

Professor Nathan Alexander Remembered

Smile

Memories are tricky. We cherry-pick them, manufacture them, forget them, enhance or diminish them. But one particular memory of Nathan Alexander is too consistent not to be trusted.

It was his omnipresent smile. Occasionally I roamed the corridors to see what was happening in the department. Whenever I passed Nathan's open door, he was with a student (or students) and...smiling. When I bumped into him on the way to class, he was smiling. He was serious in class—especially when talking about the French Revolution—but every few minutes he'd laugh at one of his own comments or, more often, smile at a student's. Whenever we walked to our cars in the evening, he was smiling.

My most vivid memory of his smile came during a visit to a Montgomery hospital, where he had an early morning appointment. He stayed overnight with Carol and me in Montgomery.

The next morning, I was called from the waiting room after his (doubtless uncomfortable) procedure was finished. Per hospital rules, he was taken out in a wheelchair and greeted me with...you guessed it...with a huge smile. On the ride back to Troy, we got into a deep philosophical discussion about something I've forgotten. What I do remember is his smile.

Not long afterwards, Nathan left the department for the Washington hospital near his family. I don't doubt he understood the precariousness of his prognosis then, or perhaps even long before. Yet I never saw his smile falter.

In retrospect, this bespoke hope and acceptance. Nathan taught many things. I am very grateful to have been among his students.

Bryant Shaw, PhD
(Former Chair and much-missed colleague)

Nathan Alexander, My Favorite Yankee

Nathan had never lived in the South, he was a certified Yankee. The thing I loved the most about Nathan was the love he developed for the South. Southern culture was so different than what he was accustomed to. He loved a Southern accent. He told me once he could listen to a Southerner talk all day. He said when Southerners talked it was like they were smiling with every word that came out of their mouths. He enjoyed Southern slang and laughed when he heard someone say "I'm fixin' to" or "he's a right nice fellow." Nathan really enjoyed Southern food. He loved eating at Sister's Restaurant. He really loved the Southern staples of cornbread and sweet tea. He got excited when he learned that Sister's had a breakfast on Saturdays. He became a big lover of grits.

Nathan got his haircut at Raymond's Barber shop and couldn't wait to tell me the stories he heard in there. Old men and their gossip really gave him a big chuckle. Raymond's has mounted

animals on the walls in the barber shop, and Nathan got a big kick out of that. Nathan went to the square in Troy a lot. He would tell me of the neat stores like the used book store. Bob McNellis was the owner, and Nathan became friends with him. He would tell me about little stores on and off the square that I didn't even know about. He got ice cream at Byrd's Drug store a lot and chatted with the locals there. Nathan saw everything in life as a big adventure and wanted to learn all he could. Always smiling and laughing, Nathan became my favorite Yankee. He embraced his new surroundings in a way that endeared me to him. He opened my eyes to my own surroundings here in Troy, Alabama. If ever a Yankee belonged in the South, it was Nathan, my friend, whom I still miss daily.

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