming need. He saw nothing incongruous in both doing abortions and in delivering babies as part of a busy family practice. He was performing abortions full-time by then and had become an expert in still harder-to-obtain second trimester abortion care. Women from all over the country were coming to see him. In fact, working at his Cedar River Clinic, Dr. Bardarson pioneered second trimester abortion techniques. Indeed, before the advent of dilation and evacuation~D & E~as a safe abortion technique, women could only have abortions in the second trimester through saline or prostaglandin induction. The use of D&E as pioneered and led in the Pacific Northwest by Dr. Bardarson made the procedure safer, more comfortable, and less emotionally difficult for the woman. He also worked diligently to change the state code allowing second trimester abortions in outpatient clinics and he became a recognized regional and national leader in introducing the new technology of D & E for later abortion care.

### **Get the facts, direct to your inbox.**

Want more Rewire.News? Get the facts, direct to your inbox.

#### [SIGN UP](#)

Dedicated to the provision of expert, caring, and non-judgmental abortion services, Dr. Bardarson brought his enormous expertise to the board of the National Abortion Federation in the early 80s. He was extremely proud that his organization Cedar River Clinic was a model of high clinical standards for safe abortion care. In a speech he gave in 2003, he wrote of his work in those times, the need to treat women with utmost respect, and the significance of outpatient clinics: "Outpatient abortion clinics revolutionized how surgical care was delivered. Gone was the dependence on the hospital where patients might be psychologically traumatized in hostile settings. Now the patient was well-counseled and treated with respect. The patient had to be in charge of her destiny. This was not a procedure for the husband, or the parents, or the boyfriend. The patient was helped to arrive at her decision by wise and compassionate counselors. Repeat abortions were not stigmatized but realized to be a problem of the vagaries of birth control methods or perhaps lack of proper counseling by the previous provider."

In this same presentation, Dr. Bardarson also described his strong Unitarian-Universalist principles, "which urges us to honor the inherent worth of every person and to strive for justice, equity, and compassion in human relations...In addition, the three leading principles of bioethics-respect for persons, beneficence, and justice-together provide an ethical mandate for guaranteeing women throughout the world a legal right to safe abortion....Abortion is, after all, about helping people. About helping people in trouble. As an issue of public health, it's a very simple matter. Our abortion policies over the last 30 years have been a resounding success in improving women's reproductive health. It has remained an issue of intense religious and political debate...but I can tell you from the many women I have served over the years, that whatever a person's belief system, those who seek abortion services represent a cross section of ethnicity, religion, and political belief....our common humanity binds us together in this regard."

In addition to being an exceptional abortion provider with this hopeful vision of humanity, Dr. Bardarson was an exceptional husband and father. At his memorial service, his daughter Siri indicated that "in the 35 years of his medical career, I never heard him make a negative comment or disparaging remark about work....there was a strong model of work ethic and an almost giddy acceptance of responsibility...he had big work and an even bigger passion with his sailing. He sailed every week-end and every summer during his vacation. He loved fraternity and competition with the guys, while his domestic life was all girls...H e exposed us to everything!...H e learned a new musical instrument every winter... and learning was always experiential, kinesthetic, and discovery in the doing...he always told me to 'Figure it out' and that's how I learned to drive and sail! ...My Dad operated where the rubber meets the road and he was the epitomé of love in action. There are very few people in this room that haven't heard him say as he extended his hand with a twinkle in his eye: 'How may I help you?' ...I learned [from him] about...the idea of personal sacrifice for another's good...."

Indeed, Dr. Bardarson's personal sacrifices were extensive, especially as violence against abortion providers began to increase in the 1980s and he worried for his and Peggy's safety. "As I started to become heavily involved in abortion care, I felt fortunate that my children were grown and out of the house...But I must confess to having apprehension at night when I would answer a knock at the door. Was there someone out there who would blow my brains out with a shotgun? I would grit my teeth and try to feel brave. After I retired in 1991, the climate worsened for abortion providers and doctors started to wear bulletproof vests-for good reason." In the mid 1980s, Dr. Bardarson had outrageously been arrested for allegedly assaulting a picketer on private property in front of his clinic when all he had done was to ask the protestor to leave and had taken literature out of the demonstrator's hands. It was a two day jury

trial and a propaganda circus for the anti-choice forces (of course), but after 20 minutes of deliberation, he was (of course!) found not guilty. Still, as he indicated at the time, "even when you are innocent of wrong doing, it is humbling to be put in this vulnerable position...It was because the city attorney was anti-abortion that it was I who was made the criminal and not the demonstrator on private property waving plastic fetuses at my patients as they approached the clinic door."

Reacting to this shocking incident of one of their own, and because of the great respect his colleagues held for him, the Washington State Association of Abortion Providers (WSAAP) was ultimately formed, and it began to meet regularly for support, fellowship, continuing education, and advocacy training. Always the teacher, humanitarian, pioneer, and activist, it was Dr. Bardarson who initially brought the group together. WSAAP has grown over the years and still meets to this day, now under the auspices of the Abortion Access Project.

One of Dr. Bardarson's esteemed colleagues from those years who is still teaching and speaking out is Dr. Suzanne Poppema, former chair of the National Abortion Federation and Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health. She recalls that the providers of the Pacific Northwest have felt his passing keenly. "Baird was such a gentleman and so supportive of all of us. He very kindly advised me, taught me, and took over care of my more complex patients when I was a young doctor just beginning...he is missed." Jane Connell, former Director of Counseling at what was then Planned Parenthood of Seattle/King County, recently wrote to me: "Of all the providers we had, he was absolutely my favorite. Baird shared stories with me about his yearly trips to Mexico with Peggy and their five girls. They were all accomplished musicians and would take their instruments with them to Mexico and give afternoon concerts in the hotel lobby...Dr. Bardarson was the most modest, sensitive, and generous physician I have ever encountered." And Dr. Jack Leversee, yet another valued colleague and renowned retired family practice professor at the University of Washington who for many years taught residents how to perform abortions, shared with me: "I learned many special things from Baird, as did so many others...also, he was a humanitarian first. He paid careful attention to the emotional needs of the patient. Often, abortion providers leave that up to their staff. In my way opinion, never a satisfactory way to proceed, and Baird felt strongly about that and acted upon that belief as well. He also had a finely honed sense of humor. He was an excellent husband and father. There is just no way we can replace such a fine man."

So true...This pioneer, hero, and brave leader guided and helped so many for so many years. He and Peggy enjoyed their well-deserved retirement on Whidbey Island where they both became active in the local Unitarian Universalist congregation and where Dr. Bardarson led the decade-long effort to plan and build a new meetinghouse that was completed in 2008. Still making changes and changing the world...of course! And I still recall his tall, sturdy, handsome Icelandic frame leaping into the clinic with his ever-present effervescence and twinkle in his eye, wearing Sperry topsider deck shoes, and always ready for the challenging, revolutionary, and inspiring work of helping women by providing excellent abortion care for more than three decades.

I later found out that towards the end of her life and as he neared retirement, Dr. Bardarson's had mother told him that she had needed to have an abortion when she was very sick-at times near death-with tuberculosis. Dr. Bardarson was 10 years old at the time-this would have been in 1936-and his mother had waited many years to confide in him. She was very proud of his work. And as a proud Icelandic-American-he had studied the language, made many trips to Iceland, and was President of the Icelandic Club in Seattle for many years-isn't it perfect that, according to the October 10<sup>th</sup> World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, the best country in the world for women is *Iceland*?

Thank you, Dr. Bardarson. There are no words to say what you mean to us...but we miss you. We will miss your skill, dedication to ethics and justice, gentleness, strength, leadership, humanitarianism, joy for life, and bright eyes. You passionately served us all... you told us to "Figure it out"...and you did it all for 84 incredible years with grace, style, warmth, openness, and greatness. You were a champion for women in your life and work and your legacy is strong, powerful, and bright...and so is the never-to-be forgotten twinkle in your eye as you lived your wonderful life.

## Topics and Tags:

[Abortion Providers](#), [Access To Abortion](#)

## Related Articles

- [Abortion](#)
- [Contraception](#)
- [Economic Justice](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Family](#)
- [Family Planning](#)
- [Health Systems](#)
- [Human Rights](#)
- [Immigration](#)
- [Law and Policy](#)
- [LGBTQ](#)