Obituary for Sylvia Onesti Richardson, MD, September 12,1920 - October 24, 2014

Sylvia Onesti Richardson, MD, a renowned physician, educator, and Tampa resident since 1980, died in her home on Friday, October 24. She was 94 years old. She is survived by her brother, Dr. Silvio Onesti of Cambridge, Massachusetts; her sons William and Christopher; and her grandchildren, Lucas, Michael, Eva, Will, Anna and Sophia.

Dr. Richardson’s educational background includes a B.A. in Speech and Drama from Stanford University (1940); M.A. in Education from Columbia University (1942); M.D. from McGill University; and an Honorary Doctor of Literature from Emerson College. She received her training in Pediatrics from the Montreal Children's Hospital and from the Boston Children's Medical Center. She was also an ASHA certified Speech/Language Pathologist *(CCC/Sp)* and a Montessori primary teacher, certified by the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the Association Montessori International (AMI).

Dr. Richardson’s many academic appointments include: Teaching Fellowship at Harvard University; Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Oklahoma; Clinical Professor of Pediatrics – College of Medicine, University of Cincinnati; Distinguished Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Emeritus Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of South Florida, where she began teaching in 1981.

Sylvia Richardson’s passionate advocacy for children with language and learning disorders formed the spine of her long and distinguished career. In 1949 she established at Boston Children's Medical Center the first Speech-Language Clinic in any children's hospital in the United States. While at the University of Oklahoma, she created the Child Study Center and became involved in the use of Montessori educational methods for children with learning disabilities. In Cincinnati, she was a founding member of the Hamilton County Diagnostic Center for Children with Learning Disabilities and the founding editor of Children’s House magazine. She was President of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in 1973-74, Chair of the Professional Advisory Board of the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) for nine years, and President of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, formerly the Orton Dyslexia Society) from 1984-88. She was a member of the founding Board of Directors of the American Montessori Society in 1964. In 1970 she was invited to the White House Conference on Children and in 1977 was appointed to the President’s Commission on Mental Health. She was Chair of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities from 1997-1999, and a member for 30 years. She was past President of the Multidisciplinary Academy of Clinical Education, and founding past President of the Florida Branch of the IDA.

Dr. Richardson has contributed much to the literature of her field (over 100 publications including the book, *Something’s Wrong With My Child: A Parent’s Book About Children with Learning Disabilities, 1973*), and her consultant appointments have been many at state, national and international levels. She received numerous honors, including 1964 Oklahoma Woman of the Year, the LDAA Learning Disability Award, the Honors of the American Speech – Language – Hearing Association; the Samuel T. Orton Award, the Pioneer Award, and the Rawson Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Dyslexia Association (IDA); the Distinguished Alumna Award from Teachers College, Columbia University; the Arrowsmith Award from the New England Network for Learning Disabilities; and the Pioneer Award from the Learning Disabilities Assoc.(LDAA).

While Sylvia Richardson’s professional accomplishments are an indication of her remarkable intelligence, energy and drive, they are only a part of her amazing life. She was married to the love of her life for 44 years. Her husband, William R. Richardson, M.D., was a distinguished pediatric surgeon and Professor of Pediatric Surgery at the University of South Florida Medical School from 1980 – 1994, the year of his death. Sylvia had followed him from Boston to Oklahoma to Cincinnati and, finally, Tampa. She blazed her own unique trail in each of those communities. In Tampa, in addition to her professional contributions, she was an active member of the Athena Society, and especially their Young Women of Promise Award program, which has been renamed in her honor. She was a strong supporter of the arts, especially the Straz Center for the Performing Arts, and she loved to attend performances there.

Sylvia and Bill raised two sons, William C. Richardson (Chip), and Christopher L. Richardson. Despite their parents’ busy professional lives, their sons always knew that they were Mom and Dad first and foremost. Some of their strongest family memories are of summers at their beach house on Hilton Head Island, where the ocean, tennis and many summer friends were the main attractions. Chip, with his spouse Patrice Kehoe, and Chris, with his spouse Lenie Richardson, each raised three children. Eva, Will and Anna (Chip and Patrice in Maryland) and Lucas, Michael and Sophia (Chris and Lenie in Colorado). They were Sylvia’s pride and joy. She attended many graduations from high schools and colleges, and this past June travelled to Kansas City to see her first grandchild, Lucas, get married. Her grandchildren think they had the most amazing Grandma around.

While Sylvia travelled all over the U.S. and abroad for her professional career, and she and Bill travelled together many times, it was after his death in 1994 that she began, with her dear friend and colleague Sue Hindman, to really broaden her international horizons. She and Sue took small active cruises to countries all over the world. She also took her grandsons Lucas and Michael, then 11 and 9, on an Alaskan cruise on a compact, 50-passenger boat. In 2010, her final voyage took her and Sue to the Peruvian rainforest.

Her passing was a great loss for all who knew her, but there can be no doubt that this remarkable woman lived her life to the fullest and left strong impressions on everyone she met. She had a meaningful life, a loving family and she made a wonderful difference in the lives of many children and families.

A memorial service will take place on Saturday, November 8 at the Hyde Park United Methodist Church. 500 W. Platt St., Tampa FL 33606. Service at 10:00 a.m. to be followed by a reception at the church.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), 40 York Road, 4th Floor, Baltimore, MD 21204 or [www.interdys.org/DonateMemorialGifts.htm](http://www.interdys.org/DonateMemorialGifts.htm).