On Tuesday, December 20, 2005, Dr. Bradford Cannon died at his daughter’s home in Lincoln, Massachusetts, surrounded by family and friends. He was 98 years old and was very active until the end.

Dr. Cannon was the son of Dr. W. B. Cannon, a world-renowned professor at Harvard Medical School who contributed in a significant way to our understanding of physiology and coined the term “fight or flight mechanism” to describe the adrenal response to stress. His mother, an accomplished author, was Cornelia James Cannon. Dr. Cannon grew up near Harvard Yard, having attended public schools in this area. He was one of five siblings, and upon completing college and medical school at Harvard in 1933, he trained in general and plastic surgery at Washington University in St. Louis.

Dr. Cannon was a pioneer in plastic surgery and plastic surgery education in Boston. He started apprenticeship opportunities for people who had been trained in general surgery to ultimately sit for the American Board of Plastic Surgery examination. This process preceded formal residencies in plastic surgery in Boston and the initiation of formal residency training at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital. Dr. Cannon started the first division of plastic surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1970 and was its first residency chairman.

Returning to Massachusetts General Hospital after training, he played a major role in providing care for the burn survivors of the Cocoanut Grove fire in Boston in 1942.

Dr. Cannon played a major role at Valley Forge General Hospital in Pennsylvania, where he was the chief of the plastic surgery section caring for World War II victims. This was a defining time for plastic surgery, as many of plastic surgery’s leaders spent time at Valley Forge and went on to establish divisions and departments of plastic surgery throughout the United States.

Dr. Cannon was beloved by his fellow colleagues and trainees in plastic surgery not only for his intelligence and skill as a surgeon but also because of the remarkable balance, which he taught in life by example. He and Ellen DeNormandie Cannon lived in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where they raised their five children. He always seemed to have time for both a stellar career in plastic surgery and an extraordinary family.

As described by his daughter, Dr. Cannon was a child of the Great Depression who never forgot how to save and make do. His practical advice regarding plastic surgery and life in general was very much appreciated by all who worked with him. Dr. Cannon was clinical professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School and was president of the New England Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, the Boston Surgical Society, and, in 1958, the American Association of Plastic Surgeons.
Dr. Cannon is survived by his sister, Marian Cannon Schlesinger, of Cambridge; three sons, Dr. Walter B. Cannon, of Palo Alto, California, Robert Laurent Cannon, of Centennial, Colorado, and Dr. Woodward Cannon, of Raleigh, North Carolina; his daughter, Sarah Cannon Holden; 14 grandchildren; and eight great grandchildren, plus many nieces and nephews. Dr. Cannon taught and lived integrity and compassion. We will miss him.

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