

In Memoriam: Dr. Daniel W. O'Brien

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on behalf of

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In Memoriam: Dr. Daniel W. O'Brien CM, ONB, KSG, DLitt

Dr. Daniel W. O'Brien passed away on October 30th in the company of loved ones in the Palliative Care ward, VG Hospital. Born in 1939 to James and Ellen (Downie) O'Brien, Dan was a 4th generation Haligonian and spent his first fifteen years in the family home on West Street, just north of the Commons. He attended St. Patrick's schools and Church. After he finished grade 11, the family relocated to the site of their summer camp in Burnside, and Dan attended St. Mary's University, from which he graduated with a BComm in 1960. Studies at the Maritime School of Social Work followed, leading to a Masters degree from Dalhousie. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1975 with a dissertation on social planning that completed research begun at the University of Toronto.

In 1965, Dan and Valerie Hart were married in Dartmouth, the beginning of an elegant partnership by which each was nurtured and sustained for 51 years, and though which they enjoyed many personal and professional friendships both at home and around the world. They have two sons profoundly grateful for the love and example they have been given: Prof. Peter O'Brien (Paula Simpson-O'Brien, Halifax), and Fr. Craig O'Brien, SSC (Savannah, Georgia). Also in Halifax are "GrandDan's" adored grandchildren, Rachel and Gabriel.

Dan spent twenty-one years as a teacher, researcher, and administrator at Dalhousie University. As Professor of Social Work, he published more than twenty externally funded book-length research monographs, numerous scholarly articles, teaching manuals, book chapters, and research papers. His Dalhousie administrative posts included Director of the School of Social Work and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health Professions. In 1990, Dan became President of St. Thomas University in Fredericton, a post he held until retirement in 2006. Under his leadership, STU underwent remarkable change. The student population and faculty complement more than doubled, and programme offerings were considerably expanded. The physical campus flourished with retrofits, ambitious landscaping, and the addition of many new and award-winning buildings. His fundraising wizardry was legendary. During his years in Fredericton, Dan served as a member or chair of numerous regional, national, and international educational and learned associations. As well, he served in a voluntary capacity on many community boards and committees. In 2008, he completed a four-year term as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, and continued on the Board through a legacy-defining period of negotiations with the UK-based Beaverbrook Foundation.

Following their time in New Brunswick, Dan and Val relocated to Nova Scotia, making their home in Chester Basin. Though "retirement" afforded some opportunities for tennis, golf and travel, Dan maintained an active consulting practice, serving, among others, the Canadian Medical Association, the Province of Nova Scotia (on a Post-secondary Teacher Education Review Panel and the Transitional Board of the former Nova Scotia Agricultural College) and the Roosevelt International Park Commission. In 2010, he was appointed Chair of the Capital District Health Authority, Board of

Directors. In the same year, he became Acting President of The Atlantic School of Theology for the 2011 calendar year; he returned to AST as President in 2014-15, his final full-time position. In January 2012, Dan began a relationship with the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, first as the provincially-appointed Facilitator of Sustainability Planning, and then, from May 2012 to June 2014 as Acting President and President. During his time at NSCAD Dan was successful in returning the University to financial sustainability, implemented robust new recruitment strategies, built closer relationships with stakeholders, and concluded two collective agreements without work disruptions.

One of the many threads that ran through Dan's life and career was the tenacious resolve (if not optimism) to support underdog causes, a tendency he ascribed to his own early struggles with dyslexia, then little understood. His many awards and distinctions are testimony to the successes he enjoyed and shared with others. He received the Queen's Golden (2002) and Diamond (2013) Jubilee Medals. In May 2003, the University of New Brunswick awarded him an honorary degree (DLitt). He was inducted into the Order of New Brunswick in October 2005 and the Order of Canada in 2007. In April 2006, Dan received a papal Knighthood in the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory. In 2010, he was installed as St. Thomas University's first President Emeritus, and in July of the same year the University named its principal study hall, located in the new Margaret Norrie McCain Hall, in his honour. Dan's quiet faith was a constant support to him and a witness to others. Through his life he worshipped at several parishes, including St. Thomas Aquinas (Halifax), St. Dunstan's (Fredericton) and in his final decade, St. Augustine's (Chester).

In his final illness, Dan was buoyed by dozens of messages and well wishes from beloved friends, colleagues, and family members who remembered his sharp but not-always-reverent wit, his energy, and strength. His family are profoundly grateful to them and to the sensitive attention of his caregivers in the Palliative Unit at the VG. In addition to his parents, Dan was predeceased by his sister Nancy (Donald) MacKinnon. As well as his wife, sons and grandchildren, he is survived by his brother Ross (Janet) O'Brien of Dartmouth.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Dan's memory can be made to the Dan and Valerie O'Brien Bursary fund (St. Thomas University), the Atlantic School of Theology or NSCAD University scholarships and bursary funds, Prostatecancer.ca, or a charity of your choice. Visitation: Wednesday, November 2, 7-9pm at Cruikshank's Funeral Home, 2666 Windsor St., Halifax. Funeral Mass: Thursday, Nov. 3 at 2:30 pm, St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica, 5221 Spring Garden Road, Halifax, Fr. Brian MacMillan, celebrant. Reception to follow in the hall. Interment at a later date.