

It's All Relative

Gordon Hoyt '21 latest addition to Dunfey family legacy

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COURTESY PHOTO

When Jerry Dunfey '56 watched via livestream from Switzerland as his grandson, Gordon Hoyt '21, walked across the stage during the [College of Engineering and Physical Sciences](#) commencement ceremony on May 21 there was one distinct characteristic that unified Hoyt's celebratory day with Dunfey's more than 60 years earlier.

Dunfey wasn't on campus for his own graduation, either. He was at Hampton Beach selling hot dogs and fried clams.

UNH remains very close to Dunfey – Hoyt is his third grandson to graduate, his son, Peter, was a member of the class of 1984 and the total number of relatives to have earned UNH degrees is in the double-digits – but nothing was as important to him growing up as family and hard work, the combination of elements that conspired to keep him away from his own ceremony because he had to open the family’s fried clam stand.



JERRY DUNFEY

'56 (COURTESY PHOTO)

In fact, the three central forces present in that anecdote – family, commitment to a cause and UNH – succinctly sum up Dunfey’s life journey, from engaged student and employee of the family business to social justice activist to proud grandparent tuning in from halfway around the world to watch his grandson add to a still-growing legacy.

“I’m very proud that, between the late 1940s and now, our family has had students at UNH, each of whom played active roles in campus and civic life,” Dunfey says. “Being No. 11 of 12 siblings growing up in a tenement with my aunt Josie’s five children and my grandmother, it’s hard to keep track of how many of us are alumni.”

The list is still growing. Hoyt is the latest addition, having earned a degree in [civil engineering](#) and landed a job at Collins Engineers in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where they do a lot of underwater inspection work and dive engineering, after interning there last summer. And he’s soon to be followed by Dunfey’s grandnephew, Simon Eisl, an [astrophysics](#) major who just completed his freshman year.

“The fact that he got the opportunity to see me walk for graduation is awesome,” Hoyt says. “It really means a lot to be a part of that family history.”

That family history runs deep, dating back more than 70 years. Dunfey’s older brothers Bud (’50) and Jack (’52) came to UNH on the GI Bill after serving in World War II, and his brother Walter opened Speedy Launderette in Durham before the family built Town and Campus, the downtown institution that has been in business long enough for Dunfey’s grandsons Braedon Dunfey ’13, Teagan Dunfey ’16 and Hoyt to shop there during their time as Wildcats.

Family businesses – which included Dunfey’s, a downtown restaurant – played a central role in Dunfey’s college experience. He strategically selected dorm rooms in Hetzel and Fairchild halls so he could walk directly across the street to work before and after classes. And he employed the strong work ethic instilled by his parents as he juggled time at all the locales, including the Hampton Beach clam shack, while also managing a full schedule of courses.

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Activism and a focus on equality and social justice are additional values instilled by his family that have become the primary focus of Dunfey’s adult life. It’s how he met his wife, Nadine Hack; both were active politically with the Kennedy family when friends set up an introduction at an event hosted by the Africa America Institute posthumously honoring Robert Kennedy. The two have been involved in social justice causes worldwide, sometimes to significant acclaim. In 2008 they were presented the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo, the highest order South Africa bestows upon foreign nationals, akin to the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Through his social justice efforts Dunfey grew close to Dr. Martin Luther King’s family in the 1960s, and both Dunfey and Hack spoke at a small family funeral service for Coretta Scott King, serving the next day as honorary pall bearers at a church service in front of more than 60,000 people.

The couple was also influential in the 1974 forming of the Global Citizens Circle (GCC), an organization focused on “gathering concerned people of diverse backgrounds and

opinions to address critical issues of our time.” Dunfey met Tito Jackson ’99 when Jackson, one of only a handful of Black students at UNH at the time, was a freshman, and Jackson soon became involved in the GCC and is currently the organization’s board chair.

“The Dunfeys have always promoted diversity – they not only ‘adopted’ me into their family, but they funded the Andrew and Jean Young scholarship for minority students to attend UNH, and encouraged Boston’s Ruth Batson to do the same,” Jackson, a recipient of the Andrew and Jean Young scholarship, says.

The couple’s cultural involvement continued to include political campaigns, as well. They’ve been active on numerous trails, including those for President Barack Obama – an experience that Hoyt was able to take part in as a youngster.

Indeed, passing that focus on equality on to the next generation is important to Dunfey, who has been advocating for a more culturally diverse campus at UNH since his days as a student. He and Hoyt share the same aspirations for UNH as it tackles new diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Both are thrilled that the work is taking place and are hopeful that UNH will achieve its goal of welcoming significantly more students, faculty and staff of color.

“Ever since I was young, I’ve been raised with that kind of mindset around inclusivity,” Hoyt says. “I think UNH is really trying to foster that kind of thinking. It’s great that they are trying to make strides to make it more inclusive to all different ethnicities and cultures.”

Hoyt and Dunfey are uniquely connected beyond a passion for inclusivity in that they share the same birthday, which they celebrated two days after graduation, and Hoyt admitted he’d like to emulate his grandfather in other ways, too. Now 86, Dunfey is still an avid cyclist and cross-country skier, prompting Hoyt to jokingly hope he inherits “some of his genes for aging, because he seems exactly how I remember him from when I was younger.”

Dunfey, too, remembers his younger self, skipping out on graduation day to peddle fried food to beachgoers. If he couldn’t attend his own graduation ceremony, being able to watch Hoyt’s, even from another continent, wasn’t a bad consolation prize.

“Sixty-five years after my graduation, it was so great to be able to see my grandson dressed up in cap and gown,” Dunfey says.

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