



Donald Collins Mullen

October 23, 1935 - May 17, 2020

Donald Collins Mullen, Sr. died at his home in Newnan, Georgia, on May 17, 2020, at age 84. He was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on October 23, 1935, to Harry Alexander Mullen and Rubye Melissa Collins Mullen. He had been a resident of Newnan since 2012, and previously lived in Highlands, North Carolina, and Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Dr. Mullen was known for his personal warmth and capacious intellect. All who knew him understood that the pillars of his life were family, community, faith, and service to others. His admirable life was a long series of acts of fidelity to these four pillars. He preached the value of progressive education and spiritual growth which had so transformed his own experience. He emphasized, and exemplified, compassion.

Dr. Mullen grew up in Charlotte during World War II, when it was a much smaller city of about 100,000 people. After the war, his family lived for three years in Decatur, Georgia, where he attained the rank of Eagle Scout. The next move, in 1950, was to Greenville, South Carolina, where he graduated from Greenville High School in 1953. He then entered The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, as a pre-med student, finishing near the top of his class in 1957.

On June 8, 1957, one week after graduation from The Citadel, he married Patricia Few Armstrong of South Carolina. That fall, he entered medical school at Duke University. After receiving his M.D. in 1961, he stayed on to complete his internship and surgical residency at Duke. The residency was

interrupted by a stint in the Army (1963-65) at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah, where he earned an Army Commendation Medal for Meritorious Service as Chief of Surgery and Chief of Professional Services. He then continued his clinical training at Duke, finishing as Chief Resident in 1969, and passing both general and thoracic surgery boards within a year.

From 1969 to 1975, Dr. Mullen practiced thoracic and cardiovascular surgery at the Sanger Clinic in Charlotte. In 1970 he was part of a team that started the kidney transplant program at Charlotte Memorial Hospital, now Carolinas Medical Center. In 1975 he joined a surgical group in Milwaukee and became Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery at the Medical College of Wisconsin. This group, Cardiovascular Surgery Associates, was nationally known as a pioneer in coronary bypass surgery and cardiac valve surgery. Dr. Mullen became Chief of Thoracic Surgery at St. Luke's Hospital (now Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center) in 1980 and President of the Medical Staff in 1986. In February 1981, at the age of 45, Dr. Mullen accepted an invitation to spend a month at a small mission hospital in the highlands of western Kenya. That visit, and the rigors of performing various types of surgery under fairly primitive conditions, led to a spiritual awakening. On the return flight to America, he experienced an epiphany, or what he would call a *kairos*, the ancient Greek word for a supreme moment or opportunity. Confronted with his own life of privilege and ease in the face of the world's suffering, he received a message from God as clear as the poet Rilke's dictum: "You must change your life."

The seed was sown. He continued to practice in Milwaukee until his youngest child went off to college, and then, in 1988, at the age of 52 and at the top of his profession, he bravely resigned from his medical practice and entered Princeton Theological Seminary. He graduated with an M.Div. in 1991 as president of his class and as its oldest member.

After being ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) that same year, Dr. Mullen embarked on an eventful decade as a medical missionary, during which he made trips—often accompanied by Patsy—to every continent on

earth, visiting over twenty countries including Greece, Tanzania, Malawi, Angola, Uganda, Congo, Cameroon, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Nepal, Laos, China, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Russia, and India. He worked extensively in war zones such as Iraq (twice), Sudan, and Rwanda, and also in refugee camps. In Rwanda he was on the first team of westerners allowed in to render medical assistance after the genocide in 1994. In his travels, he met with heads of state, leading doctors, and other missionaries—but more importantly he organized clinics and hospitals, and performed critical surgeries, thereby saving and improving the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of ordinary people. In 1994-95 he served as President of World Medical Mission, the medical arm of international relief organization Samaritan's Purse. He subsequently worked with Global Health Outreach, an arm of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations.

With their missionary days behind them, the Mullens settled in Highlands, North Carolina, in 2000. Dr. Mullen served as Parish Associate at First Presbyterian Church from 2001 to 2012, including two years as Interim Pastor (2007-09). He also served as chairman of the board of the Highlands Community Child Development Center, vice-chairman of the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital board, and, from 2005 to 2009, as Mayor of Highlands. He was one of the founders, in 2005, of the Community Care Clinic, a free clinic serving the uninsured in the Highlands area. In 2015, WestBow Press published Dr. Mullen's memoir of his life and missionary adventures, entitled *A Radical Change of Direction*.

Dr. Mullen is survived by his wife, Patsy, and their children Melissa Ballantyne (George), Christina Mullen, Don Mullen, Jr. (Tammi Brooks), Julie Ann Hartman (Doug), and Martha Conroy (Brian); grandchildren Patricia (and Frank) Brawley, Mitch (and Angela) Ballantyne, Christopher Ballantyne, Jonathon (and Mary Virginia) Ballantyne, Nicholas Pope, Rachael Mullen, Collins Mullen, Maya Sugg, Eleanor Brooks Mullen, Benjamin Hartman, Samuel Hartman, Alexander Hartman, Thomas Hartman, Haley Conroy,

Lauren Conroy, and Grace Conroy; and great-grandchildren Frank Brawley, Jones Brawley, Bennett Brawley, Margaret Ballantyne, and Isabelle Ballantyne. He is also survived by his brother, Harry Alexander Mullen, Jr. (Pam), and by several nieces and nephews.

A private memorial service is planned, with a public celebration of his life to be held at a later date at the First Presbyterian Church of Highlands, North Carolina.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Mullen Lecture Series, Memorial Fund, First Presbyterian Church, PO Box 548, Highlands, NC 28741, or to the Medical Benevolence Foundation, 9555 W. Sam Houston Parkway South, Suite 170, Houston, TX 77099.

McKoon Funeral Home & Crematory (770) 253-4580

Cemetery Details

McKoon Funeral Home & Crematory

38 Jackson Street
Newnan, GA 30263
(770) 253-4580
care@mckoon.com
<http://www.mckoon.com>

Tribute Wall

SM

“ We remember Don with affection and respect from our years at Crossroads Presbyterian Church. A humble leader and peacemaker, he always had a ready smile and a twinkle in his eye. The world is truly a better place for his having passed through, and he will be missed by many. With sympathy and regards to his family, Sue and Jim McCutcheon.

Sue & Jim McCutcheon - May 31, 2020 at 11:32 PM



“ Fairest of All was purchased for the family of Donald Collins Mullen.



May 22, 2020 at 10:18 AM

FF

“ Our thoughts and prayers are with all of you during this most difficult time.
Frank and Melody Farmer

FRANK AND MELODY FARMER - May 21, 2020 at 11:29 AM

SF

“ Our love and sympathy to your family as this wonderful man brightens heaven even more. What a wonderful example of living for his devotion to family, community, faith and service. Our church in Mequon so benefited by the involvement of the Mullen family. Now may wonderful memories bring you comfort and peace.

Suzy and Bill Frazier - May 21, 2020 at 10:06 AM

GW

“*Reading this obituary is an inspiration for all!
What an accomplished man who spent his life
in the service of others!*”



Geraldine Welch - May 20, 2020 at 08:49 AM

BG

“*I cherish having met Don at Central Baptist and shared memories of our Alma Mater The Citadel. Every Sunday we made it a point to greet and shake hands. He became an active member of our local Citadel Alumni club. What an honor to have known such and extraordinary man. He excelled in everything he did - Eagle Scout, Physician, Minister, Mayor... the list goes on. I will miss the warm smile and genuine love he showed for everyone. A man of his caliber is rare. Without a doubt he is with his Lord and I know he will hear "well done my good and faithful servant"*”

Banks Glover - May 19, 2020 at 02:26 PM