

October 3, 1999

*A Celebration of the Life of*  
**Herman "Doc" Estrin**

June 2, 1915 - May 7, 1999

Thank you to all gathered for the Celebration of "Doc's Life

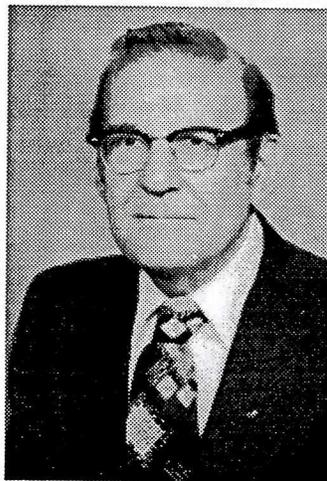
On behalf of my family, my mother Pearl and brother Robert, I'd like to tell you all how much we appreciate you're being here to celebrate the life of my father, Dr. Herman A. Estrin, "Doc" to most of you here today.

My father loved life, people and making a difference. He worked tirelessly to make this world a better place, whether by a simple hello or handshake, by the written word and a personal note, in the classroom or in his office, while grocery shopping or by riding a bus. Wherever he was, Dad reached out to all around him.

He was a teacher to his very core, an advocate of education, a friend, a mentor and a counselor. He fought for what he believed was right and was not afraid of controversy. He was motivated by the greater good in life and imbued that feeling in others.

We have gathered here today to celebrate all of what

"Doc" stood for. No man is perfect; perhaps that's also the essence of humanity. But, Herman Estrin, his soul & spirit, his love and friendship, his appreciation of the arts, his love of language, his contributions to the field of technical and professional writing and to Drew, Columbia and NJIT, and the confidence he encouraged, will live on for years to come in not only the professional and academic worlds, but in our hearts, our thoughts and our deeds.



I miss my father terribly, yet am content that he led a full and meaningful life and that he gave everything he knew how. We all experienced Herman Estrin in our own way. It is my belief he is here with us now and that he is smiling knowing that his family, friends, former students and colleagues are gathered together in a celebration of his life.

Kari Estrin

# Herman Albert "Doc" Estrin – 1915-1999

Eulogy, Dr. Herman A. Estrin  
Monday, May 10, 1999

Dr. Herman A. Estrin is dead.

That quiet, noble, loving, achieving man is gone.

We called him "Doc", we called him "Herm". We called him friend.

For me, who perhaps has known him closely as long as anyone, he epitomized several things: Scholarship, love of family, love of mankind, integrity and humor.

I met him in September, 1935, when he was a sophomore and I was a freshman at Drew University. By chance, we had been assigned adjacent lockers.

On my first visit to the locker, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. I turned to see a smiling, beaming face and a hand offered in friendship.

"Hello," he said. "I am Herm Estrin." "Welcome to Drew."

He claimed forever after that I replied by saying something vaguely and unfriendly, such as 'umph.'

Actually, What I said was, "Mornin"

Small matter. We became firm friends. Largely because Herm never gave up on anyone.

We met often on the streets of Madison and many nights stood on the corner using our growing knowledge to settle the affairs of the world.

We seldom agreed fully on anything, yet we would part with the philosophical understanding that "there are always two schools of thought."

For the first time in my life I came to know that friendship is based on mutual respect, not constant agreement.

Herm was a brilliant scholar, who led his class at Drew, just as he had topped students at North Plainfield High School.

I soon heard of his family, of Mom and Dad Estrin, of red-haired sister Ciel and handsome brother Mark, all of whom – as he described them – seemed closer to immortality than earthly reality.

Eventually I met all of them in their home at 6 Howard Street, North Plainfield. It was at best a "humble home," brightened by the Estrin philosophy that if you did not like where you were, make it better.

Herman was right. The Estrins were an incredible family, tightly-knit, joyous together.

I learned from whence came the Estrin charm and dignity and scholarship. His mother's brilliant, smiling face remains warm in memory – as does her cabbage soup, which Herman knew was the best in the world and which at least 10 years of students at Drew testified was true.

Herman became a teacher in South Plainfield the autumn after he graduated from Drew.

One autumn day, my very new, very young wife and I visited him at the school, expecting to see him tutoring a reluctant student or more likely, a dozen students.

Instead, he was out on the hardscrabble playground with 30 or so nondescript boys. He was wearing a brand new sweatshirt, blowing a brand new whistle and reading from a brand new book titled, "How to Play Soccer."

Herman Estrin had never kicked a soccer ball – or any other kind of ball – in anger, much less in sport. I never saw him in a gymnasium except to watch a game.

But he knew that his bedraggled school and its then-impoorished neighborhood desperately needed an athletic program. He set out, as best he could, to supply one.

That day I learned that Herm would spare nothing, including himself, to help his students, whomever they might be.

Later, after a solid career in the United States Army, Herm took on a job on the bottom rung of the humanities ladder at Newark College of Engineering.

It wasn't much of a ladder, really. It was a time when engineering colleges doted on turning out engineers who were almost inarticulate and definitely unlettered.

Herm quickly won the hearts of students assigned to him. He taught them English. He taught them grammar. He taught them literature and history – and he taught them how to live.

He taught many of those young men basic table manners and sociability. He took them to lavish dinners in New York City, where they could practice their newly-won manners. I know that he paid for most of those dinners.

He took his students to New York Stage Shows, usually buying the tickets.

Perhaps most vitally, he prepared them for job interviews – what to wear, how to talk, how to act like young men of the world.

He always upheld their dignity. I was in his office one day when a graduate came in on the day when he would have his first interview. He wanted Doc's approval.

The student was wearing what I now recall was a purple suit, green shirt, orange tie and yellow shoes. It was plain to see that he thought any company CEO would find him irresistible.

"How do I look, Doc?" the job seeker asked.

A lesser man could have replied, "Terrible." But, ever the diplomat, Herm asked "Did you wear that suit to

## Herman Albert "Doc" Estrin – 1915-1999

the neighborhood party last night?"

"Yes, Yes."

"It looks a bit rumpled," said Doc. "Why don't you change into that blue suit I helped you pick out a few weeks ago? Wear your white shirt, blue tie and black shoes."

Presumably the student followed the suggestion. He got the job.

One incident defined for me Doc Estrin, the sensitive teacher. I was again in his office when a pompous young professor bounced in waving an exam he had just given.

"This exam will flunk 80 percent of them," exclaimed Dr. Pompous.

"No it won't," said Doc. "It merely will prove that you didn't make much effort to teach 80 percent of them."

Contrastingly, Herm grieved if he failed to reach even one student in one of his classes.

He taught English and other humanities courses at Newark College of Engineering for about a half century, saw the street in front of the school change from Central Avenue to Martin Luther King Avenue.

He taught on as old Newark College of Engineering became vibrant, modern NJ Institute of Technology.

He never refused a request for help, from one student or many students. He was adviser to the school newspaper, "The Vector," for more years than he could remember.

Newark College of Engineering and New Jersey Institute of Technology were his heart and soul, his very reason for being.

Often, when I spoke to Saul Fenster, President of NJIT, Saul would say to me:

"You know, when I travel across the country to talk with Alumni, the first

question always is, 'How is Doc Estrin?' "

And so Herman Estrin lives on as the symbol of scholarship and interest in every individual student.

In a much broader sense, he lives on in the minds of thousands of people who heard him speak or lecture to groups from Paris to San Diego, from Westfield to Jersey City, from Atlantic City to Chicago.

He lives on in the minds of students and others who read his many books and articles.

Amazingly, despite his travels and writings, Doc never learned two things that most Americans consider fundamental: How to drive an automobile and how to type.

He was masterful before any audience. Leaving his scholarly insights with quick, deft tales of life among students.

His greatest achievement beyond the classroom might have been his establishing the esteemed annual Writers Conference that ran for more than three decades. It was staged on the NJIT campus.

Or his greatest achievement might have been the founding of the New Jersey Literary Hall of Fame, which he established in 1976.

At the Conference and the Hall of Fame, Doc consorted with noted literary figures such as Mary Higgins Clark and Belva Plain, yet he never lost his sense of proportion.

For Doc Estrin, every person was important. I often was astonished when we walked through NJIT or across the campus. He greeted security guards, lawn workers, tree trimmers and professional colleagues with equal enthusiasm.

He saluted every cafeteria worker by

his or her name – Mary, Jim, Sarah or Mohammed. No hall janitor went unnoticed.

I knew Herman most intimately on that June 26, 1949, when he and Miss Pearl Simon of Morristown stood under the canopy where the beautiful traditional Hebrew wedding ceremony took place.

I was in the wedding party, standing close by when the Rabbi broke the wine glass in a moving part of the ceremony.

From that marriage came Robert and Karen, their two children. Together we Cunninghams and those Estrins picnicked, sat on curbs watching parades and visited in one another's homes.

Herman Albert Estrin?

I saw him fade away in the past few weeks, hoping against hope that the chemotherapy would take hold.

It did not.

Always, his faithful, loving, admiring, beautiful daughter Karen sat with him.

Herman Albert Estrin?

I knew him. Knew him well. Knew him intimately. I suffered with him, shared joy in his achievements.

I remembered always that our friendship was based on trust and respect.

Through him I realized that achievement is best measured by modesty and that kindness is a matter of deeds, not worlds.

Herman Albert Estrin?

He will live as long as I live, as long as his children live, as long as those of us who knew him live.

He lives.

John T. Cunningham, *his friend.*

# Herman Albert "Doc" Estrin – 1915-1999

## Dr. Herman A. Estrin, State's Literary Caretaker

*Reprinted from The Star-Ledger,  
May 8, 1999*

By Ted Sherman

His bookshelves held everything from Nancy Drew to Walt Whitman. If the author was from New Jersey, the title had a place in Dr. Herman A. Estrin's library.

Founder and director of The New Jersey Library Hall of Fame, Dr. Estrin was a collector of homegrown writers – from the famous to the not-so-famous. An author himself and a professor for more than half a century at New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark, Dr. Estrin's mission was one of literary caretaker for the state.

A longtime resident of Scotch Plains, Dr. Estrin died May 5, 1999 at the age of 83.

"People think of New Jersey as a literary wasteland," he once told an interviewer. "It's a sea of great literature."

The hall of fame contains such authors as James Fenimore Cooper, William Carlos Williams, Joyce Carol Oates, Philip Roth, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Mary Higgins Clark, Richard Nixon and Harriet Adams, who wrote the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mysteries under the pen name of Carolyn Keene.

"All of these people, these wonderful authors, either were from New Jersey or lived in New Jersey," Dr. Estrin said in the interview. "The public knew of their works, but had no idea they were from New Jersey."

A native of the Garden State him-

self, Dr. Estrin was born in North Plainfield, attended North Plainfield High School and graduated from Drew University. He received a master's degree and later a doctorate from Columbia University after he served four years in the U.S. Army during World War II.

Dr. Estrin's teaching career, he once recalled, actually began in high school.

"I went to school during the Depression, and in those days, they couldn't afford substitute teachers," he said. "If they were out sick, they assigned me to teach the class. It was never a problem. I always came to class prepared. I knew language and literature."

It was to be his lifelong work. He began teaching in 1946 at Newark College of Engineering—which later became NJIT—where he taught English to engineers more adept with slide rules and vectors than with verbs and novels.

A short, wiry man with a friendly manner, he was known to everyone on campus as "Doc." Dr. Estrin not only taught technical writing, English and communications skills, but instituted cultural arts programs.

Saul Fenster, president of NJIT, said the long-time faculty member was a beloved fixture on campus, even long after his retirement.

"I go on a lot of alumni fund-raising missions throughout the world and by a wide margin, he is the faculty member most often asked about," said Fenster yesterday. "Isn't that interest-

ing for a technology university, that the man most asked about was a professor of English."

Fenster said Dr. Estrin taught students to "have an appreciation for arts and humanities, communications, and to have a regard for their fellow human beings."

Dr. Estrin also lectured around the world, from the University of British Columbia to the University of Paris, where he received the Medal of the City of Paris and was later inducted into L'Ordre des Palmes Academie.

The state Literary Hall of Fame had its roots in an annual awards luncheon for New Jersey authors started by Dr. Estrin. In 1976, he established the hall of fame with the idea to commemorate authors who either were born or lived in New Jersey and who won a major literary prize, or sold at least a million copies of a book.

While his favorite book—"Gone with the Wind"—isn't even close to New Jersey in setting or author, there are now 144 New Jersey writers enshrined in the hall, which is housed on campus at NJIT.

"It wasn't until I got involved with this that I began to see that New Jersey was a literary gold mine," Dr. Estrin remarked.

Surviving are his wife, Pearl Simon Estrin; a son, Robert K. Estrin of Scotch Plains; a daughter, Karen (Kari) Estrin of Nashville, TN; a sister, Cele Kipperman of Coronado, CA.; and a brother, Marc Estrin of Lemon Grove, CA.

# Herman Albert "Doc" Estrin – 1915-1999

## We Lost A True Friend

The North Plainfield High School Alumni Association lost a loyal member and a true friend when Dr. Herman A. "Doc" Estrin died May 7, 1999. A 1933 graduate of NPHS and a charter member of the NPHS Alumni Hall of Fame, his funeral was exactly one year to the day when he was honored by the NPHS Alumni, NJIT Alumni and South Plainfield's Grant School Alumni for his dedication to the teaching profession for 60 years.

Dr. Estrin was born and raised in North Plainfield, one of four children raised by Russian immigrant parents. His father, Morris, owned a tailor shop on Somerset Street near Church's Market, and his mother was a typical European mother, taking care and feeding not only their own children but also the neighborhood children and their children's friends. They were both featured recently in the NPHS Alumni Newsletter in articles written by Dr. Estrin.

Both parents were believers in education. All four children were highly educated. After Somerset School and NPHS, Herman graduated from Drew University in 1937 where he met his future lifetime friend, John Cunningham, who delivered the eulogy at Herman's funeral.

His teaching career started in Grant School in South Plainfield. Many of his former students attended his dinner in 1998. After his teaching assignment at NPHS Herman served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was honorably discharged as a Captain. After receiving his MA and Ph.D. from Columbia University, Herman started his college teaching profession at Newark College of Engineering which later became the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Fifty years and thousands of students/friends later, Dr. Estrin was recognized by Drew University with an

Honorary Doctorate Degree and the distinction of being one of their most famous graduates.

During his teaching career, Dr. Estrin's students always remembered him as a dedicated, caring, compassionate teacher who would give you the shirt off his back (which he probably did many times). He not only taught his students proper English and Creative Writing but also how to dress and how to act when interviewing for a job.

Herman always remembered where he came from and was always proud of "that little high school next to the Stony Brook." He credits his interest in the English language to Kenneth Fink, his English teacher at NPHS. He remembers all of his high school teachers who became his role models, and he never let an opportunity go by where he could give credit to NPHS and its teachers for his success.

Some of his most noted accomplishments include: establishing the New Jersey Literary Hall of Fame and the NPHS Alumni Hall of Fame and organizing the New Jersey Writer's Conference.

If I had to sum his life in one sentence it would be that he had pride in his family, friends and his background, he was dedicated to the teaching profession and loved life.

Someone once said that "a person is not dead until he is forgotten." I think that "Doc" Estrin's spirit will be alive for a long time. To honor him further, the second edition of the NPHS Alumni Directory will be dedicated to the memory of "Dr. Herman A. 'Doc' Estrin."

He will be missed.

Mario Caruso, *President*  
North Plainfield High School Alumni Association

# *Herman Albert "Doc" Estrin – 1915-1999*

## 1999 Award for Excellence

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) recently honored New Jersey public school graduates or teachers who have excelled in their fields in a special awards ceremony held in the Ballroom of the original Atlantic City Convention Hall on the Boardwalk.

Dr. Herman A. Estrin received the award in the field of education. "Doc" left his mark in education and on New Jersey's literary community. A former teacher in South Plainfield and the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), he celebrated 60 years in teaching last year. He was also renowned as founder of the New Jersey Literary Hall of Fame in 1976, which includes the most prestigious writers from the Garden State.

The award will be presented posthumously since "Doc" Estrin passed away this summer.

A 1933 graduate of North Plainfield High School, he earned an AB degree from Drew University and master's and doctorate degrees from Columbia University.

Estrin started his teaching career at the Grant School in South Plainfield in 1938, teaching social studies. He served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946 attaining the rank of captain.

In 1946, he joined the NJIT faculty as an English professor, where he taught English, technical writing, and journalism for 50 years. He also lectured at the University of Paris from 1978 to 1981, receiving the Silver Medal from the mayor of Paris for teaching master of chemical engineering students.

He became a proponent of specialized courses in written and oral communication for engineering students, publishing his pedagogical approaches in a number of journals. He was author of 14 books and more than 400 educational and scholarly articles and organized writers' conferences for more than 45 years.

He received numerous other awards over the years, including an honorary degree from Drew University, NJIT Alumni Association's first Robert Van Houton Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the NJEA Distinguished Service to Education.