

From: Judith Barnes

To: The Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission

August 12, 2025

Dear Members of the Commission, and all here today (or reading these words):

My last day in Bloomington on July 29, 2025 was an emotional one for me. Circumstances forced me to sell my beloved house at 115 East 12th Street, which I've owned for almost forty years. When I realized I could no longer afford to keep the house, I imagined that its life would continue as a home for others. I had hoped to sell it to people who would love and cherish it the way I have. I only realized in retrospect that the new owner had plans to demolish it. I am devastated to think that such a lovely, well built, 100 year old house will be reduced to rubble.

I hope that each one of you will take a little time to visit it, or at least consider the many people whose lives have been lived within its walls. Perhaps you will be able to enter and sit in the house for a while as you contemplate its fate. Take a moment to feel the spirit of the place. I hope that you might decide it is worthy of preservation. I hope you might decide to save and honor it, rather than to tear it down. It is a historic, venerable, simple, elegant, and beautifully proportioned home, a classic California Craftsman-style bungalow built in the 1920's. It is solid and in good shape fundamentally. They built well back then. It is unusual in that it has light flooding in from the four directions throughout the day. It is harmonious with the neighborhood and with the city as a whole. It represents the kind of architecture that gives Bloomington its special character. It is a part of Bloomington history, as well as a part of literary and artistic history. Once something like that is destroyed, not only the beautiful house and its potential future life, but so much that is intangible, yet deeply valuable, is gone forever.

My hope now is to acquaint the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission with a bit of the house's past, so that you will have some feeling for what this place has meant, and the rich life that has been lived within its walls. Let me tell you a bit of my history in this sweet home.

I moved to Bloomington from Brooklyn NY in 1987 to study voice at IU. My husband, Anthony Kerrigan, whom I married in 1986, lived here with me. He was a poet, an

illustrious man of letters, a celebrated translator from Spanish to English. He was a National Book Award winner and Senior Guest Scholar in the Spanish department at IU Bloomington and at Notre Dame in South Bend. He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and with that money we were able to put a down payment on the house, which we were renting from Anne and Gary Steigerwald, and which they had decided to sell. Speaking with them, we also learned that it previously belonged to the Butler family of local winemaking fame. We bought it from the Steigerwalds and happily continued living there.

My husband Anthony fell ill with cancer during the time we were together, and I cared for him with great love until the day in 1991 when he died in my arms, at home in Bloomington in our house at 115 East 12th Street. (I'm including his obituary in the postscript.) I stayed until 1993, at which point I returned to New York City and began my career in music and the arts. I am an opera singer, producer, stage director, teacher and visual artist. I founded an opera company in New York called Vertical Player Repertory.

115 East 12th Street was the place where I learned to become an opera singer. I studied with Virginia Zeani, Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, and Klara Barlow at IU. Look them up to see what legendary performers they were. Many an evening, I and my musician friends and colleagues would gather around my beautiful piano, a Weber upright which I bought at the Smith-Holden music store (which used to be down near the Irish Lion, which too has closed), to sing and drink wine and laugh and show off. We had parties with the likes of the great cellist Janos Starker, the great violinists Josef Gingold, Yuval Yaron, and Stanley Ritchie, the wonderful pianist Mark Phelps, the Catalan writer Josep Sobrer, the Hungarian man of letters Mihaly Szegedy-Maszák, the Japanese author Sumie Jones, the writer and translator Willis Barnstone, the composer John Eaton (a MacArthur genius award winner) and his wife, mezzo soprano Nelda Nelson, the Irish composer Frank Corcoran, and many other deeply accomplished writers, musicians, composers, performers, and intellects from all over the world.

While I was a student, my husband, who was 40 years my senior, had a wildly different schedule from mine. As I slept, he would be awake till 4AM writing poetry. I would leave in the morning for classes while he slept till noon. He wrote a book of

poetry to me there in the house; you can see from his words below how deep our love was.

After I returned to New York, I never could afford to come back for any sustained length of time, and I couldn't care for the house the way it deserved, but I did take advantage of the time between tenants to come and stay for a few weeks every two years or so. It has been a refuge for me, not to say a sanctuary, for all these years. Whenever I have come back to the house, I have always felt safe and embraced and peaceful, whether gently swinging on the generous porch in the warm breeze, singing in the welcoming acoustic, reading in the sunlight that floods in from all sides through the large windows throughout the day, preparing food in the simple kitchen which has such comfortable proportions, bathing in the darling clawfoot tub in the sauna-like back bathroom, sleeping in the northernmost bedroom with the sound of the freight train rumbling by intermittently at night, or just walking on the beautiful original oak floors which have sustained people's lives and steps for the past hundred years.

I urge the Commission to take my words to heart. My neighbors are also distressed at the prospect of the sweet yellow house at 115 E 12th being destroyed. It seems to me that there must be a better way to sustain a healthy community and honor our collective past while providing housing that doesn't destroy the character and history of the city we love. So much of America has lost its architectural individuality. It's within our power to preserve that local character which still exists, one building at a time. I believe that is the mandate of the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at VPROpera@gmail.com or 646-763-0195. I would be grateful to hear from you and advocate for the preservation of the house and the integrity of the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Judith Barnes

Artistic Director
Vertical Player Repertory Opera
vpropera.org

Addenda:

You may notice a plaque on the exterior wall beside the front door. It expresses much of what I've attempted to convey in this letter. I'm enclosing a copy of the text of the plaque below.

In this house for a brief eternity
the poet Anthony Kerrigan and the artist Judith Barnes
lived and loved

El'Azar: A Post-Epitaph

After I knew her, my recent death
became posthumous, future doom
entombed. And life-after-death
an iridescent present, a breathing of her breath.

—Anthony Kerrigan

*And I feel myself as herself being sung
or spoken under her breath and tongue*

Below please find Anthony Kerrigan's obit from The New York Times, 3/9/1991

Anthony Kerrigan; Translator of Works in Spanish Was 72

Anthony Kerrigan, a poet and translator of works by Spanish and Latin American writers, died Thursday at his home in Bloomington, Ind. He was 72 years old. He died of prostate cancer, his wife, Judith Barnes Kerrigan, said.

Mr. Kerrigan translated works by Jorge Luis Borges, including "Ficciones," "A Personal Anthology," "Poems" and "Irish Strategies," and by Miguel de Unamuno, the Spanish philosopher, including "Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno," a seven-volume collection that Mr. Kerrigan helped edit. He won a National Book Award for his 1973 translation of Unamuno's "Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations."

His other translations included Pablo Neruda's "Selected Poems," Camilo Jose Cela's "Family of Pascual Duarte" and "The Revolt of the Masses," by Jose Ortega y Gasset.

Mr. Kerrigan's own poetry was published in three collections: "Lear in the Tropic of Paris" (1952), "Espousal in August" (1968) and "At the Front Door of the Atlantic" (1969).

He was born in Winchester, Mass., but lived in Cuba until the age of 12, when his father died and he was sent back to the United States to live with relatives.

In 1988, the National Endowment for the Arts gave him an unsolicited grant of \$40,000 for lifetime contributions to American letters.

Mr. Kerrigan was a senior guest scholar at the University of Notre Dame and at Indiana University.

Surviving besides his wife are his daughter, Antonia, of Barcelona, Spain; five sons, Michael, of Los Angeles, Camilo Jose, of New York City, Elie, of Majorca, Patrick, of Los Angeles, and Malachy, of South Bend, Ind.; a sister, Joan Recht of Glen Ellyn, Ill., and five grandchildren.

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