

# In Memoriam: Dr. Philip Welch

Retired Professor of Pediatrics and Senate Member at Dalhousie University, and well known in the Atlantic Region as a consultant in Medical Genetics, Dr. Philip Welch passed away on January 21, 2025 at the age of 91.

He was husband to Elvira Gonnella Welch for 62 years (passed in 2021), and the beloved father of Jonathan (Sonya), Jeremy (Angie Withrow), Andrew (Elswyth Fryer), and Alison Egelhoff, father-in-law of Norma (Arnold) Welch, uncle to Judith Shaw, and “Paphil” to Janice, Emily, Siobhan (Jeff Brennan), Mark, Iain, Joshua, Kevin, Kristen, and great-grandchildren Lyla, Lily, and Lucy.

Born in Macclesfield, England, Dr. Welch often spoke of how fortunate he was to have been given remarkable opportunities in education to move beyond his default lot in life. Many teachers recognized his potential and found ways for it to be nourished in challenging settings. He was forever grateful to those who found a place for him in the King’s School, Macclesfield, followed by scholarships to Edinburgh University Medical School. While there, he fell in love with a rising star vocalist, and Elvira and Philip were married in 1958 – the same year that he graduated as a physician.

After RCAF service in Moose Jaw, the growing family moved to Maryland, where Dr. Welch earned a PhD in Human Genetics from Johns Hopkins University. Meanwhile, he accepted a position at Dalhousie University to pioneer their medical genetics program, and, with four children, the family returned to Canada and settled in Halifax in 1967. Dr. Welch went on to become Professor of Human Genetics at Dalhousie, and a Founding Fellow of the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists (1976). Within the community, he was an early champion of the Metro Area Family Planning Association, and also a leading contributor to research into inherited conditions such as Huntington’s Disease and impaired cognitive development.

Dr. Welch took on leadership roles in the Dalhousie Faculty Association, Canadian Association of University Teachers, and the Dalhousie Retirees and Pensioners for many years. When he was not active in those pursuits or seeing patients in clinics, he pursued his passion for wine-making and tasting, passing his Sommelier exam in later years. He never entirely set aside his theatrical talent, which blossomed with the Edinburgh University Dramatic Society, and progressed to directing and acting accolades in Moose Jaw. Many a Halifax Christmas concert featured Elvira as soloist and Philip as the narrative reader. This was also a frequent role in later years with the Unitarian Universalist Church, where he was also a valued board member.

While his education and professional talents allowed Dr. Welch enviable success in life, he never forgot where he came from, and was a powerful advocate for the rights of those whom he saw as being unfairly treated. This did not always engender friendships in some of the boardrooms where he took

on these causes, but it did earn him respect from those who appreciated his battles for integrity, and he has left his world a better place than when he found it. That spirit of choosing what was right over what was popular will be missed even more in the generation he leaves behind.

As with his wife, Elvira, we lost Philip twice; first to progressive dementia, and second to the final relief from its challenges. They will soon be reunited in a resting place within sight of the home they built together in Tantallon.