



Harrison Case Dunning

JUL 27, 1938 - MAR 31, 2025



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Harrison (“Hap”) Case Dunning died at midnight on March 31, 2025, at Alta Bates Summit hospital in Oakland, at age 86. He passed away peacefully, holding hands with his two children. A longtime resident of Davis, Hap was professor of law at UC Davis.

He was born on July 27, 1938, in Philadelphia, Pa., to Harrison Freeman Dunning and Kathleen Mulligan Dunning. He graduated from Swarthmore High School (1956), where he was a National Merit Scholar; Dartmouth College (1960), where he was valedictory speaker; and Harvard Law School (1964), where he was active in civil rights work.

He belonged to a local chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality that worked on housing discrimination in Boston. He participated in the March on Washington in August 1963, where he was greatly moved by Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Hap’s moot court team at Harvard argued before a bench that included Thurgood Marshall, later Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

After pursuing graduate work in African studies at the London School of Economics and in civil law in France, Hap taught law for four years at Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, an experience that contributed to his abiding interest in Africa.

Upon joining the faculty at UC Davis, Hap initiated a course in water law, which became his passion and the focus of the rest of his professional career. In the late 1970s, he served as executive officer of the Governor’s Commission to Review California Water Rights Law.

He later served on the California Water Commission and the Bay Delta Advisor Council, and he sat on the board of directors of several nonprofits, including among others The Bay Institute of San Francisco, the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, and the Tuolumne River Trust. Much of his scholarship dealt with the application of the public trust doctrine to water rights. In



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its landmark decision on that topic in 1983, the California Supreme Court cited the papers from a major conference Hap organized at UC Davis in 1980.

Hap was given the Defender of the Trust award from the Mono Lake Committee in 2014 “for his extraordinary work defending the public trust and protecting the public’s natural heritage at Mono Lake and its tributary streams.”

Hap was a dedicated teacher who received the William & Sally Rutter Distinguished Teaching Award in 1996 at the UC Davis School of Law. He maintained long-standing friendships and mentoring relations with many of his former students. He was also a stalwart member of the Davis community who could be found many Wednesday evenings enjoying live music at Central Park with friends.

Hap was hugely dedicated to his family and his friends, several of whom he had known for more than 60 years. He was also a passionate world traveler and skier and remained active with alumni of Dartmouth. An epitaph written for his father applies equally well to Hap: “strong of will, tender of spirit.”

Hap prepared a beautiful memoir for his grandchildren, which included his words of wisdom that encapsulate Hap’s values in life: “work hard at your studies and what you love;” “be an activist!;” “carpe diem!;” “nurture friendships & accept them for what they are;” “enjoy your family!;” and “eat chocolate!”

Hap is survived by his daughter Ashley Kathleen Dunning, son-in-law Ken Sorey, and their children Casey and Jake Dunning-Sorey, of Oakland; his son Thad Stephen Dunning, daughter-in-law Jennifer Bussell, and their children Thalia and Clio Bussell, also of Oakland; his sister Kathleen Dunning and her partner Kath Williams; his sister-in-law Roxy Dunning, nephew Benjamin Dunning and his family, niece Sarah Park and her family, and nephew David Dunning and his family; and beloved first and second cousins and their families. His death was preceded by that of his brother, Stephen Dunning. He will be sorely missed by all.

The family is planning a private burial in Connecticut, where Hap will be placed in a plot next to those of his mother and father. In the family tradition, he will have an epitaph that memorializes two drivers in his life: “devoted to family, committed to public good.” Separately, there will be a memorial gathering for Hap at his home in Davis.



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In lieu of flowers, the family asks that friends consider a donation to the “Harrison ‘Hap’ C. Dunning Founders’ Circle” Cascade Fund of the Tuolumne River Trust or the Harrison F. Dunning scholarship fund at Dartmouth College.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Harrison by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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