



## Lawrence Jay Dessner

March 29, 1934 - July 19, 2023

Lawrence (Larry) Jay Dessner, PhD, died peacefully in his home on July 19th at age 89. He was born and raised in Manhattan, NYC. He attended the Horace Mann School for Boys in Riverdale, and graduated from Yale University in 1955. In high school and college, he played varsity tennis. His doubles partner for these years was his good friend Richard Raskind, who became widely known years later as one of the first transgender athletes, Renee Richards. They remained good friends, exchanging emails until the end.

After graduation, Larry went to work in Advertising and worked on Madison Avenue, and in Toronto making television commercials for which he won several Clio awards. He married Phyllis Picker in 1960, and started a family: Daniel was born in 1963 and Susan in 1965. During these years, he and Phyllis enjoyed sailing in Long Island Sound and Lake Ontario. He was also an avid bridge player and he taught his wife to be an effective partner. They enjoyed the game together throughout their 62-year marriage, even playing with other residents in their independent living facility up until a few weeks before his death. He also enjoyed crossword puzzles, sometimes going to the newsstand in New York City late on a Saturday night to get an early crack at the Sunday Times crossword.

In the late 1960s, he decided to make a dramatic change and pursue an

academic life, enrolling at New York University and earning a Masters and PhD in English language and literature in 1969. Larry then accepted an appointment to the faculty at the University of Toledo and moved his family east of the Hudson River to what must have seemed like the frontier to both him and Phyllis, both native New Yorkers.

Lawrence specialized in Victorian literature. His dissertation was on Charlotte Bronte, but he wrote articles about Dickens, Trollope and many other writers. He also had an interest in creative writing and eventually channeled his experiences into a book titled "How to Write a Poem," which became a popular and best-selling text used in creative writing courses across the country. He also wrote and published his own creative writing, and had a particular skill at special-occasion poetry to commemorate birthdays or other events. He wrote a poem about his mother-in-law, Ruth Picker, which was read at her funeral and was a profoundly moving experience for those in attendance.

In the 1970s, after being a guest on a local radio talk show, he was hired to host his own nightly show, Rap with Larry Dessner, which was heard on WOHO radio. His quick wit, good will, and sharp intellect made him a natural and the show was quite popular, often featuring colleagues of his from the various departments at the University of Toledo as his guests. He also had many local politicians on his show, including Andy Douglas, Carlton Finkbeiner, and Lud Ashley. Special guests included Morris the Cat (not much of a radio personality but his trainer answered the questions) and a man who painted murals in tiger cages with the tigers in the cage with him. These last two guests were, according to his children, by far the best! Eventually, he grew tired of the nightly drive from his home in Old Orchard to the studios on Pickle Rd. in Oregon but the station management offered to construct a remote studio in his home from which the broadcasts continued until a change of format occurred at WOHO.

During his life, Lawrence was given to a number of enthusiasms. He had a great period of fascination with photography, taking thousands of photos and developing them in a darkroom he built in the basement, under the stairs and next to the laundry chute. He also became delighted with bicycling, building, maintaining and riding his 10-speed bike in local rides and bike commuting to the UT campus when time and weather would allow. He also was fond of the dogs with whom he and Phyllis shared their home over the years. Nifty, Newman, Noggs, Winnie and Finnegan provided loyal companionship and humor and he became a true dog person along those years.

He was a popular teacher, known for being demanding, fair, and insisting on high standards. He was not an "easy A," but those who "got it" often said he was the best professor they ever had. Some grateful students donated to establish the Dessner Fund, which is a financial resource to English students who have emergency needs and which has helped, and continues to help, many students.

Larry was a brilliant man with a great sense of humor and a twinkle in his eye all while being acutely aware of the limitations and obligations of the human condition. He was predeceased by his brother Gerald, parents William and Ruth, and is survived by his wife Phyllis, son Daniel and daughter-in-law Jonna, and daughter Susan. He will be missed and fondly remembered by his family and by those who knew him as Professor, teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the Larry J. Dessner Endowment Fund via <https://tol-edo.org/dessner> <<https://tol-edo.org/dessner>> .