

<https://obits.al.com/us/obituaries/birmingham/name/david-baker-obituary?pid=195810221>

David Remember Baker, retired attorney at law, passed away at his Birmingham residence on March 20, 2020, his 12th day in hospice. Five years prior he had had a massive disabling stroke. A second stroke earlier in the month led to further limitations and caused him to decide to enter hospice care. Shortly before he died, surrounded by his wife, Lois Avery Gaeta, his sister-in-law Elease Mullins Smith, and carers, he was asked how he was feeling and he responded with the forefinger and thumb of his left hand, "A-OK." He was 88 years old and quite annoyed that he had not made it to 90.

David was born in Durham, N.C., on January 17, 1932, the first son of Eleanor Ussher Baker and Roger Denio Baker, MD, a pathologist. His unusual middle name "Remember" was after his fifth generation grandfather, Captain Remember Baker of the Vermont "Green Mountain Boys". His two younger brothers, Douglas Ussher Baker (Janice Chen Barber) and Stephen Denio Baker, PhD (Paula Eisenstein) survive him, as do their children, Rachel Beal Baker (Len Parker) and Nicholson Baker (Margaret Winslow Brentano); Hannah Baker Hitzhusen (Michael Hitzhusen) and Sarah Baker Topper (David Topper).

David's first wife, Myra Mullins Baker, PhD, an art historian and teacher from Birmingham, passed away in 2010. His maternal grandfather was Rev. Clarence D. Ussher, MD, a medical missionary to Van, Turkey, whose book, *An American Physician in Turkey: A Narrative of Adventures in Peace and War*, was a source for the Canadian film on the 1915 Armenian genocide, *Ararat*. His paternal grandfather, Ray Stannard Baker, was a noted muckraking journalist and official biographer for Woodrow Wilson, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize.

The Baker family first came to Birmingham in 1945 when Dr. Roger Baker Denio Baker became professor and chairman of the new Department of Pathology at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, and moved his wife and young sons to a home on 4215 Glenwood Avenue. David's part time job as a newspaper carrier for the Birmingham Post earned him a \$700 cash scholarship that enabled him, at age 14, to go to the University of Chicago where he earned his Bachelor of Philosophy in 1949.

"I was fortunate to room with three wartime veterans who protected me from the tough older students who might harm me, and, also, taught me how to play bridge," he said.

While there, he decided to become a lawyer. Harvard Law was his natural choice since his father had gone to Harvard Medical School. However, when he applied to Harvard Law at the age of 17, he was rejected. Admissions told him that the Chicago undergraduate program produced "kiddies' degrees" and Harvard would not consider him until he had a "proper" baccalaureate.

"Well," David reasoned, with typical Baker logic, "Birmingham-Southern College is right here and I can live at home." Having earned an A.B. degree from "the hilltop" in 1951, he scored an exceptional 753 on the Educational Testing Service used for Harvard Law School at that time, and earned a JD from Harvard University in 1954. He next served in the U.S. Army, where he was assigned to classified communications on the base in Herzogenaurach, Germany.

Myra Mullins, his Birmingham fiance, a schoolteacher, joined him there, where they were married. The two traveled around the Continent in their Volkswagen, often piling friends and family members into the back of the tiny car as they toured about freely on \$5 a day, taking slides to show to everyone on their inevitable return to Birmingham.

When they did return home, David became an associate with the law firm of Cabaniss & Johnson. But the cultural advantages of New York City caught the young couple's eye and David found a post with the New York law firm of Chadbourne, Parke, Whiteside & Wolff. In 1986 he became a partner at Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue. His Birmingham-New York City legal career included his being of counsel for Haskell Slaughter Young & Rediker in Birmingham and for Kayser & Redfern in New York City. He was president of the New York Legislative Service (1975-1998), a director of Junior Achievement of New York (1973-1999) and a director of Junior Achievement of Greater Birmingham (1999 to 2007). He was General Counsel for the Economic Club of New York for 34 years and a trustee of Birmingham-Southern College (1985 to 2013). He was a formidable competitive bridge player. In 2009, Birmingham-Southern College honored David R. Baker with an LLD, honoris causa.

His first wife, Myra, passed away in 2010. He married Lois Avery Gaeta, a writer, in 2011. A new David emerged after his 2015 stroke as "Team David", comprised of his wife, Lois, his main carer, Ida Russell Webster, CNA, and a host of friends and carers enabled him to experience EPCOT, a wedding in Maine, holidays in New York City, and the historical sites of D.C. This past November, "Team David" took a 16-day museum trip to London, U.K. When in Birmingham on Friday nights, he was a familiar face at Gianmarco's Italian Restaurant at 5 P.M. for dinner! All the while, David rigorously worked at physical therapy. The goal of his private PT, Melissa Robinett, was to enable David to have as much physical freedom as possible as she helped him use his hiking stick to navigate the trails of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

David regularly attended the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and the services at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham ("Always 10 minutes late and on the left side," observed Rev. Julie Conrady, Settled Minister, with amusement.) where he relinquished his place as a baritone in the choir for fear that his compromised vocal cords would produce a humiliating wrong sound.

"However," he always warned. "At some point something untoward will happen and we just have to accept it when it does."

That "something" was the second stroke that followed a week after he had been awoken from his sleep in his room at the Embassy Suites in Birmingham so that he could be evacuated backwards down four flights of stairs in his wheelchair to escape a heavily smoking fire that emanated from the restaurant at the hotel. (His residence was having new flooring installed by Issis & Sons. Thus, the short hotel stay.)

While David was in home hospice, he was asked about charitable donations he would like given in his honor. David looked up from his book, a bit annoyed about being interrupted from his deep concentration (as he preferred books to people those days), shrugged his left shoulder, and responded with the balanced, decisive tone of an arbitrator, "The choice of donation is up to the individual."

A week before David's passing, David's nephew Lawrence Alexander Smith IV, Past President of the National Alumni Association of The University of Alabama, took David on a Memory Lane drive around his favorite places in the Magic City as a Birmingham youth. His sister-in-law, Eleese Mullins Smith, and niece, Myra Eleese Noble, RN, accompanied him. Alex describes: "The first stop was 1572 Steiner Avenue in the West End of Birmingham, the white house where David's first wife Myra, lived. Next: Birmingham-Southern College with a 1951 brick marker in front of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) house with its majestic white lion. After

that, the Baker boys' childhood home – 4215 Glenwood Avenue with its flowering trellis. Finally, a quick ride over to the Avondale School and to Ramsay High School. "I'm ready to go home," David remarked softly after that.

A Memorial Service for David Remember Baker will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham once Covid-19 has abated. (He has requested Beethoven and Brahms for musical accompaniment.) A musical remembrance will be at the Unitarian Universalist Church of All Souls in New York City in the fall of 2020. Interment will be at the wooded Wildwood Cemetery in Amherst, MA.