

Obituary of Alvin B. Kernan '49

Alvin B. Kernan died on May 17, in Skillman NJ. He was born in Manchester, Georgia, on June 13, 1923. His parents later had a ranch in the Sierra Madre Mountains in southern Wyoming. He graduated from Saratoga high school there in 1940. Unable to meet a small cash expense to fulfill his scholarship to the University of Wyoming, he instead enlisted in the US Navy, at age 17. He served on the USS Enterprise and other aircraft carriers as a bombardier in torpedo squadron 6. He was discharged as a Chief Petty Officer, having been awarded the Navy Cross, DFC, and Air Medal. After the war he took full advantage of the GI Bill, attending Columbia for a year, then graduating from Williams College, where he won the Wilson Fellowship for post-graduate study at Oxford. He did his PHD studies at Yale, where he later taught for 25 years, in the English Department. At Yale, he was one of the founders of the Lit X program. He was also acting provost of Yale in 1970, then later the dean of the Graduate School at Princeton, where he returned to teaching. Upon retiring from teaching he became a director of the Mellon Foundation, rejoining his old friend William Bowen there. His published works include "The Cankered Muse," "Samuel Johnson and Print," "The Death of Literature," "Shakespeare the King's Playwright," and a memoir of WWII "Crossing the Line, A Bluejacket's Odyssey." Suzanne, nee Scoble, his wife of 58 years, died in 2007. He is survived by his children Geoffrey Peters of Lambertville, NJ, Marjorie Kernan of Blue Hill, ME, and Alvin Kernan Jr. of Florida. His daughter Katherine Kernan, of New York City, predeceased him in February.