Charles Douglas Darling

*July 7, 1905 — August 23, 1986*

Doug was born in Walkerton, Indiana, the second son of a Canadian-born Presbyterian minister, Charles David Darling, and an American mother, Gertrude Peebles Darling. As church ministers then and now frequently receive different parish assignments, Doug’s early schooling was in many places. His longest childhood home was in Cleveland, Ohio, where he graduated from high school and entered Lafayette College, from which he graduated summa cum laude in 1929 and was honored by membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He entered the University of Pennsylvania Medical School that same year, received his medical degree in 1933, and immediately entered a two-year internship at the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia.

Colleagues of Doug’s in medical school and during internship days remember his great interest in music, especially his talents with the piano. His interest in music continued throughout life. One of his classmates remembers going with Doug to operas many times in Philadelphia. At Cornell Douglas and his wife regularly attended the concerts in Bailey Hall.

Following his internship he became school physician at the George School for two years. While there, Doug met Ruth Walton, the daughter of the director of the school, whom he later married in the summer of 1938. Doug became a member of the staff of the Princeton Student Health Service for the following two years, marking the beginning of Doug’s interest in, and understanding of, young people. In the course of his medical education, in medical school and during his internship, Doug made the acquaintance of, and established the beginning of a lifelong friendship with, Dr. Joseph Hughes, director of the Pennsylvania Institute in Philadelphia, whose influence was to nurture Doug’s interest in mental health and the emotional problems of young people. While still on the Princeton staff, Doug enrolled as a summer extern in psychiatry at the institute. So great was his interest in the mental health field that he accepted the invitation of Dr. Dean Smiley, head of the Department of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine at Cornell, to join (in 1938) the staff of that department as lecturer in mental health and adviser to students with emotional problems.

About the time Doug arrived at Cornell there appeared on campus concern that the university had no control over the medical care of ill students. After two years of investigation and debate among university officials, the trustees took action. In July 1940 the university assumed responsibility for clinical care of students and delegated that responsibility to a newly appointed clinical director, whose duty was to organize a medical staff to provide
both ambulatory and hospital care for ill students. As the service was short of clinicians and Doug had a solid background in medicine, he was requested to serve along with others as an attending physician for all hospitalized student patients, as well as act as counselor to student patients with emotional problems. That was a time when a residency program in medicine was begun at the direction of the board of trustees. Doug added to the program by sharing in the total educational program of those young physicians. Later, when the residency program was expanded by arrangement with the staff of Tompkins County Hospital, Doug’s contributions to the educational program were of even greater significance.

Before the clinical department was fully developed, and because of the war, physicians in the newly formed department were assigned additional medical responsibilities by the Cornell administration: for the personnel of the Naval Officer Training Program, the Army Student Corps, the Air Force Officer Training Program, the Army Student Training Program, and other short-term military programs on campus. Those responsibilities were in addition to providing clinical care for some four thousand civilian students. The medical facilities and staff were fully occupied from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. and from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. with military sick call. The hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. were the hours for ambulatory visits by civilian student patients. Douglas Darling, although eager to develop a mental health division, recognized the priorities of war time, and shared the clinical load with his medical colleagues. Needless to say, he had patients with serious emotional problems from both the military and civilian groups in addition to his sick-call patients.

After the war Dr. Darling was able to continue the development of the mental health division. With administrative support he recruited psychiatric social workers and clinical psychologists. He spread his expertise to the larger community by establishing a local Mental Health Society and by encouraging other colleges and universities to develop strong mental health divisions via the American College Health Association and through state and national psychiatric associations, of which he was a contributing member. He continued his general medical interests through membership in the Tompkins County Medical Society, the Medical Society of the State of New York, and the American Medical Association. He was in demand by public health officials to participate in programs in mental health.

During that time Doug kept his contact with Dr. Joseph Hughes at the Pennsylvania Institute. He seldom came back from a visit to Philadelphia without the urge to strengthen the mental health program at Cornell. Even before the war the problem of suicide attracted his attention. As the years went on, his interest in suicide became stronger. Together with one of his clinical psychologists, Leif Braaton, he pursued the subject in several scientific papers
and, with the cooperation of his medical colleagues at Cornell, devised a system to help identify students with suicidal tendencies. The implementation of that system put a burden on the mental health staff at Gannett Clinic, but it worked. The last years Doug was at Cornell, the student suicide rate was very low.

Doug’s career in psychiatry did not end with his retirement from Cornell in 1969. He opened an office for private practice from 1969 to 1977. Although failing health restricted his activities, he continued to see some former patients and a few new ones at his home until 1983. When further failing health forced him into complete retirement, Doug continued his intellectual pursuits although seriously ill. In fact, he wrote and published a booklet of poems during that time, which he enjoyed distributing among his friends.

Friends and former patients alike will miss this genial, talented man. Those professionals who worked with him during his active years will remember him as the one who developed high standards for the treatment of emotionally disturbed students at Cornell.

Doug is survived by his wife, Ruth, who was affiliated with Cornell in several capacities—as a research assistant, as a member of the staff of the Office of the Dean of Men and Women (1959-77), as the coordinator of disabled students (1977-79), and as the acting dean of students (1979-80). Douglas Darling is also survived by his daughter, Barbara. His son, Charles Douglas Darling, Jr., died in a motor vehicle accident in 1958.

Ralph Alexander, Blanchard Rideout, Norman Moore