

EULOGY FOR MICHAEL
DESTEFANO

HON. RITCHIE TORRES

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Mr. TORRES of New York. Mr. Speaker, long before I was a Congressman and long before I had been a Council Member, I am and will always be the eternally grateful student of Michael DeStefano. For his influence on me is as powerful today, as it was nearly two decades ago, when God first brought him into my life.

When I was a kid, growing up in the 1990s, I would watch a show known as *Boy Meets World*, which had an iconic character, a wise, revered teacher by the name of George Feeny.

Mr. DeStefano was, in many ways, the Mr. Feeny of Herbert H. Lehman High School in the Bronx. As a teacher, Mr. DeStefano embodied for me the nobility of public education as a profession. And as a person, he was a formidable presence who could inhabit a room with the power of his personality and the force of his intellect. He had an eloquence and erudition that could captivate almost anyone who heard him speak. And captivate he did.

Indeed, Mr. DeStefano was the first educator to inspire me.

He engendered in me a love of words and ideas—a love that has remained with me ever since. He enabled me to discover a talent for public speaking I never thought I had. He encouraged me to lead the Lehman High School Law Team, which, I believe, set me on a trajectory that led to the New York City Council and then ultimately to the United States Congress. Words cannot capture the fullness of what Mr. DeStefano has meant to me.

The only constant in life, it has been said, is change. The ancient Greek thinker, Heraclitus, put it best: no person steps into the same river twice. The river is not the same, and neither is the person. Everyone and everything changes constantly at every moment. Reflecting on the theme of a constantly changing self, William James once observed that we have various selves at various points in our lives, and how do we know which one of those selves is the true self? According to James, the true self is one in which we feel most deeply and intensely alive.

Mr. DeStefano inspired me to pursue Moot Court in high school, and it is through Moot Court where I began discovering something resembling my true self, where I felt most deeply and intensely alive for the first time in my life.

As a student at Lehman High School, I remember looking for reasons to stop by Mr. DeStefano's office just to listen to and learn from him, just to be inspired by him. He never disappointed. He never ceased to amaze me with the sheer breadth of his knowledge and the sheer eloquence with which he could express every thought that came to mind and the sheer seamlessness with which he could move from one subject area to the next: philosophy and history and psychology, economics and international relations, literature, and religion. He could speak effortlessly about all of it. He had anecdotes and allusions, quotes and statistics that he could readily recover from his encyclopedic mind.

Whether it is Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization as the highest human need or Immanuel Kant's concept of the thing in itself or Søren Kierkegaard's leap of faith: all of these ideas that continue to shape how I think about life and the world were born out of conversations with Mr. DeStefano nearly two decades ago.

Those dialogues with Mr. DeStefano remain fresh in my mind as if we had spoken yesterday. I often find myself wondering: What would Mr. DeStefano do about a particular problem? What would he think about a particular question?

As I ask these questions, I am reminded that I am a better person and a better public servant for having had Mr. DeStefano as an educator in my life.

Mr. DeStefano brought out the best in me, and that, to me, is the greatest gift that one can give you.

I am grateful to his wife for sharing her brilliant husband and to his daughters for sharing their brilliant father with the students of Lehman High School, where he served with distinction as an Assistant Principal and teacher for decades.

He was a close confidante of Robert Leder, who at the time was the longest serving principal in the NYC public school system, beloved by many in the Bronx and beyond. The two of them, together, were the dream team in public education.

I miss and love them both.

Mr. DeStefano's legacy will live on not only in the lives of his family and friends but also in the lives of his students.

I will end as I began: I am proud to be a student of Michael DeStefano—always have been and always will be.

May my greatest teacher Rest in Peace.

RECOGNIZING THE WHEAT RIDGE
ROTARY CLUB

HON. BRITTANY PETTERSEN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Ms. PETTERSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Wheat Ridge Rotary Club for receiving the Wheat Ridge Chamber of Commerce's 2023 Non-Profit of the Year Award.

The Non-Profit of the Year Award recognizes an organization serving the Wheat Ridge community for their outstanding work and the difference they are making in the community. The Wheat Ridge Rotary Club supports service activities by individuals and groups that are working to improve the community. They raise money by manning the beer tent at the Carnation Festival, volunteering at local schools, sponsoring a coat drive, and also offer scholarships for local students.

We are grateful to the Wheat Ridge Rotary Club for their many contributions to the Wheat Ridge community.

REMEMBERING ARCHITECT
ROBERT BONNER NORCROSS

HON. STEVE COHEN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay my deep respects to Robert Bonner Nor-

cross, a Memphis architect known for his designs of many Memphis landmarks, who died from complications of Early Onset Alzheimer's on December 27 at the age of 62. A native of Tyronza, Arkansas, and a graduate of Marked Tree High School and Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design at the University of Arkansas, Mr. Norcross became a principal in the architecture firm Looney Rick Kiss and led projects that transformed the city of Memphis and nearby communities for three decades. He was licensed in seven states and perhaps best known for his work on AutoZone Park, named the Minor League Ballpark of the Year in 2009 by Baseball America, and the FedEx Forum, home of the NBA Grizzlies and the University of Memphis Tigers. He had a hand in South City, the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital expansion, Soulsville Charter School and Multipurpose Building, Central Station, many homes in Harbor Town, the University of Memphis Men's Basketball Training Center, AutoZone's headquarters and the FedEx World Technology Center in Collierville. In 2020, he won the prestigious Francis Gassner Award from the American Institute of Architects—Memphis Chapter. Active in his Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church and its Vestry St. Columba outreach ministry in West Tennessee, Mr. Norcross was also a board member of the Boys & Girls Club of Memphis, Leadership Memphis, the Memphis Leadership Academy of Arkansas, Dean's Circle at Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design, and was a founding committee member of the Regional Memphis Design Center. I attended his service at Grace-St. Luke's on Saturday which was packed to the walls. I read the eulogy written by his children and will never look at butterflies again in the same way. I express my sincere condolences to his wife of 37 years, Jill, and their children Phoebe and Brandt, his colleagues and his many friends. He led a good life, but he left us too soon.

HONORING PERRY HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL DAN MARBURGER

HON. ZACHARY NUNN

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Mr. NUNN of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to honor Principal Dan Marburger's family who are grieving following an attack on Perry High School.

During the attack, Principal Marburger heroically and selflessly put himself in harm's way enabling his students to run to safety. He saved many lives through his actions.

Dan passed away and will be laid to rest this weekend. As his daughter Claire said, "Dad taught us, inspired us to be better people every day. He passed many lessons and things on to us kids."

There's no doubt his impact will live on through the many students he mentored as an educator.

My heart goes out to Dan's wife and children. I would like to include in the RECORD a Facebook post written by his daughter Claire that encapsulates the tremendous man, husband, father, grandfather, and educator he was:

"Yet another post I didn't imagine having to write . . .

If you are lucky enough to know my Dad, you know there are not enough words to say about him.

Dad taught us, inspired us to be better people everyday. He passed many lessons and things on to us kids.

Education is important. Five Perry High School graduates . . . were lucky to walk across the stage as Dad said our name with pride and we gave him a hug, Dad's hugs will never be beaten . . . and then five college graduates that represented the state of Iowa. Two graduates from UNI, a Central College grad, a Luther College grad, and a University of Iowa grad. Four out of five of us now work in schools or for schools. The fifth child actually makes money.

As a teacher in his building and watching him handle students and accommodating as needed to see them succeed, it became clear to me the impact we teachers and adults can have on our students. Sometimes all a kiddo needs to find success is for someone to genuinely hear them, and see them, and prove to them that someone cares about them after their mistakes, after their bad choices, and to not leave them out to dry. Dad took no greater pride than seeing the kids he harped on and held up tough expectations for, walk across the stage with a diploma in hand. He also made sure that each student had their name pronounced correctly, spending months before graduation with flash cards pronouncing each name over and over so that every student and family got to hear their child's name or their name as they crossed the stage. If you know how diverse Perry is, you know how tough a test this can be.

Another thing Dad taught us was how to love. How to love each other, how to love our parents, how to love our spouses and significant others, how to love our kids and grandkids. And it comes down to one word, selflessly.

Dad loved my mom, Dad is in love with my mom, unconditional, no question, Dan & Elizabeth 4evr. His patience, his grace, his unwavering support for mom in good and bad times was so clear, I understand what it truly means and looks like to love another person, not just saying you love them but to live it and prove it every day. Not every kid is lucky enough to see this from their parents but we were.

Dad showed us that we are never too busy or too far away to care and support your parents. Dad has so much love and respect for his parents, he would drop anything to be there for them, however, whenever they needed. Give back to the people that give so much for you.

Us kids know now, especially looking back on our growing up years how much Dad loved us. Tough love when we needed, patience and understanding when we needed that. Expectations that he had, but expectations that he made sure we knew were important for us to have for ourselves.

It is the little things like calling me Clairey or sending me a random amount on Venmo saying "Gas" or "Lunch on me". I was so excited for my Dad to meet my girlfriend's three boys, knowing they would love him and he would love them as if they were my own. Going out of his way to make sure our boys felt welcome to the Marburger family. I really wish Dad had an opportunity to play catch with them, especially the youngest and his passion and love he is developing for football and being able to bond over that. The grandkids don't yet understand what they lost today, but there will forever be "grandpas babies", bear traps, gummy bears in the freezer, and plenty of naps in grandpas chair. All things we will carry on.

My Dad was an incredible man, educator, husband, Dad, grandpa. A person I aspire to be and hope to make proud every day.

He will be greatly missed.

I love you, Dad. You are the best, forever".

Principal Marburger showcased to America, to Iowa, to our own families what Perry Strong means.

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF NORMAN RAYMOND SMITH

HON. TROY A. CARTER

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Mr. CARTER of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to honor the life of Norman Raymond Smith, Executive Director of Harmony House Senior Center, the Tremé Community Education Program, an agency of the New Orleans Council on Aging. He was the son of the late Yvonne and Matthew Smith, Sr., born on November 17, 1944, in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the Historic Tremé Community, located in the district I represent. Mr. Smith passed away on Sunday, January 14, 2024.

Mr. Smith and his family, Roman Catholics, attended St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. The Mass was conducted in Latin which Smith could not understand, but he enjoyed the Gregorian chants and the singing of standard Black Catholic Church Hymns. He sometimes visited other churches with friends, which had very powerful Tremé voices accompanied by piano and sometimes guitar or drums. In his adult life, Norman joined Saint Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, where he served as an Usher.

As a youth living in the Historic Tremé, he attended Joseph A. Craig Elementary School, graduated from Joseph S. Clark Senior High School, and received his associate degree in Mortuary Science from the Commonwealth College of Science in Houston, Texas, becoming a licensed Mortician.

As a child, some of the first stories Smith heard were of family members from generations past. He knew that his father had been in the military, along with his grandfather and great-grandfather. In fact, his mother's great-grandfather had served in the War of 1812, and her great-uncle had fought in the 9th Cavalry Heavy Artillery in the Civil War. Their stories fascinated Norman. Soon after finishing his training, he was drafted into the Army where he was to serve as a telephone technician, arriving in Vietnam and transferred to work as an identification specialist, and later he was tasked with preparing fallen heroes for return home to their families. After Smith returned from Vietnam, he worked as a funeral escort stationed at Oakland Army Base. His military service included serving as a United States Army Sergeant, Quarter Master Corporal, and was a Purple Heart Recipient, though never receiving his Medal of Honor. He was honorably discharged in 1969. He was also a member of the Veterans of Foreign War, following his service in the Vietnam War, a member of the American Legion Post 500, and the Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 15.

He returned to New Orleans and began working at Charbonnet-Labat Funeral Home, also working at several other funeral homes in the city. His passion to see his community uplifted led to his ultimate involvement in community politics. His life as a community activist

started to take shape. He attended the inaugural class at the Institute of Politics at Loyola University. Norman also served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, electing President Jimmy Carter. Norman was instrumental in helping to elect countless men and women to state, local, and national offices.

Education was always very important to Norman, so at the age of 50, he returned to Southern University at New Orleans and earned a Bachelor of Arts, BA in History. Norman worked as an Education Specialist at the State Department of Education under Superintendent Kelly Nix, serving Veterans across the State of Louisiana. His departure from the Department of Education led him to follow his dream of creating calendars like the one he read as a child at Joseph A. Craig School, Norman Rockwell. He began what would eventually add up to nine years of research on historical Black figures from Louisiana under the title "Etches of Ebony Louisiana", dedicating the rest of his life to researching and educating his community in the contributions of Black people born in Louisiana. In 1983 he published his first calendar.

An active resident of New Orleans until his passing, Norman was a renowned Culture Bearer, Tremé's Drummer, Photographer, member of Joseph S. Clark Alumni Association, Knights of Peter Claver Tommy Lafon Chapter 214, Loyola Institute of Politics, Amistad Research Center, Southern University New Orleans Alumni Association, Officer/Member, New Orleans Embalmers Association, Crescent City Funeral Directors and Morticians Association, Louisiana Funeral Directors and Morticians Association, Louisiana Black History Historian, Political Strategist and President of Tremé Improvement Political Society (T.I.P.S.), and past member of the Upper Pontalba Board of Directors. He was also the Author and Publisher of "Footprints of Black Louisiana".

Norman was the proud father of two sons, Corey Norman Smith (Heather) and Christopher Jude Smith, born from his marriage to Joyce Singleton Smith. He was the loving grandfather of Sterling and Sydnei Smith, and Taylor Hampton; great-grandfather of Ava Rose and Dallan Steen, Jr., his sister Emelda Petit. Norman is preceded in death by siblings Emma Smith Brown, Matthew Smith, Jr., Anthony Smith, Verdelle Smith Johnson, Isabelle Smith, and Paulette Smith Pate.

He was one of those children who knew what he wanted to do at a young age. He wanted to be a historian. Specifically, he wanted to record and preserve Black history. As early as the fifth grade, Smith had the idea to make calendars that would bring to life the stories of Black historical figures. His goal was to share the many contributions Black people had made to American society, especially some who might be lesser known. "The point was to do something positive," he explained. "So little Black kids like me could have something to look forward to. To look up to." He successfully fulfilled his dream.

His impact on Greater New Orleans, especially the Tremé Community will forever remain engraved in the lives he touched along the way. Rest well, my brother.