

Date of Birth
Nov 05, 1925



Date of Passing
Jan 16, 2015

Dorris Marie Harris

November 5, 1925 - September 16, 2015 An 89-year adventure defined the life of Dr. Dorris M. Harris, beloved mother, inspirational mentor, and accomplished public health physician. Dorris passed away Wednesday, September 16, in Poway, California where she lived for the past two months. Dorris, only child of Bulgarian immigrants Nicholas and Stefanka Pencheff, was born on November 5, 1925 in Los Angeles, California. A perpetually curious student and avid reader as a child, Dorris graduated from Catholic Girls High School at age 16. She attended Immaculate Heart College and UCLA, before graduating from USC in 1943 with a degree in zoology. After three determined years of rejected applications to many colleges, Dorris was finally accepted into the School of Medicine at the University of Maryland. She was one of four women in a class of one hundred. She interned at Los Angeles County General Hospital, and then completed her residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. Thus began a career in which Dorris would break many glass ceilings as she led the way for women's contributions to

the field of medicine. Dorris began working for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health in 1965 doing well-baby clinics. She expanded her expertise to working with autistic and mentally retarded children, which quickly led to her promotion as Director of Maternal and Child Healthcare. Her greatest accomplishments in the Health Department came with her appointment as Regional Director for the San Fernando and Antelope Valleys, the largest region in the County. Dorris used her considerable skills to bring together the Board of Supervisors and members of diverse communities to champion coordinated healthcare, integrating clinical, public health, and mental health services for the citizens of the Valley. She was most proud of her work in rebuilding Olive View Hospital, in the Sylmar neighborhood of Los Angeles, after it was damaged in the 1971 earthquake. Dorris played a key role in bringing in the UCLA School of Medicine to team with the Health Department, opening the Olive View UCLA Medical Center in 1987. Dr. Harris ended her career with the County supervising the creation of quality adult day care centers for memory care patients. Her dedicated leadership in mentoring her staff allowed her work in innovative healthcare to continue to this day. Dorris began her lifelong love of the arts as a young girl. She took ballet, tap, and Spanish dancing lessons with renowned teacher, Ernest Belcher. Her classmates were Gwen Vernon, Marge Champion, and Maria Tallchief. Dorris also earned accolades as a pianist, leading her to play Rachmaninoff in concert on the radio with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. She taught piano to many students in the Hollywood area while she waited for acceptance to medical school. In later years, Dorris filled her life with theatre and travel. Dorris' greatest devotion, however, was reserved for her four children. They will remember her for her boundless energy, optimism, and determination. That she so successfully raised a family-by herself- as a professional woman, is a credit to her strength and love. She is survived by daughter Julie Harris Neiger of Rancho Bernardo, sons William Harris of La Jolla, Dr. Stephen Harris (Nancy) of New Canaan, CT, and Thomas Harris (Akemi) of Coto de Caza. She was also very proud of her Harris grandchildren: Taylor, Morgan, Trevor, Conor, and Cole. The family wishes to thank Bennie Kaplan and the wonderful staff at Sunshine Care for attending so lovingly to Dorris' needs this past year. A private graveside service for the family was held on Friday, September 25, at Holy Cross Cemetery in Los Angeles. To honor this great lady, we invite you to enjoy your favorite dessert-especially if it's chocolate! In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial contributions be made to Loyola High School, St. Mary's Academy, or Homeboy Industries.

Memories of Dorris

