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Author, broadcaster Alex Barris dies

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TORONTO - Alex Barris, best known for his work on popular CBC game show *Front Page Challenge* and his work as a showbiz newspaper columnist, died Thursday. He was 81.

Barris died in a Toronto nursing home of complications from a stroke he suffered a year ago.



Alex Barris

The New York-born Barris started his lifelong writing career during his stint in the U.S. army in the Second World War. Officially a medic, Barris spent a lot of time writing for army newspapers and was later awarded a Bronze Star for the battlefield rescue of several injured men.

When he returned to the U.S., he began working for the *New York Times* as a clerk, while freelancing for the *Globe and Mail* and the *Montreal Gazette*. In December 1947, the *Globe* offered him a reporter job and Barris moved to Toronto. Six months later, he married and brought his new wife Kay to Canada.

By the 1950s, Barris was writing movie and music reviews as well as a column about show business. Building on his increasingly high-profile print reputation, he soon added TV to his repertoire.

Barris was an early CBC-TV writer and personality, hosting variety TV shows such as *The Barris Beat*, which was co-produced in 1956 by Norman Jewison, and *Barris and Company* in 1968. He was one of the original panellists on *Front Page Challenge*, and later wrote for the program as well as appearing frequently as a guest panellist. By this time, Barris had switched newspapers, writing for the *Toronto Telegram*.

Barris moved to Hollywood in the mid-1960s to try his hand at scriptwriting for television and radio. While there, he wrote TV variety shows for performers such as Sonny and Cher, the Fifth Dimension, Dionne Warwick and Kenny Rogers.

Barris's time in Hollywood inspired several books, including *Hollywood According to Hollywood*, *Hollywood's Other Men*, *Hollywood's Other Women*, and *Stop the Presses: The Newspaperman in American Films*. He and his wife

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returned to Canada in 1976, however, to be closer to their children Ted and Katy.

He also wrote about his CBC experiences, publishing two books about *Front Page Challenge*. Barris co-wrote other books with his son Ted, including *Making Music: Profiles of a Century of Canadian Musical Artists* and the best-selling *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember 1935-1945*. Most recently, Barris, a long-time jazz aficionado who had hosted a CBC-Radio jazz show called *Tributes in Tempo*, published an exhaustive biography of jazz great Oscar Peterson.

Barris received a special Gemini Award in 1994 for his body of work as a writer and for making a significant contribution to Canadian television. He was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1999.

Barris is survived by his wife and two children.

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