Dennis Anthony Xuereb, M.D.

Dennis was born on the small island of Malta on May 20,1944 just as WWII was winding down. Malta, situated strategically in the Mediterranean Sea between Sicily to the north and Africa to the south, had been pummeled mercilessly by the Axis. In recognition of its bravery the country, which was a British colony at the time, was awarded the George Cross by King George VI in 1942. The cross has been incorporated in the national flag ever since.

Dennis’s parents, Erminia Camilleri and Emanuel (Manu’) Xuereb came from working class families. Just having a steady paying job was the key to middle class status and Manu’ had that. Erminia was a full-time home maker though she had had higher aspirations. Opportunities for women were practically nonexistent at the time. She was determined to put all her efforts into her children’s education and Dennis, being her eldest, was the first beneficiary of his mother’s drive. These days she would have been considered a ‘tiger mom’.

Dennis attended Montessori elementary boys’ school after some 18 months at pre-school. High school was at The Lyceum, the primary state-run boys’ high school. Subjects included four languages - the official two national languages Maltese and English, plus Italian and French. Dennis loved languages; physics and chemistry not so much. He finished high school at 16 and entered university for two years of general studies before embarking on medical studies. Medicine was neither an aspiration nor a vocation for Dennis - he almost landed in medical school on a whim. That probably explains his lifelong love/hate relationship with medicine. Regardless, he graduated M.D. in 1967 from his alma mater - the Royal University of Malta.

Study was not all encompassing for Dennis in his youth. He was a member of the Legion of Mary for many years. He joined an adult choir specializing in Italian songs only taking a break when studies got really serious in the clinical years. He played soccer at every opportunity and spent his annual summer vacations swimming daily. He also loved travel and a lack of family finances did not stand in his way. In an early iteration of today’s ‘go fund me’ he politely contacted relatives overseas requesting donations. This allowed him to spend month long clinical clerkships at hospitals in London, Berlin and Copenhagen during the summers of 65 and 66. The cherry on the cake though was an 8 year ‘courtship’ of his sweetheart Monica Mallia who became a school teacher and whom he would eventually marry.

Mary Rose, Dennis’s sister was, and is, 2 ½ years younger. Her schooling was at the hands of the Sisters of St Joseph from pre-school right through high school. After graduating she worked at the Barclays Bank until she married. Eventually she, her husband Henry Naudi and their 1 year old son James would emigrate to Canada.

Dennis’s younger brother Anton was the most promising student in the family until, half way through high school, he showed signs of schizophrenia. He spent the rest of his life in and out of institutions and he tragically passed away at 52 breaking the hearts of the family, especially his mother’s.

Following graduation from med school Dennis did 18 months of internship while deciding on a choice of specialty for a career. He decided on obstetrics and gynecology. From early on in med school Dennis had intended to emigrate. His girlfriend was in agreement and they jointly decide to move to Canada. They married in 1968 and flew to Canada a year later.

Dennis was accepted to do his residency at the Ob/Gyn department of Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. The newlyweds loved the city on the shore of Lake Ontario where the St Lawrence River starts its travel east towards the Atlantic. They were warmly received which made their assimilation in their new country easy.

Five months after arrival Marc was born, followed a year later by Michelle. Monica’s father (53) back in Malta passed away following a massive heart attack just before Michelle’s birth. Soon thereafter Monica’s mom packed up her other five children and moved to Toronto. Thus, Dennis and Monica had family to visit a mere two-hour drive away.

Dennis passed his FRCSC exams (Canadian equivalent of American Boards) in 1973 and plans for their next move led to their going to North York which is at the north east of Toronto. His practice was based around North York General Hospital. This was the golden era for obstetrics and gynecology with fetal monitoring, ultrasound, IVF, microsurgery and laparoscopy all coming of age concurrently. Dennis enjoyed teaching students from the University of Toronto. But possibly his most ambitious endeavor consisted in the assembling of a group of motivated social workers, nurses, and chaplains to provide support to parents experiencing pregnancy loss.

Dennis and Monica’s social circles grew exponentially in the late 70s when a new wave of emigres from Malta arrived. Toronto went from being a sleepy, mostly white Anglo-Saxon enclave to a bustling, cosmopolitan and multilingual powerhouse in a decade and continues to grow to this day.

Dennis and Monica’s younger son Steven was born in 1975. All three children went to the local Catholic elementary school followed by high school at Catholic colleges. All three did well. Marc took political sciences at the University of Waterloo, Michelle studied architecture at the same university, while Steven read mechanical engineering at Queens University in Kingston. They are all settled with their respective spouses and four grandchildren have blessed the families - Silas is 21, Hazel 12, Miral 6 and Malik 3.

Stormy weather hit the Xuereb household in the early 90s. Dennis and Monica’s marriage broke up and medical politics brought turmoil to Dennis’s department. All this prompted Dennis to move one more time - this time by himself, to the US specifically to QC, Iowa.

Coming from his positive Canadian experience with single payor universal healthcare Dennis chose to look for a salaried position in his new country. He found the best fit in a women’s clinic catering to marginalized, uninsured or under-insured patients. The Maternal Health Center (later Edgerton WHC) gave Dennis an opportunity to teach Ob/Gyn residents and family medicine students affiliated with the University of Iowa. Later on recent midwife graduates joined the staff and Dennis enjoyed working with them too.

Dennis remarried in 1996. His new wife Patrice May came with two young daughters, Melissa and Katie as well as Sheena the dog. Patrice was a nurse at MHC until she switched to a day surgery center working with ophthalmologists and urologists. The girls switched to Bettendorf schools from Davenport ones. After high school they both attended college for a couple of years. Katie moved to Minnesota where she is married to Matt Paolo and has two children, Marley 9 and Kylie 7. Melissa has a young boy Roman, also 9.

Just as Dennis and Patrice were looking forward to retirement Dennis received a pink slip from the women’s clinic, he had served for 11 years. Not ready to completely retire Dennis took a job in Muscatine and stayed for three years. He called it quits in 2008.

In retirement Dennis looked for incentives to keep him busy and useful. He turned to his parish of St Anthony in downtown Davenport. There he co-founded an adult Grief Support Group thus rekindling his previous experience with a Perinatal Grief Group. He started to lector at Mass and joined the ‘Bread Brigade’ which collects early stale bread from supermarkets for distribution to the poor and homeless at the McAnthony Window of the parish.

Dennis took over cooking duties at home. Surprisingly Patrice did not put up much of a fight. Things were chugging along nicely until in November 2018 Dennis found out he had advanced cancer of the pancreas. Progression is rapid and unrelenting.