



Archibald, John J

Webster Groves, MO

96th Div Headquarter Co

John J. Archibald, whose byline graced the Post-Dispatch for more than four decades, died Monday (Jan. 3, 2011) at St. Mary's Health Center in Richmond Heights. He was 85.

He lived in Webster Groves, and suffered a stroke about two years ago, his family said.

Mr. Archibald was a sportswriter, features writer and the newspaper's first television critic.

He brought to his writing a courteous curiosity and a gentle sense of humor.

His first paid job as a journalist was with the Army. As a 19-year-old private in the Pacific, he wrote for the official newspaper of the 96th Infantry Division.

He earned a journalism degree at the University of Missouri in 1949, then talked his way into a job as a sportswriter at the Post-Dispatch. For more than 20 years, he covered events ranging from the grand (the old St. Louis Hawks, then in their glory days, in the National Basketball Association) to the lowly (the old St. Louis Browns, then in their final days of decline).

Mr. Archibald's first love in the Sports section went to a beat that few other writers wanted anything to do with: bowling.

As a kid, he caught the bowling bug from his father, a letter carrier who bowled in a post office league.

Mr. Archibald himself was a pretty good bowler, usually averaging in the low 190s.

In 1971, the Post-Dispatch made Mr. Archibald its first television critic.

He stood aloof from the Take-No-Prisoners School of TV criticism, preferring to accept television on its own terms. "Personally, I thought 'The Lucy Show' was dumb," he once said. "But I realized that people just loved it. How could you criticize something like that?"

In 1977, Mr. Archibald changed channels and became a feature writer. His affable manner and easy-reading style made him a natural for interviewing celebrities, including Nobel Prize-winning author and death camp survivor Elie Wiesel, historian William L. Shirer and pianist Liberace.

His prose read more easily than it wrote. Mr. Archibald made a methodical project out of writing, seeking a quiet corner that gave him room to spread out, in order, pages of notes, torn one at a time from his notepad.

He never put bowling behind him. Through his tours as a critic and feature writer, he persisted in turning out bowling columns for the Sports section. He also contributed on the subject to the Encyclopedia Britannica and wrote a book titled "Bowling for Boys and Girls."

The American Bowling Congress regularly bestowed writing awards on Mr. Archibald and called him the sport's "winningest writer." The Professional Bowling Association's Hall of Fame made him a member, for meritorious service.

His colleagues in the Everyday section used less flattering terms after they dispatched him to buy red shirts for the Everyday bowling team. Mr. Archibald, who was colorblind, returned with shirts in Frederick's-of-Hollywood pink, and the team spent a season being hooted at.

He promised when he retired in 1990 to continue writing an occasional column on bowling, and he did. His last one appeared in 1993.

He once wrote about what he wanted engraved on his tombstone: "Why don't you guys ever get anything in the newspapers about bowling?"

Visitation will be from 4 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Gerber Chapel, 23 West Lockwood Avenue, Webster Groves. The funeral will be at 11:30 a.m. Thursday at Gerber. Burial will be at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

Among the survivors are his wife, Georgia Archibald; a son, Mark Archibald of Schaumburg, Ill.; two stepsons, Greg Johnston of Chesterfield and Scott Johnston of Jefferson City; a daughter, Terry Hopper of Redding, Calif.; a sister, Mary Wertz of St. Louis; two brothers, David Archibald of Shrewsbury and Jim Archibald of Sun City, Ariz.; and 14 grandchildren.