



## Douglas Renwick Caldwell

August 7, 1954 - February 1, 2025

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA — Douglas R. Caldwell, 70, passed away peacefully at home February 1, 2025, after a brief illness, surrounded by his loving family and faithful St. Bernard, Finn. A native of Northampton, MA, he was born to Renwick K., M.D. and Justine (Mintie) Caldwell in 1954, where he joined his two doting sisters, Marjorie and Pamela. Doug attended local public schools where he excelled in academics and was a member of the band, swim and cross-country teams. Later, he headed to Dartmouth College where he forged lifelong friendships and discovered his love for geography. He went on to earn master's Degrees at both the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Edinburgh. Geography to Doug wasn't just a major or springboard to a semi-related career, but a passion he segued into a 40-year career with the federal government. After a short stint with the then-known Defense Mapping Agency, he found his permanent home in Alexandria, VA, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its everchanging alphabet of research and development agencies. His endless knowledge of maps, features and place names culminated in his appointment as the Department of Defense's representative to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, serving as its Chair from 2013-2015.

Doug was so much more than what he did professionally. He was a critical thinker and lifelong student who read voraciously. He believed in the power of books and education to lift up and inform, to help people make wise choices

about their lives and who they select to lead them. Being in Doug's orbit meant you were surrounded by his unerring kindness, patience, gentle humor and loyalty. His humble, creative nature made him an ideal mentor to many friends and colleagues throughout his lifetime. In 2017, he and his wife Sandy moved to Charlottesville, VA, where he embraced his retirement and volunteered his geographic knowledge with the Charlottesville Fire Department and Smart Cville Center for Civic Innovation Information. Doug's favorite place was home with his family. He was overjoyed to become "Pop" to his grandchildren Alden and Renwick Swab and begin to share his love of reading with them. To his children John and Meg Swab (Robby) he was their north star, gently illustrating by his daily example how to choose the honest, moral, ethical course of action in every situation. To Sandy, he was simply her world.

Two services are planned. The first will be Sunday, March 23, 2025 at 1 PM in Northampton, MA, at Edwards Church. A second service will be held Sunday, May 18, 2025 at 1 PM at Jefferson Funeral Chapel in Alexandria, VA

If you would like to make a contribution in Doug's memory, please consider your local library or literacy organization.

# Previous Events

## Gathering

MAY 18. 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (ET)

Jefferson Funeral Chapel  
5755 Castlewellan Dr  
Alexandria, VA 22315-5516  
(703) 971-7400

## Celebration of Life

MAY 18. 1:00 PM (ET)

Jefferson Funeral Chapel  
5755 Castlewellan Dr  
Alexandria, VA 22315-5516  
(703) 971-7400

# Tribute Wall



“ Jefferson Funeral Chapel created a Webcast in memory of Douglas Renwick Caldwell



Jefferson Funeral Chapel - April 21, 2025 at 01:10 PM

RS

Our love for your family, Tom and Raquel

Raquel Spangler - May 18, 2025 at 02:11 PM

ML

“ Mary L. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Douglas Renwick Caldwell.

Mary L. - May 18, 2025 at 10:28 PM

RA

“ Ric A. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Douglas Renwick Caldwell.

Ric A. - May 18, 2025 at 12:45 PM

NF

“ I agree with everyone saying that Doug was such a kind person. He came to the rescue more than once!

*Doug and I worked at the Topographic Engineering Center together although we were not in the same group. The first time I attended the ESRI Conference in San Diego we happened to be in the same hotel far away from the conference. My co-worker, Sue Mayo, and I weren't authorized to get a rental car so we show up from the airport and the first bad sign was there was a lovely establishment directly across the parking lot called "Les Girls" and it didn't have any windows... Sue and I left the hotel together around 7 am to get the trolley to the conference and had to walk under an overpass past a very popular 24 hour liquor store. Well Sue was friends with Doug and tracked him down and asked if he could please give us a ride the next day and save us from walking through the neighborhood around the hotel. Of course Doug obliged and was so kind and made sure we had a ride both ways each day. It was so much fun getting to chat with him at the conference, and so grateful the sketchy neighborhood brought us together. Thanks Doug!!! And thanks for always being so positive and helpful with your big smile and clever GIS brain!*

—Nancy

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**Nancy Ferris** - May 18, 2025 at 12:36 AM

“ True friends are such a blessing. I am privileged that Doug was such a friend. I met Doug back in the early 1990s at work, at what was then known as the U.S. Army Topographic Engineering Center (TEC). Doug was senior to me, but I did not work under him. I actually never worked on any project with Doug. However, I found myself gravitating to his office more and more over the years just to talk and pick his brain. What he knew about mapping and geography was incredible and he was always learning, always looking ahead. He was one of the most curious people I have ever known. His interests were vast and he was always reading. I was constantly asking what he was reading. He was generous and kind. Those are words that you often hear when others refer to Doug. He was the kind of person that made you a better person just by being around him. The world needs more men like Doug.

He was also very funny, but not in an obvious way. He was clever with his humor and he was pretty good at pulling my leg until I would catch on. One prank he pulled that I remember fondly involved the author Alistair McLean. He was a British writer from the 60s and 70s who specialized in adventure/military novels. I was always bragging about how good “The Guns of Navarone”, “Ice Station Zebra”, and “HMS Ulysses” were. One day Doug told me that he had started reading books by McLean based on my recommendations. He had read my favorites, but he had also read others. I admired that. He said that in particular, he liked “Circus” and that it was better than ‘HMS Ulysses.” I lost it. Are you kidding me? “Circus” was a known clunker (and I mean real clunker) - there was no comparison. I went into a big speech picking apart “Circus” and got really wound up. After letting me go on for a while I noticed that Doug had broken out into a grin and I realized that he had set me up. We had a good laugh about that. What got me was how he had actually taken the time to research McLean and find an obvious stinker which he knew would wind me up. Also related to Doug’s humor was his laugh – he had one of the world’s all-time great laughs. I will miss Doug - his generosity, kindness, humor, and especially his laugh.

*Brian Graff*

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**Brian Graff** - May 16, 2025 at 06:13 AM



“ *Tender Tribute was purchased for the family of Douglas Renwick Caldwell.*



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May 12, 2025 at 11:13 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Douglas Renwick Caldwell.

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May 12, 2025 at 11:13 AM



“ *I never heard Doug say a negative thing. He focused on others even in this. He was the kind of person who asked questions and he was interested in the answers, naturally curious, knowledgeable, smart. Kind. It's even sad to write about him in past tense. Gone too soon.*



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**Joyce** - April 22, 2025 at 10:23 PM