

## LIFE WELL LIVED: Nordstrom gave over seven decades to Northfield

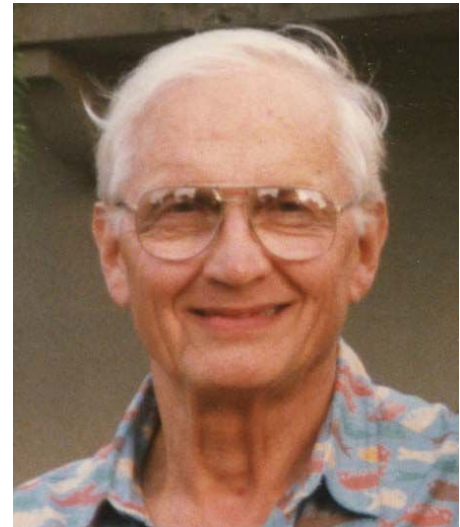
By JANE TURPIN MOORE, Guest Contributor | Jan 25, 2022

When Harry Wallace Nordstrom died on Nov. 13, 2021, only eight days short of turning 98, he departed the town where he had happily lived, worked and raised a loving family for over 71 years.

“Dad took such pride in Northfield,” said Nordstrom’s daughter Amy Gunderson, Burnsville.

“He always said things like, ‘You go up to the Twin Cities to try to find something and you come back to Northfield and you can find it right here.’”

“He appreciated the intimacy of Northfield’s shops, the personal connections he made, and once he found something he liked—whether a bank or an auto mechanic—he was extremely loyal to it.”



Nordstrom, an accomplished violinist and violist who held master’s and doctorate degrees from the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, New York, was a vital member of the Carleton College music faculty from 1950 to 1989.

### Coming to Carleton College

He came to Carleton after serving with the U.S. Army during World War II and playing two seasons with the Minneapolis Symphony (now the Minnesota Orchestra)—and he never really left.

“Northfield has such a special place in our whole family’s heart, and I don’t think they [Nordstrom and his wife, Sally Lee Nordstrom, a cellist, adjunct St. Olaf instructor and private cello teacher] would have wanted to be anywhere else in the world,” said his son Rolf Nordstrom, St. Paul.

“Dad got a sabbatical every four years, and our parents would take all five of us to live somewhere else while they studied with other musicians to bring back new knowledge to their roles here.

“Being in many other parts of the world only made them cherish Northfield more, and underscored how privileged they and we were to be in this beautiful small town.”

The Nordstroms formed the Collegium String Quartet in 1956. The group performed regionally for decades, also appearing on public television and at venues such as the Jackson Hole Fall Arts Festival.

Anne Mayer, a pianist and Carleton music faculty member from 1959 to 1999, says rehearsals for their chamber ensembles took place at Nordstrom’s Fifth Street house, where he lived from 1957 until his death.

“I got to know the family, and sometimes during our rehearsals the last one or two of the Nordstrom children would be napping under the piano,” said Mayer.

“We decided if we weren’t disturbing them we must be doing something right.”

Mayer recalls Nordstrom as a fair, calm man whose skills and personality were welcome within the department, of which he served as chair or co-chair for various terms throughout the years.

“He was such a patient man, an even-tempered person who worked well with people at all ages and stages,” said Mayer.

### **Thoughtful musically**

“Harry was very thoughtful musically and a good colleague; among a lot of temperamental musicians, Harry was the exception,” she continued.

“When he spoke, you took him seriously because he didn’t just spout off about anything; he thought things through.”

Gunderson also reflected on her father’s remarkable temperament and sense of responsibility.

“He urged us to be prepared for all contingencies, and to always be considerate of the effect our words and actions had on others,” said Gunderson.

“I never heard him say anything harsher than, ‘Oh, that was really poor,’ when one of us had done something pretty crummy,” she said.

“Our dad wasn’t the type to say, ‘Now do it this way,’ or ‘Be sure about that,’ but what he modeled was to always be conscientious and 100% reliable, and to never take shortcuts that would sacrifice quality.”

Stephen Kelly, another longtime Carleton music colleague of Nordstrom’s, echoed Gunderson’s comments.

“I learned a lot about how to be a successful colleague, to the degree that I was, from Harry and Anne [Mayer],” said Kelly.

“I took my lessons from their modeling, and later when younger faculty members asked me for advice about being a department chair, I told them what I’d learned from observing and working with two very successful people.”

Additionally, Kelly’s two daughters studied violin with Nordstrom.

### **A successful teacher**

“Their lessons were always musically rich, technically expert and affirming—and they both play to this day,” said Kelly. “And Harry had students who went on to play professionally.”



*Harry taken 1944*

“He was a wonderful, compassionate colleague and a very successful teacher.”

Mayer observed the same phenomenon.

“I really felt he was able to teach people at various levels,” said Mayer. “He taught very advanced college students as well as six-year-old beginners.”

Nordstrom’s son Rolf notes that his father had a deep affection for Carleton and “really loved what he did.” As a result, he kept in touch with many of his former students, corresponding with some for decades.

“It seemed like his goal was to make music available to everyone,” said Gunderson. Tellingly, a Collegium Quartet brochure articulated the group’s desire to teach, inspire and provide enjoyment to a broad audience.

Growing up in such a musical household, the Nordstrom offspring were bathed in music.

“We were all required to play something,” said Rolf Nordstrom, “and we all came away with a love of music.”

Nevertheless, none of Nordstrom’s children pursued music professionally—but two of his grandchildren are doing just that.

Grandson Rolf Haas is a professional violinist who performs with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and is also a hip-hop artist; he uses his grandfather’s Gagliano violin. Another grandson, Erik Nordstrom, is an aspiring opera singer currently studying at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

“Maybe it skipped a generation,” said Rolf Nordstrom of his parents’ musical heritage.

Nordstrom suffered a head injury in a fall at home on Dec. 21, 2020. Thereafter, he required greater assistance; his family rallied around him, allowing him to remain in his home until his passing.

“We cared for him 24/7 for almost a year,” said Rolf Nordstrom, saying all five Nordstrom siblings plus spouses provided care on a rotational basis.

The family also received support from Minnesota Hospice, a home health aide who visited a couple times weekly and several helpful neighbors.

“The five of us have always gotten along well, but in the course of this caregiving year, we remarked that his parting gift to us was the privilege of caring for him together,” said Rolf Nordstrom.

“It was both lovely and challenging at the same time.

“My dad was among the people I absolutely admire most in the world; he was inspirational and exceptional.”

Nordstrom’s survivors include his five children: Pat (Kyle, deceased), Northfield; Sarah (Fred Haas) Nordstrom, Eden Prairie; Amy (Doug) Gunderson, Burnsville; Eric (Laura), Stewartville; and Rolf



(Kathy), St. Paul; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents, Harry and Ellen, brother Lawrence and wife Sally.

A memorial service at Carleton's Skinner Memorial Chapel will occur on a yet-to-be-determined date in the spring or early summer.

The family prefers memorials in the form of donations to plant trees in national forests for the enjoyment of future generations.

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