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## Jean-Paul de Chezet

### Obituary

August 22, 1927 - February 25, 2013

[Print](#)

Jean-Paul de Chezet (Aug. 22, 1927 -- Feb. 25, 2013) was a gifted man. Among those gifts was the ability to fearlessly scoop up in his bare hand any big, hairy spider that had invaded either of his small children's bedrooms and calmly walk it out the door. Equally impressive, 50 years later, was the warm-up to his swim routine at the Bowdoin pool: a full-length underwater in one breath, at 85 years of age.

Although his mind faltered in recent years, Jean-Paul was fluent in four languages and conversant in two more, attacking his Russian text books early every morning, into his 80s. And despite the loss, in 2011, of his cherished wife of 54 years, Dimitry (not Russian), he remained a happy man, an encouraging father, and a committed swimmer. His lifelong love of classical music thrived, even as he had ceased playing piano, after a foray into jazz improv that had followed 70 years at the keyboard. Although he seldom spoke of it, Jean-Paul had painted for a time, selling a few works at shows in the 1950s. The foundation of his artistic, scholastic, and linguistic accomplishment was not only talent but discipline. A note found on his apartment wall, days after his death, read: "Do sit-ups!."

He also led by example in the craft of thrift, driving his '77 Chevy Nova for 20 years, and his '97 Camry for 15, darning his socks, and patching his jeans -- all the while happily putting his children through college or traveling time and again to Italy with his wife. The man was nothing like cheap, just frugal and unpretentious. Jean-Paul, exasperated at a fellow professor's trumpeting the pedigree of her PhD in a court proceeding, announced to the judge: "Any idiot can get a PhD."

Anything but, Mr. de Chezet held -- his son liked to say -- more degrees than a thermometer: in Law (Aix-Marseille, France), International Relations (M.A., Georgetown), and French Literature (M.A., PhD, University of California at Irvine). No egghead, Jean-Paul expressed to his sister a fondness for the routine and physicality of bootcamp at Ford Ord, California, after being drafted into the Army in 1951. He parlayed his language skills into a job as an interpreter/chauffeur in occupied Germany, also working as an Army ski patroller in the German Alps.

Moved equally by art and nature, he marvelled at reflections in water and the quality of light in the sky. Dimitry called him the most fascinating man she had ever met. Of Flemish and Spanish background, Jean-Paul was born in Belgium, lived subsequently in French Indochina, France, Los Angeles, Washington, DC (where he met and married Dimitry), Los Angeles again, and San Diego. During the Southern California years, he worked in management at his parents' continental restaurants, before enrolling in his early 40s at UCI to study French Literature. He took his first and only professorship in Quebec in 1974, where he taught at the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivieres for 14 years. Retiring to Maine, Jean-Paul and Dimi lived 20 happy years in Harpswell on High Head Road.

His last five years were spent at The Highlands in Topsham, a fixture enjoying dinner with wine and a paperback or playing Scrabble in the lobby, when not surrounded by art, music, and books in his apartment. An engaging introvert, he valued his contacts and conversations in his community -- at The Highlands, the pool, Curtis Library, and in local music stores. Really, his hobbies kept him going, with tactical support from Lorraine Berte and Roberta Brezinski. And he had fallen in love again -- with his baby

granddaughter, Navah, whom he had met late last summer.

His departure, brought on by a heart attack at home, took all who knew him by surprise. His son was at his bedside for Jean-Paul's last two days among us.

Mr. de Chezet is survived by his daughter, Dominique (Jamie) of Ottawa, Ontario, son Alan (Marnie) and their daughters Jade and Navah of Kelowna, British Columbia, his little sister, Jacqueline (Steve) of North San Juan, California, (and by her son, Aaron), and by his beloved cat, Kica, now of Brunswick.

There will be no funeral services.

Condolences may be expressed at [stetsonsfuneralhome.com](http://stetsonsfuneralhome.com)

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