

Alums Honor Parents with Endowed Professorship in Education  
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Irene Peters celebrates the creation of the John and H. Irene Peters Professorship in Education with, from left to right, Michael Middleton, associate professor of education who will be the first faculty member to hold the professorship; Ken Fuld, dean of the UNH College of Liberal Arts; and UNH President Mark Huddleston. The professorship was created by Brian M. Peters '77, with his wife Ann-Frances Peters '78, and their son Matthew to support in perpetuity the teaching, research, service, and other activities of the holder.

“Please, make sure the boys go to college.”

After suffering a heart attack in the middle of the night, this was the final request that John Peters, 48, of Dover, New Hampshire, made to his wife Irene, on Oct. 7, 1962.

Not only did John and Irene Peters' two sons – Douglas and Brian -- attend college, they both graduated from the University of New Hampshire, along with their mother, who started at UNH

as a 39-year-old freshman almost immediately after her husband's death. Irene went on to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in education, and a certificate of advanced study.

In honor of his deceased father, and his mother who just recently turned 90 years old, Brian M. Peters '77, along with his wife Ann-Frances Peters '78, and their son Matthew have created the John and H. Irene Peters Professorship in Education, an endowed professorship that will support in perpetuity the teaching, research, service, and other activities of the holder. Michael Middleton, associate professor of education, will be the first faculty member to hold the professorship.

"UNH is much more than the common thread of my family's story. Rather, UNH is the very foundation upon, and around, which my family's life was reconstructed and built, and which today sustains our immediate and extended family in the lives we are very privileged to lead," says Brian Peters, now an attorney in Philadelphia. His brother Douglas is an attorney in Detroit.

"My father's dying wish started a life-cycle of desiring, embracing, and truly loving learning and education, as well as the collaboration, collegiality, and receptivity that are implicit in learning and education. The life-cycle became a reality because his wife, our mother, and our son Matthew's grandmother, possessed the physical and emotional courage, the perseverance, the intellectual rigor and discipline, the love of knowledge, and most precious, the unqualified love of her deceased husband and their two boys, to begin attending UNH at age 39, and achieve much more than degrees and a certificate. Rather, she became and remains to this very day emblematic of 'life' and 'learning,' and her sons' and grandson's lodestar," Peters says.

A third-grader, Brian Peters was just 8 years old when his father passed away. His older brother, Douglas, was a 14-year-old high school freshman. Their mother Irene, a part-time registered operating room nurse, almost immediately enrolled at UNH, attending class evenings to pursue her bachelor's degree in psychology.

Several years later, Irene Peters' oldest son Douglas would join her at UNH. She would go on to earn her master's degree in education, again at night, while working full time, now with the New Hampshire State Department of Education in Concord. She then earned a certificate of advanced graduate study in 1978, and joined the New Hampshire Hospital Association as vice president of research and education. She retired at age 64, and now lives in Florida.

During his mother's early years attending UNH, Brian Peters says he often would accompany her to UNH, spending time in the Dimond Library, and Murkland and Hamilton Smith Halls while his mother was in class. "I was totally intrigued by Dimond Library, the students researching, reading and studying...quietly. And all the books, on all the floors. Heaven! So much information, so much to learn!"

Peters knew he wanted to attend UNH, but unfortunately, he says his high school grades and SAT scores did not entirely support his "wanting" to attend UNH. However, then Director of Admissions Gene Savage met with and told Peters he "showed promise," noting his extra-curricular activities.

“I left the interview wondering what ‘showed promise’ meant. I was accepted into UNH the next month. It was, and remains, one of the happiest days of my life,” he says. “There, but for the grace of Gene Savage, his intuition, perception, trust, and humanity and UNH, I never would have been accepted into UNH where I truly loved, and took maximum advantage of, every minute of my enriching and tremendously diverse undergraduate experience.”

Peters fondly remembers how classics professor Richard Derosiers taught him how to think critically and to appreciate that “man’s time on earth is measured not in years but in hundreds of centuries.” From English professors Andy Merton and Don Murray, Peters says he learned how to write and cherish and respect words. And from political science professors Susan White, Robert Dishman, and Robert Craig, he says he learned how to apply theory to facts and facts to theory – “and that collaborative, intellectual, didactic learning is a life-long privilege, which we ignore at our and humanity’s peril.”

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