

## In Memoriam: Madelyn "Molly" Bowen Connelly '84

**Mother of 12, midwife, therapist and educator**

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Molly Connelly did it all and did it all well. She co-founded the Lakes Region Daycare Center in Gilford, New Hampshire, while raising her own seven sons and five daughters. She taught catechism classes in her church and facilitated childbirth classes for 5,000 couples. She delivered many of her 12 children at home and, working as a midwife, “caught” more than



1,000 babies for other women. She preferred the term “caught” for her role in the births because she felt that laboring mothers deserved the credit for the hard work of delivery.

But Molly was just getting started. She graduated from UNH at age 45, opened a private therapy practice, taught parenting

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classes and was an adjunct faculty member in the UNH department of family studies for 20 years. "My mum loved teaching at UNH," says her daughter Shelagh. Her affection was reciprocated by the many students who honored her at her retirement party in 2016.

Among those who gathered to wish her well was Andrew Minigan '14, one of her teaching assistants, who remembers Molly's class as a mini-UNH community. "Whenever anything big happened on campus, Molly's class was a space for building community and constructive discussion that led to action or cathartic inaction," he says. She emphasized the importance of reflection, notes Andrew, and taking time out of a busy day simply to breathe. She was also eminently practical. Andrew is among the many students who fondly remember how on the last day of the semester, after leading the class in chanting and deep breathing, Molly would send her male and female students alike on their way with instructions to do daily Kegel exercises.

Caitlin Connelly Cooper '09, Molly's granddaughter and another of her teaching assistants, says that working with her grandmother taught her patience, compassion and responsibility. "I will always be grateful for our special bond and time together," says Caitlin. "She always said she was the lucky one, but she was wrong. It was me." Another granddaughter, Molly Riehs '18, learned as a freshman that her grandmother was a campus legend. "I made more connections by being the beloved Molly Connelly's granddaughter than any other RA/orientation/club signup combined," she says.

Despite her busy family and professional life, Molly found time for hobbies and friends, says Shelagh. With William, her husband of 60 years, she planted more than 1,000 flowers every spring and enjoyed hosting tours and parties in her award-winning gardens. She reigned as "Queen" of her local branch of the Red Hat

Society.

Molly accomplished all she set out to do by being extraordinarily organized. Shelagh recalls that growing up with 11 siblings was “controlled chaos” that functioned thanks to her mother’s detailed chore list and the expectation that everyone would do his or her part. The large family got by without an automatic dishwasher, but they didn’t need one. “We had 12 live dishwashers,” Shelagh says.

Molly’s energy was boundless and she often slept just four or five hours a night, says Shelagh, who recalls once waking up at 2 a.m. to find her mother hanging wallpaper. No matter how busy things got, Molly’s philosophy was that there was always room for one more in the Connelly household. The children’s friends were always welcome, especially those going through a tough time and needing a place to stay. Molly kept that open-door policy virtually up until her death last Nov. 2 at the age of 78. “Being a mother, midwife and professor defined my mother’s values,” says Shelagh.

When Molly counseled pregnant couples, she asked them to write the story of their own births. In her UNH classes she had students consider how they wanted to be remembered at the end of their lives and compose their own obituaries. All of her interests had a common theme that she thought everyone should contemplate, says Shelagh: “What does it mean to be human?”

Soon, students and other UNH visitors will be able to contemplate that question on a granite bench installed in Molly’s memory near the Health and Wellness Center. There’s plenty of room for a group — the bench is a dozen feet long; one foot for each of Molly’s 12 children.

**WRITTEN** [Karen Tongue Hammond '64](#) | UNH Magazine

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