



## R. Wade Ortel

June 27, 2024

R. Wade Ortel, age 95, of Wakefield and Block Island, RI, passed away peacefully at home on June 27, 2024.

Born Nov. 12, 1928, in Baltimore, MD to Dorothy Werner and W. LeRoy Ortel, Wade's life was characterized by boundless curiosity about the world and a desire to help others. He attended Gettysburg College (class of 1951), where he majored in physics, played soccer and was a member of the Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity. In his senior year, he met the love of his life, Jane Drennen, whom he married in 1955.

Strongly influenced by the Christian values with which he was raised, Wade spent one year at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg then received his M-Div degree from Yale Divinity School (Class of 1954) before deciding that he could better serve people in need through medicine. He graduated from the University of Maryland Medical School in 1958.

Following his medical internship and surgical residency, Wade and Jane moved in 1960 with daughter Dee (born 1959) to Kotzebue, Alaska above the Arctic Circle where Wade was apart of the U.S. Public Health Service for two years, treating Native Alaskans in Kotzebue and 20 remote villages across 70,000 miles, to which he traveled by dog sled and prop plane. Daughter Jo was born in 1961.

From 1962-67, Wade served as the Island physician on Block Island, twelve miles off the coast of Rhode Island. Son Jim was born in 1965. Jane and Wade cherished the Island friendships they made, many centered around their love of chamber music and art.

The Ortels moved to Williston, Vermont in 1967, where Wade completed a residency in rheumatology at the University of Vermont and served on the medical faculty at UVM for ten years. The family enjoyed many camping vacations in the northeast filled with sailing, canoeing, swimming and discovery.

In 1977, the Ortels moved to Wheeling and subsequently Morgantown, WV, where Wade taught at West Virginia University Medical School, profoundly impacting students – particularly in the area of medical ethics. Following his retirement from WVU in 1987, he and Jane moved back to Block Island and became involved with the Nature Conservancy, the public library and spending time with grandchildren. He also participated in paleontological “digs” in Montana and England, and worked as a volunteer with Yale University on dinosaur excavation projects. He and Jane enjoyed playing chamber music, attending concerts and working for world peace with fellow Quakers.

A true intellectual, Wade spent every free minute reading and thinking. He sought to understand the nature of the human condition through his study of science, philosophy and religion. His sense of wonder about the world led to his lifelong fascination with astronomy, paleontology, and archaeology. His sensitive nature fueled his deep love and knowledge of classical music, his humor infused the cartoon drawings he doodled, and his contemplation of nature manifested in his watercolor sketches and paintings.

But it was his wife to whom Wade was most devoted. From the time they met,

he and Jane shared a remarkable love story, rooted in profound mutual respect and admiration, common values and intellectual curiosity. They spent many hours discussing political affairs, science, philosophy, art, music and history, and truly enjoyed each other's company.

Wade is survived by daughters Dee Sparks and Jo Ortel, son Jim and daughter-in-law Marion S. Ortel; grandchildren Lucas Wade and Tory Adna Sparks, and Brooke Stephan and Wade Christian Ortel. He is also survived by his sister Nancy Mehl. He is preceded in death by his wife Jane, parents and brother Richard W. Ortel.