MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
John William Ahlhauser
September 9, 1923 – March 29, 2016

Upon his retirement from Indiana University in 1990, his IU colleague-biographers, Will Counts and Marjorie Blewett, noted that John Ahlhauser “could have had a comfortable life in Milwaukee, continuing the work he had done for twenty-five years as a photographer on The Milwaukee Journal.” He didn’t do that. At the age of forty-nine or so, he took a leave from the paper and the city he so loved, and with his wife Lois and the three youngest of their six kids in tow, came to Bloomington to pursue a master’s degree in journalism. The family lived in Tulip Tree Apartments, and the “leave” turned into a thirty-some year residency in Bloomington. During those years, John completed both the MA and PhD, became a full-time faculty member in the School of Journalism, with Lois raised their six children, and retired as a full professor.

John’s twenty-five-year newspaper career as a staff photographer at the Journal included assignments political, social and religious. He covered national political conventions, including the Chicago Democratic Convention in 1968; he covered the inaugurations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon; he covered civil rights workers in Mississippi, coal miners in Kentucky and migrant workers in Wisconsin. He also photographed society affairs, including a series of shots in 1949 of a young glamorous starlet a local public relations fellow brought by the paper. Several months after the shoot, John learned that the woman had changed her name, to Marilyn Monroe.

John came to IU because he was interested in studying what was then just a concept: the idea that news could be delivered electronically in such a way that people could read the day’s happenings on a television set and news organizations could, at least theoretically, eliminate the apparatus of door-to-door delivery. His observations from the newsroom and interest in the future developed into MA and PhD research about the “electronic newspaper” and some early businesses in the United States and Britain that were developing them and experimenting with delivery methods. John soon became widely known as an expert in this area, “a bit of a prophet in the pre-Internet age,” wrote the National Press Photographers Association in its obituary of John. John was hired as an assistant professor of journalism and soon, in addition to teaching undergraduate photo journalism classes, developed a graduate class on electronic news publishing, assisting students who wished to seek careers in this new field.

John and his photojournalism colleague, Will Counts, formed a team that taught and mentored hundreds of students during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Many of those students went on to successful careers and won the profession’s top accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize. The two established the Counts/Ahlhauser Scholarship, which continues to help support photojournalism students. (Counts retired in 1995 and died in 2001.)

John’s “dedication to photojournalism straddled the profession and academe throughout his career,” Journalism Dean Trevor Brown said at the time of John’s death. “He inspired professionals and students to refine their talent and practice their craft and
art responsibly and ethically.” He was also regarded by both students and his colleagues as a humble, extraordinarily patient and uncommonly kind man. He and Lois were also noted as gracious hosts for colleagues, friends, students and many former students who returned for visits.

John Ahlhauser was born in Milwaukee. He attended Marquette High School then served in the South Pacific during World War II. Returning to Milwaukee, he earned his undergraduate degree in 1948 at Marquette University.

An active member of the National Press Photographers Association, John eventually held every office in the association, including national president. Among the many honors he was awarded over the years were the NPPA’s Joseph A. Sprague Memorial Award, the organization’s highest honor; Marquette University’s Byline Award; individual service awards from the Wisconsin, Indiana and Kentucky News Photographers associations; and the Indiana University Media School’s Distinguished Alumni Award, which he was awarded in 2015.

With his wife, John Ahlhauser founded the Kalish Workshop in 1990, which set the standard for visual editing workshops and continues to attract participants from all over the world. John directed the workshop for eight years, and Lois took care of the business side of the enterprise. The Kalish now is based at the Rochester Institute of Technology and is overseen by an advisory board that includes several of Ahlhauser’s former students.

Following his retirement from IU, John and Lois returned to Milwaukee where John was active in social justice and service work at his retirement community and his church.

At his death at age ninety-two, John was survived by Lois, his wife of sixty-seven years, six children (Kate Meloy, Bill Ahlhauser, Mame O’Meara, Anny Ryan, Margi Ahlhauser and Joan Barchi), twelve grandchildren, and many, many beneficiaries of his teaching and mentoring skills.

I request that after its presentation in the Bloomington Faculty Council, this memorial be preserved in the minutes and archive of the Council, and that a copy be sent to Lois Ahlhauser.

Bonnie J. Brownlee
Emeritus Professor, The Media School