



Randall Jarrell

May 6, 1914 - October 14, 1965

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Randall Jarrell, the poet and critic whose war poems and children's books made him one of the clearest American voices of the mid-century, died near Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on October 14, 1965, after being struck by a car at dusk on a roadside. He was fifty-one.

He was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on May 6, 1914, and spent part of his childhood in California before returning South. He studied at Vanderbilt University under John Crowe Ransom, roomed with the future novelist Peter Taylor, and followed Ransom to Kenyon College, where he taught and began publishing. During World War II he served in the Army Air Forces, mostly as a celestial-navigation tower operator, work that fed the spare, devastating poems collected in *Little Friend*, *Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948).

"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," a five-line lyric that ends with the gunner washed "out of the turret with a hose," became one of the most anthologized American poems of the war. After the war he taught at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, wrote searching criticism for *The Nation* and other journals, and published the novel *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), a campus satire still read for its sentences. His children's books *The Bat-Poet* and *The Animal Family*, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, showed the same exact tenderness.

He was Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1956 to 1958. In his last years he suffered depression after a stay in a psychiatric hospital; friends and his wife, Mary von Schrader Jarrell, debated whether the roadside death was accident or suicide. The coroner ruled it accidental. He is buried in New Garden Friends Cemetery in Greensboro. Robert Lowell called him "the most heartbreaking poet of our time."

Services

Died in Chapel Hill, NC, October 14, 1965, aged 51. Portrait: Photograph, 1962 (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H280

<https://noticenearby.com/obituaries/randall-jarrell-obituary-chapel-hill-nc>

On-chain proof: <https://noticenearby.com/obituaries/randall-jarrell-obituary-chapel-hill-nc/proof>

View on blockchain: <https://basescan.org/tx/0xfd40c7e18e564e3c2206869f3d8753e10d159ae9dd1c037f52212e1f99d4e9c6>

Base stores the content hash, publication number, memorial id, and timestamp - not the full obituary text. The complete memorial remains on Notice Nearby. This is not a legal affidavit.

This page is a memorial, not a legal affidavit.