

## Obituary

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# A Tribute to Martha Clare Morris, ScD: A Zest for Life and a Passion for Science



The year of 2020 will be remembered for many things; a pandemic, protests, raging fires, a contentious election. But our first memory of 2020 will always be that of losing a dear friend and colleague, Dr. Martha Clare Morris.

She died on February 15, 2020, at the age of 64, but her life and legacy will live on in her science, within her family and with her many friends and colleagues.

Both Dr. Aggarwal and I knew Martha Clare for almost 24 years working at Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center which partnered with and early on resided together within the structure of the Rush Institute on Healthy Aging at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois. We came to Rush at the same time to continue our careers, Dr. Aggarwal, a cognitive neurologist researcher, and myself, a neurologist/neuropathologist researcher in Alzheimer's disease. We knew little about nutritional epidemiology but we quickly were engaged by Martha Clare's enthusiasm for the science and equally with her zest for life, family, and friends. Martha Clare loved to enjoy food, adventure, travel, and celebrations. One

of my favorite memories (and there are many) was my husband and I spending a day, exploring, and eating, morning into late evening, in Paris in 2001 ("we will always have Paris" she would always smile and say); for Dr. Aggarwal and her husband it was sharing a special voyage on an evening boat cruise on Lake Michigan.

Both of us did not know much of her early story that was shared by her family's lovely tribute and memorial to her life. Their stories of her vivacity, career, friends, travel, outdoors, and adventure as seen through the eyes of her family were extraordinary and touched us deeply.

Martha Clare Morris (nee Chinn) was born in Homewood, Illinois. She received her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science from University of Iowa. She followed this with a doctorate, ScD at Harvard School of Public Health. During this time, she was starting her family and married the love of her life, James Morris. She was recruited by Dr. Denis Evans to Rush in 1992 where her research in the nutritional epidemiology in aging and dementia grew within the Chicago Health and Aging Project (CHAP). She was fascinated with the role of diet in health and the prevention of disease, especially Alzheimer's disease and Alzheimer's disease related disorders. Her early work in CHAP was foundational in establishing that dietary components can be examined within the context of a rigorous epidemiological population study. Importantly she had the vision to see that these epidemiologic nutrition studies could extend to other cohorts and be enhanced by studying varied population demographics, deep phenotyping, and biologic factors. She extended her work to include the Rush

Memory and Aging Project, where she could link nutrients not only to cognitive health outcomes but also motoric aging changes, resilience, and blood and brain tissue changes. Her vision further expanded into a novel clinical trial on dietary interventions to prevent dementia which is ongoing.

In 2015, Dr. Morris published the positive findings from her MIND (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) diet in *Alzheimer's and Dementia*. The MIND diet was based on the Mediterranean diet, DASH diet, and her own research in the prevention of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease and focused on green leafy vegetables and berries. The manuscript was followed by a rapid advance of her research and publications, and by her book "Diet for the MIND" in which she included recipes, co-authored with her daughter Laura and published in 2017.

Though her life's work was tragically cut short, there were already many achievements. Dr. Morris Clare published over 80 articles in peer-reviewed journals, was awarded numerous prestigious grants and awards, chaired NIH study sections, and presented her work nationally and internationally. Dr. Morris was a Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, Section of Community and Epidemiology, Assistant Provost of Community Research, and Director of the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging at the Rush University Medical Center.

Martha Clare always had a vision for her work. She was also a careful listener and had an incredible academic presence, open to other viewpoints, directions in research, and eager to learn how it could impact research participants, clinic patients, and the communities they lived in. She embraced novel and forward-thinking projects, e.g., post-stroke cognitive decline and dementia, the microbiome and dementia, and simultaneous interventions to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. She helped to pave new trails, her work making and continuing to make tremendous progress.

Martha Clare was extraordinarily energetic, and she had a terrific laugh, smile, and passion for her life and work. She and her family helped create lovely

(and healthy) celebrations in her home for the accomplishments and special life events of her friends and family. While her personal life went through tragic downturns, with the prolonged end of life for her dearly beloved husband and father of her 3 children, she never lost the ability to light up a room, open the doors of opportunity and friendship, connect with people of all backgrounds, and have purpose in her life. This purpose was her family, friends, and science. She spoke often of the accomplishments of her 3 children, Clare, Laura, and Patrick, and later of her adoration of her precious grandchildren and her daughter's special yoga house of retreat.

With her numerous academic accolades, Martha Clare believed and proved that women could accomplish all things in life that are possible. She, however, did not pretend this was an easy feat and recognized the struggles and uphill battles not only for herself but for all women.

When we both met Martha Clare, she organized a women's book club for the increasing number of women faculty in our group and planned directed readings and discussions. It was a special opportunity to explore a difficult landscape and be among friends. Looking back, it is now clear that Martha Clare's was a true advocate for a woman's ability to create meaningful change and contribute deeply to science. For those who had the privilege of working with Dr. Morris, her dedication and passion for bringing nutrition science to the forefront in aging and dementia research was truly inspirational for all. Let her joy and love of life, family and friends, and her profound sense of purpose be an inspiration to us all.

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