

Dr. Harold Dexter, 97



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LACONIA — Dr. Harold 'Gup' Dexter, 97, died on the evening of Tuesday, January 12, 2021, at the Taylor Community in Laconia. Mary Dexter, his wife of 74 years, was, as always, by his side, holding his hand in the hours before his death.

Known as “Gup” to his family and many friends and “Doc Dexter” to others who knew him from his decades as a family dentist in Wakefield, MA, Harold lived his life making the most of every day. He approached both large and small decisions with care and intention, and was a lifelong learner eager to improve his skills and share his expertise with others.

Harold was born in Lynn, MA, on May 3, 1923, the eldest child of the late Elsie (Pilz) and Harold Dexter. He was raised in Saugus, and graduated from Saugus High School

in 1941 before attending Tufts College and then the University of Pittsburgh Dental School, where he was a member of the class of 1946. Mary Morrison was a charming classmate at Saugus High, and as a young man Harold worked part-time in her father's pharmacy. For five years, their courtship consisted of a near-daily letter correspondence. The two married on November 30, 1946, and raised two daughters together, Daryl and Marylou.

Harold enlisted in the Naval Dental Corps following his graduation, serving from 1946 through 1949. In 1950 he opened his own dental practice in Wakefield, running the business for 35 years before passing on the operation to John Denley, the son of his best friend, Gordon. The dental practice was memorable for its large, calming fish tank with some of its occupants named after noteworthy patients.

In 1951, to the horror of Mary's mother, the couple used the down payment they'd saved for their first home to buy a plot of land on the Broads' side of Lake Winnepesaukee's Welch Island, and Harold began building the camps that would remain their family's summer home through the generations. In the years that followed, Gup bought a beautiful wooden Chris-Craft, a forest-green Old Town Canoe, and a little fiberglass sailboat, each of which he tended to with meticulous care over many decades. In later years he determinedly nurtured a large vegetable garden in the island's rocky soil, sharing his bounty with island neighbors. He liked to take a crisp dip early each morning, and enjoy a cocktail on his boathouse deck in the late afternoon.

Harold retired from his dental practice in 1985, but remained active in the Wakefield community, continuing to serve on the board of directors of the Wakefield Savings Bank until the mid-90s. He refined his woodworking hobby, building and gifting Shaker-style furniture to friends and family. In 1993, he and Mary moved full-time to Gilford, buying a 'winter' home on Sprucewood Drive, becoming active in the Gilford Community Church, and fundraising for the Gilford Public Library, where the Teen Room is named in their honor.

Gup enjoyed learning about the world, and planning adventurous journeys of his own. He was an avid hiker and skier and over the years he and Mary took trips to Nepal, Peru, Norway, New Zealand, and the European Alps, where they made lifelong friends who continued to visit and exchange letters decades later. He had an incredible memory, recalling details of specific hikes years in the past to his grandchildren — who was there, what route they took, which rock ledge they stopped on for a lunchtime rest. In their later years, Harold and Mary became Elderhostel devotees, attending at least 30 programs in Canada and the US, including several in our national parks.

Nurturing health and happiness were always top priority. Well into their 90s, Harold and Mary continued daily walks near their home on Gilford's Sprucewood Drive. He held a season pass at Gunstock until the age of 90, regularly arriving to be on first chair and, at home, watching instructional videos to improve his already exceptionally-smooth technique. Gup had long embraced the afternoon nap. He laughed easily: A Muppet Show skit or Far Side cartoon could easily launch him into a deep belly laugh. He left instructions that his body should be donated to Harvard Medical School. "That's the only way I'll get into Harvard," he joked. "The whiter the bread, the sooner you're dead" he warned his grandchildren, an adage that seems to have worked out well for him. His preferred special treat for himself, or young visitors, was two Fig Newtons.

Harold Dexter is survived by his loving wife, Mary; by his two daughters and son-in-law, Daryl and Brad Thompson of Stewartstown, NH, and Marylou Miller of Peacham VT; and by his younger sister, Martha Dexter, of Sarasota, FL. He will be remembered fondly by his grandchildren: Kalee Thompson and Dan Koeppel of Portland, ME; Becky and Pete Doherty of Wilmington, NC; Jesse and Alison Thompson of Gilford, NH; Abby Thompson Fopiano, also of Gilford; Chelsea Miller of Falls Village, CT; Julianne Miller of Plainfield, VT; and Gavin Miller and Molly Kennedy, also of Peacham; as well as by great-grandchildren Clara, Elizabeth, Otto, Laszlo, Jaxson, Jonah, and Roslyn. They mourn a grandfather who taught by example the value of developing varied skills, of appreciating the natural world, loving travel, and of doing what's possible to take good care of your teeth!

In addition to his parents, Harold was predeceased by his brother, Kurt; a son-in-law, Joe Miller; grandson-in law, Jason Fopiano; and a dear great-grandson, John Bradley Thompson.

For the last three years of his life, Harold received exceptional care from the nurses and staff of the Taylor Community in Laconia, who continue to care for Mary.

A Celebration of Life will be held when it is safe to do so.

Donations in Harold's memory can be made to the Gilford Community Church, 19 Potter Hill Road, Gilford, NH 03249.