



## Derrick Gordon

May 8, 1938 - December 2, 2025

Derrick Gordon, 87, died on December 2, 2025, in Raleigh, N.C., just six weeks after being diagnosed with an aggressive non-Hodgkin's B-cell lymphoma. He was caring, gentle, and warm. To know him was to love him; it was impossible not to. He was a good man, a family man; someone who hand built his world — and ours — with kindness, joy, and intention.

Derrick was born in Jamaica, in 1938, and was raised in the small town of Highgate. Even as a boy, he was a tinkerer. He could be found playing with his favorite Meccano erector set or crafting a piece of driftwood into a lamp. He dreamt of life outside Jamaica and later moved to Canada to study engineering at McGill University, a place where his curiosity began to meet structure and discipline. In 1971, he moved to New York City, where he earned a bachelor's in architecture from City College and a master's in civil engineering from Manhattan College. Those degrees suited him perfectly: equal parts imagination and precision.

Just a year after moving to the U.S., Derrick met Thelma: a tall, regal woman whose grace drew him in from across the room. During the very last song at a party, he asked her to dance, and she moved with him as though they'd been partners for years. A few days later, he asked her on a date to a popular supper club, Pemples — the start of a courtship that never ended. Derrick would go on dancing with her, and dating her in his own attentive, steady

ways, for the next five decades.

Derrick and Thelma married in 1975, living in Little Ferry, Oakland, and Byram, N.J., as they raised three children. In addition to being a loving husband, Derrick was a present and involved father: helping with school work, cheering at performances and games, leading thoughtful Sunday dinner discussions, and fostering a love for music.

Though family always came first, Derrick also had a successful career. He spent 34 years working out of Newark Airport for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. He held a variety of roles — draftsman, planner, project manager, and program manager — before retiring in 2005.

In 2011, Derrick and Thelma moved to Cary, N.C., to live out their golden years. They spent their days enjoying friends, music, and theatre; volunteering to get out the vote; visiting their five grandchildren on both coasts; and taking cruises all over the world. Derrick remained strong and active until the end: swimming, exercising, doing pilates, and walking daily. If you met him on a walk, he was easily recognizable by his handsome smile, dignified white beard, and cheerful stride.

Derrick carried a sparkle in his eye that made you feel welcome the moment he looked your way. He delighted in sharing anything he had figured out, and just as eagerly delighted in hearing about what fascinated you. He nurtured people with his genuine interest in them, just as tenderly as he nurtured the little lizards that appeared on his doorstep or the birds that alighted on his bath and feeder — quiet acts of care that revealed the gentleness at his core. There was a warmth and charm about him that made every interaction feel like a small gift. He loved to laugh and was every bit as sweet as the milkshakes he loved to make.

Derrick was nothing if not inquisitive. His calling card was the pen and paper in his breast pocket, which he carried everywhere so he could write down curiosities and questions. As he would say: “All that glitters is not gold but should be observed.” Be it genealogy or geography, he was a researcher at heart; he wanted to understand how everything worked — and why. Something as simple as a new flower could send him down a curiosity rabbit hole. His passion for learning was enriched by his love of travel, through which he explored the history, people, and cultures of places like China, Japan, Egypt, Tunisia, Estonia, and Denmark.

Derrick valued the art of the handmade, and had the creativity, know-how, and dedication to craft almost anything. He built treehouses and bunk beds, Christmas ornaments and Halloween decorations, bird baths and beautiful gardens. He selflessly and consistently showed up for his family in ways big and small: designing his mother-in-law’s salon, writing poems on birthdays, shoveling the driveway solo so everyone else could stay cozy. There was never any question about how much Derrick loved his family: He demonstrated his devotion every day and in every way. Love, to him, was a verb — something you built, fixed, carried, or wrote.

Derrick will be remembered for the time he freely gave to others. For his resemblance to Sean Connery, and for the Jamaican lilt that he never lost. For his steadfast and endearing personality, and for the meticulous way he did everything, including cutting grapefruit. For his big, enveloping hugs. For his love of French onion soup. For the bananas foster he made at the dinner table. For being one in a million: the blueprint of what a husband, father, and man should be.

Derrick is predeceased by his mother, father, and stepfather. He is survived by his younger sister; adoring wife; devoted children; and five grandchildren, his

greatest joy.

A public celebration of life and memorial mass will be held on January 10, 2026 at 1 p.m. at Mother Teresa Catholic Church in Cary, NC. A private family reception will follow. In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes in-memoriam donations to Hurricane Melissa relief through the American Friends of Jamaica (<https://theafj.org/disaster-relief/>).

# Cemetery Details

## Wake Memorial Park

7002 Green Hope School Road  
Cary, NC 27519

# Previous Events

## Memorial Mass

JAN 10. 1:00 PM (ET)

Mother Teresa Catholic Church  
1125 Mother Teresa Drive  
Cary, NC 27519  
[http://\(motherteresacary.org\)](http://(motherteresacary.org))

# Tribute Wall

SE

“ 1 file added to the album *Memories*



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**Sharon Elliott** - January 05 at 06:43 PM

SE

“ 2 files added to the album *Memories*



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**Sharon Elliott** - January 04 at 01:58 AM

“ I knew our cousin Derrick since I was a baby, but I was three when he came into focus. That’s when he (18), came to live with our family in Kingston for a time. I do remember that far back, especially just his clear presence, the sweet, fun, safe brother we’d always wanted. Perhaps this early bonding is what laid the groundwork for us to become such cherished friends in our latter years, even across thousands of miles.



As I try to articulate Derrick’s outstanding, even unique, qualities for this tribute, these come to mind:

He approached everything and everyone with the fascination and rapt attention of someone who had suddenly gained sight for the first time. He was foremost an explorer, an archeologist, eager to exuberantly show, in the moment, whatever he uncovered. And I mean whatever. It could be something inside the Familia Sagrada, under his kaput dishwasher, or a detail in a photo others scarcely glanced it. And off on another adventure we’d merrily go...

Possessing a seemingly ideal balance of Yin and Yang, his masculinity came across in quiet, solid strength. Derrick lived grounded in his own power, making him refreshingly, not a bulldozer of man, but a creator. He had such an innate sense of permission (vs entitlement), it was as easy for him to stand up for himself as a child as it was to carve his lovely path in life.

Not once did I hear him blow his own horn. Ironically, he easily promoted and credited the achievements of those around him – especially God.

I can’t imagine anything pleasing Derrick more than sitting around his dinner table with his entire family.

Derrick fooled everyone by being so active, alert, ostensibly healthy, making it easy for his actual age, or associated vulnerability, never to cross our minds. Consequently, his sudden illness came as a shock to us all, no less himself.

*Derrick was as kindhearted as he was stimulating and inspiring, so many will feel his absence. I send condolences to every person who was blessed to be in his flock.*

*Derrick:*

*"[I] can be. Be and be better. For [you] existed." Safe in the Universe. Safe in my heart. Thank you for choosing to play with me from my earliest to recent memories. I will always miss you and the precious time we spent "in each other's orbit", as you would say.*

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**Sharon Elliott** - December 31, 2025 at 04:51 AM

SE

“ 4 files added to the album Favourites



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**Sharon Elliott** - December 25, 2025 at 08:15 PM

SE

*Derrick, it's Xmas day and what am I doing? Right about now I'd be emailing you. The best way I found to reach you today was through some recordings we both liked, notes we traveled together. Playing these now, my birdies are hitting the high ones, which is what I need. (I didn't mean to pick mostly Celine but she really does reach into the heart strings, eh?) I think the last one you sent me was Jeff Buckley. You wondered if I'd heard it...I hadn't, but said that I loved the male treatment of the song...you said, you did however prefer KD's version at the Olympics...Sorry mi'dear, that's all I got for now. Merry Xmas love.*

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**Sharon Elliott** - December 25, 2025 at 08:35 PM

JN

“ *Derrick and I had the Honor of sharing two Sons from different Mothers Thank you for making me part of your family and being part of mine*

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**james nigro** - December 23, 2025 at 07:49 PM

JH

“ *Derrick had a loving heart. His poem to Thelma on her birthday brought tears to all. He was a role model for me.*

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**john harvey** - December 17, 2025 at 12:33 PM

DA

“ *For as long as I can remember it was always just Derrick and me, my Mom& Dad. He was my brother, 5 years older than me and my protector.*

*It seems because of our age difference we were always going in different directions. Separate high schools , he to university in Canada, me to New York and after each married he settled in New Jersey and me in New York. However, through it all I could always count on Derrick to answer my call for help, guidance and figuring out a solution to any problem-always the Engineer.*

*Derrick, I love you with all my heart, and will forever miss you until we meet again. Rest In Peace my dear brother, your loving sister Deanna*

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**Deanna Adolphus** - December 16, 2025 at 11:02 AM



*Derrick was such a perfect gentleman, always kind, considerate, and gracious. He was a real joy to be around. The official obituary accurately described his insatiable curiosity. That pulled up a memory for me when after a birthday dinner honoring Thelma I had noted Nina toast that in marrying her he had "married up" and had "out kicked his coverage." The next day he sent me the results of a Google search on both comments. Our world was a much better place with him in it but we are blessed with a deep treasury of memories of this wonderful man.*

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**Cader Howard** - December 16, 2025 at 04:31 PM