

# Douglas Villy Cormack

1926 — 2024



Douglas Villy Cormack—“Doug” to the world, and “Dood” to his family—passed peacefully in Calgary on November 24, 2024, at the age of 98. Doug is survived by his wife of 71 years, Ishbel (previously “Sybil”, née Gladys Ishbel Anson Garland), and his brother Ernest Eric “George” Cormack. His other brother, David Cormack, died earlier this November.

Doug has three children, four grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. His children are Margaret Burnett (William Burnett), Gordon Cormack (Maura Grossman), and Barbara Philip (Iain Philip). His grandchildren are Marie “Ree” Marx (Dylan Marx), Douglas Boucher Cormack, Helen Richards (John Richards), Heather Burnett (Jon Zaozirny); and his great grandchildren are Anya Marx, Owen Marx, James Richards, Joseph Richards, Jackson Zaozirny, and Hannah Zaozirny.

Doug was born August 30, 1926, in the town of Lacombe, near his family farmstead in Alix, Alberta. He attended a one-room “Little White Schoolhouse”, completing his education there through high school and, as

the eldest son, helping his mother Barbara Villy Cormack to look after the family farm and his infant brother George, who had special needs, while his father Eric Wyld Cormack was at war. Doug joined the first postwar cohort at the University of Alberta, earning a bachelor’s degree in the burgeoning field of nuclear physics. Doug remained at Alberta to earn a master’s degree in the application of nuclear physics to soil science, but he developed a passion for nuclear medicine, which he pursued as a PhD student at the University of Saskatchewan, where he was a member of the team that in 1951 developed the Cobalt 60 radiotherapy unit—misleadingly dubbed “The (Cobalt) Bomb,” a name that offended Doug’s sensibility for precision and accuracy.

After marrying Ishbel in 1953, the newlyweds cruised to London where Doug completed a postdoctoral fellowship. In 1954, the couple, with Margaret in utero, returned to Saskatoon where Doug took a faculty position at the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Cancer Commission. Margaret, Gordon, and Barbara were all born in Saskatoon. In 1967, Doug and family moved to Winnipeg, where he joined the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation. In 1980, Doug, Ishbel, and Barbara moved to Calgary, where Doug became Director of Medical Physics at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre, Foothills Hospital, a position he held until his retirement in 1992.

Doug was a founding member and Fellow of Canadian College of Physicists in Medicine (CCPM). He was an active member of the Canadian Organization of Medical Physicists (COMP), both before and after retirement. He was awarded the 2006 COMP Gold Medal—COMP's highest award "to recognize an outstanding career as a medical physicist who has worked primarily in Canada." He regularly attended meetings, and published several articles on the history of medical physics in Canada, including a four-part series "Cobalt 60—A Canadian Perspective."

Doug was equally engaged with his family—his wife, his children, their spouses and their offspring, as well as those of his brother. He demonstrated an intense interest in each as an individual, engaging them with probing questions, illuminating comments, and thoughtful gifts, in accordance with their individual interests and pursuits. He celebrated and recorded for posterity their various accomplishments.

Doug contributed on a subscription basis to dozens of organizations promoting social welfare locally, nationally, and internationally. He donated blood to the Red Cross and Canadian Blood Services more than 75 times.

A celebration of Doug's life will take place in Calgary at a yet-to-be-determined date early in 2025. Memories may be recorded at

<https://www.arbormemorial.ca/en/edenbrook/obituaries/douglas-villy-cormack/133041.html>

Doug requests that in lieu of flowers or mementos, donations be made to the Robin Hood Association, or another charity of your choice.