

Dr. Paul Dratch, longtime Mount Auburn radiologist with a gift for humor, dies at 78

By [Bryan Marquard](#), *Boston Globe* Staff, October 12, 2017



A gifted and caring radiologist, Dr. Paul Dratch possessed such intuitive diagnostic skills that he could “almost see into the patient without X-rays,” recalled Dr. Stanley C. Foster, a longtime friend and former colleague at Mount Auburn Hospital.

Just as skilled at lightening the mood on any dark day, Dr. Dratch used his memorable sense of humor to enliven meetings that had stayed serious too long. “He’s honestly the funniest person I’ve ever come across,” said Dr. Philip A. Rogoff, a radiologist at Mount Auburn. “And he was remarkable in his intellect. He was literally a walking encyclopedia.”

Known for choosing thick biographies and history books as beach reading, Dr. Dratch drew from vast stores of knowledge as he made every conversation unforgettable.

“The mystery of Paul is, ‘How could one person embody so much zest for life, humor, knowledge, and compassion?’ He was an intellectual who could enlighten us about the mundane and the profound,” Foster said in his eulogy at a memorial service for Dr. Dratch earlier this

week. “Yet, the next second he could illuminate the irony and contradictions of life with his facile wit. And it was all wrapped in a blanket of loving kindness.”

Dr. Dratch, who spent his career at Mount Auburn and had only retired in January, died Oct. 5 in his Lexington home of acute myeloid leukemia. He was 78.

“His legacy was not only his humor and the human side of who he was, it was also the education side that he imparted to his residents, and how they cherished him,” Rogoff said. “He was engaged in the process with an enthusiasm that was extremely unusual.”

Dr. Morris Dratch of Lexington, an older brother who is also a physician, said he was “a very, very good radiologist. My brother found a wonderful home in medicine at the Mount Auburn Hospital.”

He added that it was quickly apparent to all who met Paul that he “had this wonderful sense of humor that I felt was just innate. It just came so naturally to him.”

A gifted mimic even as a teenager, Dr. Dratch entertained high school friends with impromptu impressions of teachers who had just stepped out of a classroom. In later years, he simply drew inspiration from his surroundings. “He would take what was going on in the room and make that funny,” said his daughter, Rachel Dratch of New York, a comedian and actress who formerly was a “Saturday Night Live” cast member. Having Dr. Dratch as a father, she added, “was almost like growing up in an improv master’s class.”

With her father around, comedy “was just in the air. He was joyous about everything,” Rachel Dratch said.

Dr. Dratch’s son works in comedy, too. Daniel Dratch, who lives in Los Angeles, has written for the TV shows “Monk,” “The Cleveland Show,” and “Anger Management.”

“My brother and I, we didn’t grow up thinking, ‘We’re going to be in comedy. We’re the funny family,’ ” Rachel said, but with her father around, comedy “was just in the air. He was joyous about everything.”

The youngest of seven children, Paul Leon Dratch was born in Somerville and was an elementary school pupil when his family moved to Mattapan. His parents, both immigrants from what is now Ukraine, were Benjamin Dratch, who painted the interiors and exteriors of houses, and the former Clara Turok.

Dr. Dratch graduated in 1956 from Boston Latin School and in 1960 from Harvard College. He acted in college plays and subsequently in community theater for many years. One role at Harvard, as the bartender in Eugene O’Neill’s “The Iceman Cometh,” found its way into family lore because the character’s foul language drew the ire of Dr. Dratch’s father, when he attended a show.

“He was great,” Morris said of Dr. Dratch, laughing at the memory, but their father couldn’t get past the cursing, which he thought was “so unbecoming of someone from Harvard. My father was roaring angry.”

Dr. Dratch graduated from Tufts University School of Medicine in 1964 and served for a few years in the Army Reserve Medical Corps before joining the staff of Mount Auburn Hospital in 1971, where he received multiple awards for teaching.

“Paul had a gift for medicine,” Foster said in his eulogy. “His encyclopedic memory was enhanced by an almost artful way of assessing patients, and a roiling curiosity.”

In 1964, Dr. Dratch married Elaine Soloway, whom he met on a blind date, and who later was director of the Share-a-Ride agency, which provided transportation to the elderly and those with disabilities.

During his medical training, Dr. Dratch's studies didn't end with his shift, and weren't confined to his specialty. "He was a guy who, during residency, would stay up until 3 o'clock in the morning watching movies from the '30s and '40s," his brother said, "and he would know the primary actors and secondary actors."

A biography of former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin that stretched for nearly 800 pages might be ideal summer reading for Dr. Dratch, but "at the same time, he enjoyed a lot of pop culture, so it was fun to talk with him about what was on Turner Classic Movies or the latest Hollywood dish," said Ronna Foster.

Dr. Dratch also played the euphonium — what he liked to call "the forgotten horn" — in the Lexington town band for 40 years, "but I know that career will probably go nowhere," he noted drily in 1995 in an anniversary report for his Harvard class.

He would bring Passover Seders to a close by playing "God Bless America" on his euphonium, as a tribute to his immigrant father, who sang the song at Seders when Dr. Dratch was growing up.

"He had so many facets to his personality," Stanley Foster said in an interview. "The most important was that he was a caring guy. He listened to you. He was a good friend."

Dr. Dratch also "absolutely loved being a grandfather" to his grandson, Eli Dratch Wahl, Rachel said in her eulogy. "He would be on the floor playing trucks for hours."

A service has been held for Dr. Dratch, who in addition to his wife, children, grandson, and brother leaves a sister, Mary Rosenfield of Dedham, and a brother, Nathan of Boynton Beach, Fla.

During his years at Mount Auburn Hospital, Dr. Dratch "had the ability to take a room full of people talking about something serious and turn it into a comedy show in two seconds," Rogoff said.

That was true of his friendships, too. In his eulogy, Foster likened their longtime bond as physicians and friends to examining "the facets of a diamond, constantly turning it, and seeing the reflections and distortions, and trying to differentiate what is real from the imagined. Paul, with his wit and his ability to imitate as well as mime, could turn this into an unending stream of life skits in real time. No one could do it better."

Also, published in *The Lexington Minuteman* from Oct. 18 to Oct. 26, 2017:

Dr. Paul Leon Dratch, 78, died at home, on October 5, 2017, of complications from acute myeloid leukemia. Born Nov 29, 1938 in Somerville MA., he was the son of Benjamin and Clara (Turok) Dratch. Paul graduated Boston Latin School 1956 and went on to study at Harvard University (BA 1960 in Chemistry; member of Dudley House). He graduated from Tufts Medical School in 1964, and went on to train at Baltimore City Hospital, Yale/New Haven Hospital, Graduate Hospital of Philadelphia and Boston City Hospital. He joined as a radiologist at Mount Auburn Hospital, where he practiced from 1971 until January 2017. He also served as Captain in the US Army Reserve, Medical Corps from 1965-1971. Paul is survived by his wife Elaine Soloway, and his children, Rachel Dratch, of New York City, and Daniel Dratch, of Los Angeles, CA, and his wife Mary Trahan. He was a doting grandfather to his grandson, Eli Dratch Wahl and loved laying construction workers with his "little buddy." Paul is also survived

by his sister Mary Rosenfield, his brothers Nathan (Helayne), and Morris (Gladys); is predeceased by brother Joseph and sister Claire Dratch Feldberg. He's also survived by Eli's dad, John Wahl, sisters-in-law Susan Williamson and husband Jack; Jane Soloway and husband Mitchell Moody, and Debra Sobin and husband Stanley. He leaves behind many nieces and nephews who loved their "life-of-the-party" uncle. Paul was a member of the Lexington Bicentennial Band for 40 years, where he played the euphonium. He also loved directing the Journal Club for the radiology residents at Mount Auburn, as here he got the chance to display his rare comic abilities which were well-known to all who crossed his path, and which he passed on to his children, both of whom pursued careers in comedy--Rachel as a former cast member of "Saturday Night Live" and Daniel as a writer on "Monk" and other shows. These past few years he thoroughly enjoyed his lifelong learning classes through BOLLI at Brandeis and Llaic. In addition to being a loving husband, father and grandfather, Paul was a voracious reader, who loved spending time on Cape Cod with his family. During summer months, he could often be spotted on Cold Storage Beach in Dennis, MA reading a giant history book.