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Remembering Dr. Nelson

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Dr. Larry Nelson Tribute

Remembering Dr. Nelson

John Clinton Harris and Casey Mills

“Good morning, ladies and gentleman, it’s another beautiful day here at the University of North Alabama....” Almost every day, Dr. Larry Nelson’s class began with those words, after he had written “Ghiih” (Good history is intellectual history) on the left-hand side of the board, along with the historiography for that day’s lesson on the right-hand side of the board. He often teased and playfully interacted with his students before class began, warning them to avoid the “bling-bling,” encouraging them to “watch the high number channels,” and commenting on how much he loved “being paid to talk about history.” Once he began his lecture, he mentioned all the beautiful people in the classroom and on campus, because all of his students were beautiful; beauty, to Dr. Nelson, could be found in everyone, no matter who they were. To Dr. Larry Nelson, the classroom was more than a place to assign grades. The classroom was a place to change the lives of his students, in a way Dr. Nelson only knew how... with his unparalleled wit, generosity, and love.

Dr. Lawrence J. “Larry” Nelson was born on October 20, 1944 in Joliet, Illinois to Lawrence and Hannah Nelson. At the age of twenty-one, he met the oft mentioned “Miss Verlie” Vipond, and married her on May 31, 1969. In 1972, he received a PhD in American History from the University of Missouri, and taught at several universities before finding his academic home at the University of North Alabama. He suffered through the greatest tragedy a parent can

know in the summer of 1974, when his son, Larry Peter, died from a brain tumor. Soon after, he knew joy in the form of another son, Peter John, and a daughter, Julia Suzanne; he was very proud of his children, and their stories, along with those of the legendary Miss Verlie, were staples of the Nelson classroom. Although teaching was his great love, he actively contributed to historical scholarship, publishing articles, peer reviews, and two books, *King Cotton's Advocate: Oscar G. Johnston and the New Deal*, and *Rumors of Indiscretion; The University of Missouri "Sex Questionnaire" Scandal in the Jazz Age*.

On January 14, 2014, Dr. Larry Nelson passed away after an eight month battle with glioblastoma brain cancer. Nelson is survived by his beloved wife, Verlie; brother, Paul Nelson; sister-in-law, Elaine Nelson; sister, Doris Smith; children, Pete Nelson and Julia Strickland; son-in-law, Josh Strickland; and three grandchildren, Samantha, Jack, and Gus, with a fourth expected in May. He was a brilliant scholar, a loving father, a servant of Christ, and a beloved mentor to countless students who had the good fortune to find themselves in his classroom. To borrow another of his famous quotations, it can be said that he truly "left the planet" a better place, enriching all the lives he touched along the way.

The following article is the first chapter in Dr. Nelson's book with the working title *The Cold War at Home: Nikita Khrushchev's Journey into America*, which is being edited by Dr. Schoenbachler (University of North Alabama) and will be published in the near future.