

C.E. Sikkenga 1970-2072.

Most novelists write their first book long before the age of 60. As his readers will tell you, C.E. Sikkenga was not most novelists.

Sikkenga, who passed away quietly yesterday at the age of 102 became known as the voice of several generations through his unique wit and lowbrow philosophizing.

Critics called *The School Improvement Committee*, Sikkenga's absurd dark comedy about public education his generation's *Catch-22*. Published three years after he retired after 36 years as a history, journalism and literature teacher at Grand Haven High School, it became an instant sensation due to its hilarious, often scathing take on the American education system. Soon, Sikkenga was standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the first rank of American celebrities, his bad puns, odd stories and riddles always a reliable way to start a discussion. Over the next 25 years, he wrote dozens of other fiction and non-fiction works before retiring from the writing life in his mid 80s. He also curated a music blog, *Radio Free Grand Haven* which grew to become one of the most influential tastemakers in the music industry.

In spite of his newfound fame, he retained much of his regular guy persona, rejecting VIP rooms to stand with the crowd near the front of the stage in dingy indie rock clubs or enjoying his season tickets to Michigan State basketball games and the Chicago Cubs. On his frequent book promotion or lecture tours, he'd often slip off in his trademark flannel shirt, shorts and sandal combos to dig through the crates at record stores and also became an expert on the best hot dogs in every American city. Those two passions became the subject of *Dogs and Discs*, his wildly successful coffee table book published in 2047.

Through his writings and frequent memorable appearances on the late night talk show circuit, he became a friend and mentor to many younger celebrities. Although 20-some years his junior, President Miley Cyrus considered Sikkenga a dear friend and confidant, one she often consulted during the toughest days of her administration.

"He was always there with honest advice," Cyrus said. "I wouldn't have made it through the Canadian War without him. Sometimes he'd say the most bizarre, obscure things but once I took some time to think about it, it always made sense. He was like a little hairy, roly-poly yogi that way."

Sikkenga is survived by his constant companion Booker, a beagle he adopted in 2002.