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David D. Helprin '59

May 31, 2018

David Davies Helprin, 81, died April 28, 2018, at his home in Stowe after a long battle with hepatitis C. His children, Carrie and Ted, were by his side.

David was an intellectual, a family man, a renaissance man and a spiritualist. In his final years and months, he dwelt continually on his love of travel and his passion for great literature, fine food and art.

As a longtime member of the Stowe community, David was known by many people — as an avid skier and hiker, and the former owner of Ten Acres Lodge. More than a few knew him from his loyal companions, Fagan and Charlie with whom he walked the Quiet Path. In later years, he reconnected with his love of teaching and sport to become a teacher at the North American Hockey Academy in Stowe. He was also executive director of Copley Woodlands in its early days.

David was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., April 4, 1937. His father, William M. Helprin, held a seat on the New York Stock exchange and groomed his son to be a Wall Street man. David would have other plans.

He graduated from The Choate School in 1955 and Williams College in 1959, then joined the U.S. Navy, where he served as an officer on the USS Oklahoma City conducting electronics warfare in the Pacific. He resigned his commission as a decorated first lieutenant in 1963, but never lost his love of the Navy, the sea and sailing.

After the service, David decided to commit to a career in teaching and the theater. He met his future wife, Elizabeth “Libby” Halsey Richardson while studying at the University of Grenoble in France. The following year, he took a position teaching English literature, French and theater at the Sterling School in Craftsbury Common. He and left after two years to further his education at Boston University. In 1967, he and his bride moved to Lake Placid, N.Y., where he chaired the English department and led the drama club at Northwood School for three years. Later they relocated to Litchfield, Conn., where he taught at St. Margaret’s-McTernan School and directed local theater productions, and they raised their two children.

In 1983, the Helprin family made their way to Stowe, where David had skied often during his college days. They purchased Ten Acres Lodge and became innkeepers. David and Libby and the staff of Ten Acres would eventually earn many awards, including Restaurateurs of the Year in 1989 from the Vermont Chamber of Commerce.

Friends of David knew him to be a committed liberal who nevertheless believed that decent, well-meaning people could legitimately disagree on important issues, but ultimately find common ground. He was a student of the great texts of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. He loved opera. He was a fine athlete — a sprinter and wrestler in high school, a mountain climber with a first ascent of an Alaskan peak, a parachutist, an Outward Bound instructor, and a passionate skier. He once loaned his son a book called “The Centered Skier.” David had meticulously underlined various sections, including one that read, “There is more real strength in being attentively relaxed than there is in resistive effort.”

On the occasion of his death, his granddaughter Olivia wrote: “Recalling my last conversation with him, we spoke in a way that I had never spoken to him before. I asked him if he was afraid and, without me needing to clarify what I meant, he said (in a moment so vivid I will never forget), ‘No. My life has been too good, and too happy, for me to fear whatever may come next.’ In light of his passing, I will take all of the strength and happiness David left to me, and the rest of the world, and use it every day. I want his endlessly inspiring character to influence the way I speak, the way I act, the way I give, receive, want, and need. I want to be able to look back on my life, like my grandpa did, and know that it was the happiest, loveliest life I could have lived, and with the lessons he has taught me I know that this will be true.”

Toward the end he expressed one great regret, a fear that he might not have done enough to share with his grandchildren the life lessons he took from his elders and his own personal experience. To this we say, put your mind at ease, Dave; your legacy is intact.