



## McCay "Mac" Vernon

October 14, 1928 - August 28, 2013

Dr. McCay Vernon, an iconic figure in the fields of deafness and psychology, passed from life on August 28, 2013 at age 84. His exploration of the psychological aspects of deafness, his challenges to poor educational and mental health services for people who are deaf, and his advocacy of legal rights for people who are deaf extended throughout his nearly 60-year career in those fields. His lasting legacy includes the many former students and colleagues now serving in the fields of deafness and psychology.

Dr. Vernon was born at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. to Colonel Percy Vernon and Teresa Preble Vernon. Upon his father's death, the family moved to St. Augustine where he attended Ketterlinus High School. He entered the Army at age 17 and served with military intelligence in Korea. Upon his discharge, he obtained his bachelor's degree at the University of Florida and later earned Master's degrees from Gallaudet University and Florida State University. He completed his doctoral work in Psychology at Claremont Graduate University in California.

Vernon was author of five books in the field of deafness, over 250 journal articles, and an award-winning public television documentary, "They Grow in Silence." After serving in a number of schools for the deaf, he became head of a research project on deafness at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. Later he was instrumental in establishing a graduate program at Western Maryland College (now McDaniel College) to prepare professionals to work with individuals who are deaf. He was active in the field of deaf/blindness and served on the board of the Foundation Fighting Blindness. In more recent times he focused on his forensic practice in which he became a strong advocate for justice and legal rights for people who are deaf. He was always a strong advocate for the use of sign language. Among the many awards Vernon received during his career were The American Psychological Association Award for "Distinguished Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest," the Medal of Honor from the British Association of the Deaf, the Declaration of Merit from the World Federation of the Deaf, and the American Psychiatric Association Award for "Career Contributions to Mental Health and Deafness." He received Honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from Gallaudet University and McDaniel College. Vernon was predeceased by his first wife, Edith Goldston Vernon, who was deaf and

played a vital role in his career. Through her, he gained critical insights into the needs of people who are deaf. With his second wife, the former Marie vonGunten, he co-authored two books on serial killers, one of whom was deaf.

Dr. Vernon is survived by his wife, Marie; his daughter, Eve Vernon Peters and son-in-law Brian Peters, of Riverton, New Jersey; brother, Col. (ret.) Graham Vernon of Carlisle, Pennsylvania; sister, Terese Vernon Douglass (Dexter) of Tallahassee; and stepchildren Dr. Jean Aims (Clifford) of Smithfield, Virginia, Hollace Feist (Rodney) of St. Augustine, Florida, Wade Wisner (Lucy) of Dandridge, Tennessee, Roger Wisner of Long Beach, California, Dr. Priscilla Wisner (Joe) of Knoxville, Tennessee and Patricia Miller (Cameron) of Reisterstown, Maryland.

His family wishes to thank the staff of the Northeast Florida Community Hospice and the Bailey Center for Caring in St. Augustine for their many kindnesses during Dr. Vernon's final illness. No memorial service is planned at this time.

Those wishing to make a memorial donation may contribute to the Dr. McCay Vernon Fund for Support of Deaf Education, McDaniel College, 2 College Hill, Westminster, MD 21157.

# Comments

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“ Dr. Skinski is following this tribute.

**Dr. Skinski** - September 02, 2013 at 11:36 AM

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“ Mac truly was one of a kind. I was one of many that he inspired to go into the field of deafness at Western Maryland College back in 1970. He was one of the smartest people I ever knew; he taught all of us so much about deafness and about working with with deaf children and their families. His vision and foresight in helping to establish the deaf ed program at WMC helped many schools to hire properly trained teachers of the deaf. I had great respect and admiration for him. My thoughts and prayers are with Eve, Marie and all of his family.

Ruth Howell

**Ruth Howell** - August 30, 2013 at 02:55 PM

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“ My thoughts and prayers are with Eve and all of Mac's family. He was a unique individual; a gifted teacher, a passionate advocate for the deaf and a really nice guy! He is directly responsible for my going into the field of deafness. I took his Psych of Deafness class at Western Maryland College his first year there (my junior year) and the rest, as they say, is history. Debbie Clark

**Deborah Clark** - August 30, 2013 at 01:48 PM

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“ I have known Dr. Vernon ever since he was one of the main speakers at a 1980 workshop in Harrisburg, PA on the mental health needs of deaf persons. I also met him at Western Maryland College in Westminster, MD, in the early 1980's, where my daughter Louise (Montoya) was a student majoring in psychology. She and I -- a deaf member and longtime advocate of the PA Society for the Advancement of the Deaf -- are deeply aware of Dr. Vernon's important contributions toward understanding deaf persons and providing for their needs.

**Frank Nemshick, Jr.** - August 29, 2013 at 02:53 PM

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“ How fitting that Mac leaves us on a day where we remember the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr’s Dream speech. Truly there is an analogy to be made between Dr King’s impact and the seminal impact of Mac’s influence on the lives of real people who are deaf and deaf-blind over the past 50 years, as well as the lives of the many deaf people each of us has touched and will touch in our careers going forward. Mac, your consistent positive regard for me, for others, over my career helped me believe I could make a difference, I had something to contribute, and something I owe to others. You are an icon and pioneer in the lives of deaf and deaf-blind people, children and their families. You were my first and lifelong mentor (outside of my parents). I miss your persistent pesky humor and pushing for more and better! My deepest sympathy goes to Marie, his children and family, along with my heartfelt thanks for sharing Mac with us over the years. Having parents who also did a lot for the community, I know well the sacrifices you must have made to allow Mac to share his talents, positive encouragement, and ingenuity with us for so long. RIP Mac. Go to God with our love!

**Louise Montoya** - August 29, 2013 at 02:50 PM

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“ Louise Montoya lit a candle in memory of McCay "Mac" Vernon



**Louise Montoya** - August 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

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“ Dr Vernon was a great "connector" of people in the unique field of deafness and deaf blindness. He helped get many interested new-comers to the field in touch with each other and was a great resource for books, articles and advice. The world needs more people like Dr. Vernon. Who will take up his mantle and continue his work? Those who will honor his legacy.

**Peggy Johnson** - August 29, 2013 at 06:13 AM

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“ Mac was always such a strong supporter of me and my career goals. I will always remember our Halloween lunch in 1994 when he discovered that I was an avid sports fan. That began our competitive years of “fake” sports wagers. He was always so enthusiastic and caring whenever we spoke. His was a life that truly made a difference and my own life will never be the same without him. My sincere prayers of comfort and condolence are extended to his wife Marie, daughter Eve and other family members and colleagues.

CL Ingraham

**Cynthia Ingraham** - August 28, 2013 at 10:15 PM

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“ I took a moment of silence to pay tribute to Dr. Mac Vernon after learning of his passing. He was a truly considerate friend and professor whom I respected. I thank God for gracing his presence to which many lives he has touched through his compassion, sincerity and passion for the rights and better services for the Deaf people. John and I send our sincerest sympathy to the family.

Mary G. Yeh

**Mary G. Yeh** - August 28, 2013 at 10:08 PM