Canadian Humanists who knew Joe Piercy will be sorry to learn that he died on February 13, 2013. He will be especially missed by those who were fortunate to have worked with him over the years in Canadian Humanist Publications. Here is a short account of his good and productive life.

Joe was born in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1924. He completed his first year of university at UBC before going to serve in World War II. Joe joined the Royal Canadian Navy and he trained in Halifax to be a craftsman known as an electrical artificer. He was then assigned to the **HMCS Haida**, a tribal-class destroyer that served in the Navy from 1943-1963. After the war, Joe returned to his studies at UBC and graduated in 1949. He spent 1949-51 in Ottawa, Toronto and Quebec City on several short projects, including working in the Acoustics Section of the National Research Council. Then he went on to study at the Imperial College in London, England and graduated in 1955 with a PhD in acoustics.

It would be difficult to reminisce about Joe without including his wife of 57 years, Blodwen, who started working at the National Research Council in 1948. Joe became acquainted with her while going on canoe trips organized by the Ottawa YM-YWCA. It turned out that Blodwen went to study at the Imperial College in London at the same time as did Joe. After returning to Canada in 1955, Joe joined the Acoustics Section in NRC. Blodwen also returned to the NRC, and they married in 1956.

Joe enjoyed activities such as being outdoors and making things. He designed and drew plans for the house he and Blodwen built in 1960. With the young children, Peter, Megan and Jocelyn, they all enjoyed canoeing and swimming, then skiing and skating in winter. Eventually, Joe planned to build a cabin on a lake property in Quebec. By 1972 he had a willing helper in his...
14-year-old son and there were some construction jobs for the girls in the family too. All went well, and the whole family has appreciated spending much time up there ever since, Joe especially.

Blodwen became interested in the abortion issue in the late sixties and attended an event in 1968 put on by AMCAL (Association for Modernization of the Canadian Abortion Law – a small but active Ottawa group) with Dr Henry Morgentaler as one of their speakers. Everything that Morgentaler said about the abortion issue was so rational and humane that she asked her AMCAL friend about him, and was introduced to Humanism. Dr Morgentaler was active in the Montreal Humanist Fellowship and also in founding the Humanist Association of Canada that year.

Meanwhile, the Humanist Association of Ottawa (HAO) was also being formed, so Joe and Blodwen attended an early meeting of HAO in 1969. Joan Gawn, a remarkable school teacher from England, chaired the meeting and briefly described Humanism, including its ethics and goals. She was so passionate that she virtually radiated Humanism. Neither Joe nor Blodwen had been believers for many years, so they joined the HAO in 1969 and have been members ever since. They quickly subscribed to Humanist in Canada magazine which was published in Victoria at the time by Lloyd Brereton. Joe served as President of the Humanist Association of Canada from 1979-1981.

Production of Humanist in Canada magazine moved to Ottawa in 1983, and Canadian Humanist Publications (CHP) was created to be its publisher. Joe was a key contributor to the publishing of quarterly Humanist in Canada, (renamed Humanist Perspectives in 2005) for nearly 30 years. He had served on the editorial board since 1983 and was the main editor from 1991-2003. He was President of CHP from 1984-1997 and had since been a vice-president and director.

During his 12 year term as magazine editor, Joe ran the editorial board in a very democratic manner. He ensured that everyone had a say and he used this input to help make final decisions on magazine content. Joe firmly supported Henry Morgentaler and the abortion rights movement and was always pleased to include articles submitted to the magazine by Henry. He felt that Henry exemplified Humanism.

Joe was a detailed and thorough person and keyed the articles on his computer, especially in the days before most print material was available electronically. He also did preliminary work on the layout of each issue. Joe was certainly dedicated to Humanist Perspectives magazine which was, and still is, the only voice for Humanism printed here in Canada.

Joe and Blodwen have served the humanist cause faithfully, if I may use that word, over the years, and they were recognized for their contribution in 1998 when they were jointly presented with the Humanist of the Year Award by Humanist Canada.

It was always a pleasure to be in Joe’s company. He was congenial, attentive, motivated and intelligent. His contribution to this magazine will be missed, including having him sit in on the CHP board meetings. The foundation Joe helped to build for Canadian Humanism will continue to serve Canadians as society becomes increasingly secular. His 44 years of commitment to improve the quality of human life through reason and compassion have been a valuable contribution to Humanism and to Canada.

Simon Parcher is president of Canadian Humanist Publications.

Please consider making a donation to the Joe Piercy Memorial Fund, which will be gratefully received. The fund will be used to continue Joe’s work by making improvements to Humanist Perspectives.