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SINGER, Dr. Jerome

Dr. Jerome B. Singer dies at 82; former Westerly dentist, veteran

WESTERLY — Dr. Jerome Benedict Singer, 82, of 16 Happy Valley Rd., a long-time Westerly dentist noted for telling jokes to set his patients at ease — and also an athlete, adventurer and world traveler — died Sunday at the Westerly Nursing Home. He was the husband of Pearl "Petey" (Cohen) Singer.

Dr. Singer, who took a whitewater rafting trip down the Salmon River in Idaho when he was in his 60s, was an accomplished swimmer and water polo player who won several championship medals as a New York City schoolboy. He later won trophies at South County golf courses.

His swimming ability earned him the nickname "the Fish" in his youth, when he was a lifeguard in New York.

It was another talent, horseback riding, that led him to his future wife. At a stable where both had gone independently, her mount, spooked by a cement truck, galloped off the bridle path. After she had brought the horse under control and dismounted at the stable, Dr. Singer struck up a conversation by invoking some classic advice — he urged her to get back on the horse right away.

A 1935 graduate of the New York University School of Dentistry, he practiced in New York City until 1941, when he moved to Westerly. In addition to practicing there, he spent one day a week providing dental services on Block Island.

Until his retirement in 1985, Dr. Singer's sense of humor — and compassion — played a significant role in his practice. He developed a repertoire of one-liners to ease his patients' anxieties. Many of his younger patients recalled even in their adult years his typical greeting to children: "How's your belly button?"

With his wife, Dr. Singer traveled worldwide, taking photographs meant to show both the richness of cultural diversity and the similarities of human experience.

After his retirement he visited Israel, where he volunteered for a month to perform dental services in a kibbutz.

Dr. Singer served in the Coast Guard as a lieutenant j.g. during World War II. Later, when asked his thoughts about mortality, he replied that he was unafraid of death, and that when the time came he would salute his new Commander and say "Aye, Aye, Sir. Jerome B. Singer reporting for duty."

He was a past president of the Westerly and New London Dental Associations, and a member of the Providence Dental Association.

Dr. Singer was a son of the late Herman and Sophie (Stein) Singer.

Besides his wife he leaves a son, Paul F. Singer of Richmond; a daughter, Karen S. Baker of Northville, Mich., and two grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Thursday at 10 a.m. at Congregation Sharah Zedek, Union Street.