

Anne Brunk Keegan Aronson

May 12, 1943

May 18, 2011

Chicago, IL

“... [Longtime Tribune reporter/writer captured lives of working people”



Arguably the best female reporter/writer in the history of Chicago journalism, Anne Keegan was ferocious, feisty and passionately devoted to her craft. She was also softer and more sensitive than her Front Page-era facade would ever indicate. She was, in short, an original.

"She was Whitmanesque, a superb, powerful writer who gave voice to people that the media seldom focuses in on as individuals," said the Tribune's William Mullen, a longtime colleague and friend.

Ms. Keegan, 68, died Wednesday, May 18, after a long illness, in her North Side home, the setting for many legendary parties over the decades.

"I loved her so much. I'm just wandering around the house looking at photos of our life together," said her husband, Leonard Aronson, a journalist and television producer. "And I also admired her. She taught me so much about people. She was such a gifted observer, a person of high-caliber values and instincts."

Born in Springfield and raised in Rockford, Ms. Keegan was the eldest of three children of Thomas and Betty Ann Keegan, he an attorney and she a Democratic state senator. She graduated from Rockford College and began her career as a reporter at the City News Bureau, the legendary training ground - some might call it a boot camp - for journalists in Chicago.

It was there that she met and fell in love with Aronson, an editor for City News. They saved their money and took off for an extended trip to Europe and were married on the Rock of Gibraltar in January 1969. Their son, Patrick, was born nine months later and after the family returned to Chicago, Ms. Keegan was a stay-at-home mom for three years until being hired by United Press International.

She soon joined the Tribune, reporting and writing about the city and filing stories from many foreign countries. For much of the 1980s she was a featured news columnist and later wrote lengthy and distinctive stories for the paper's former Tempo section. She captured the workaday dignity and essence of the police officers, firefighters, schoolteachers, soldiers, waitresses and factory workers she preferred to write about, putting their lives in the middle of the issues of the day, both big and small. She knew

and loved the city and a Keegan byline above a story meant the delivery of precise reporting and poetic prose.

Here is how she began a 1995 story about cops on Christmas Eve:

"It's not really snowing. It's trying to. In honor of the season. There is a fine white dust in the air, as if an angel has just passed by and shaken out her wings. Magic little particles falling from the sky catch in the headlights of the squad car but never seem to land on earth.

"There is a special energy on the street tonight, a purpose in the way people walk home. Stores are shutting down early. Christmas lights are blinking from windows, winking from icy porches. The sky is a cold blue-black, and Lake Michigan lies half frozen in peace.

"You are a Chicago cop, it's Christmas Eve, and while everyone else in town is snuggled in for the night, wrapping presents, listening to Christmas music, lighting a fire in the fireplace, warmed by furnace and friendship, you are out on the street at work, with long johns under your blues, a leather jacket that cracks and crinkles in the cold, a loaded semiautomatic pistol on your hip and, on your belt, a radio that has never been known to play carols."

Former Tribune employee Ron Silverman edited many of her stories for Tempo.

"Anne was the ultimate pro in her ability to get information and to tell a great story," he said. "And she was also a character. I don't think she especially enjoyed Tempo staff meetings where we discussed story ideas, because she always had plenty of story ideas of her own and was always working on something."

After resigning from the paper after 24 years in 1997, Ms. Keegan self-published a book that had long been brewing. "On the Street Doing Life: The West Side of Chicago Through the Eyes of a Cop Named 'Cronie'" was a look at the city's West Side through the eyes of Mike Cronin, a legendary Chicago Gang Crimes and Narcotics police officer. It is a quick and captivating read, with intriguing chapter titles such as "Vietnam, the Double Bubble and a Mass Card for the Old Man" and "I'm a Nut But I'm Me Tonight."

Here, as in all her newspaper stories, there was no "I" in her work. No wallflower in person, she seemed to lack any self-promotional genes. She didn't do much, hardly anything, to help sell her book. There were no radio or TV appearances, bookstore signings, or library lectures.

References:

May 21, 2011|By Rick Kogan, *Chicago Tribune*, Reporter

[Anne Brunk Keegan \(1943-2011\) - Find A Grave Memorial](#)

[ANNE KEEGAN Obituary \(2011\) - Chicago, IL - Chicago Tribune \(legacy.com\)](#)

[Anne Keegan | Bleader \(chicagoreader.com\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm-7zH2p8zA> - A Tribute from Her Husband