

Gooooooooo Wheaton!

Anyone who ever attended a women's basketball game at Wheaton in recent years will have heard Nancy Norton's signature cheer. Always rendered at a moment when the spectators were silent, her call reverberated throughout Emerson Gymnasium. It was addressed, of course, to the basketball team, but in many ways it symbolizes Nancy's fervent dedication to Wheaton from the day she arrived to teach American history in the fall of 1953 until her death this past July.

I doubt there has ever been or ever will be another Wheaton faculty member who kept in regular contact with the number of alumnae that Nancy did, nor one for whom the student-professor relationship of undergraduate years became a personal friendship with as many alumnae following graduation. And this was not because Nancy sought friendship; rather, it was because she gave it, generously and unhesitatingly, to all the members of the Wheaton family with whom she came in contact.

What distinguished Nancy more than anyone else I know was her genuine interest in the people she interacted with—in their lives, their families, their careers. She became close not only to me through our joint work in the History Department, but equally with my wife and our three children, and ultimately relished the opportunity to get to know our grandchildren. And I know there are numerous other families fortunate enough to have had the same experience.

Nancy became my friend almost as soon as I arrived at Wheaton in the fall of 1957. We were the two junior, untenured members of the department, and this undoubtedly helped to create a bond between us—a bond that was further cemented as she won matches from me on the tennis court. It was something she routinely did for more than a decade. It took me a long while to realize, both from my own matches and watching her play others, that she often adjusted her own game to make sure that no one was ever humiliated, that the score in the set would be 6–3 or 6–4, never 6–love. But the 6 would always be hers, not yours.

I must confess that in one instance Nancy's years-long friendship with my children tested the bonds of our personal relationship. In 1975, Nancy had two tickets to the sixth game of the World Series between the Red Sox and Cincinnati. Instead of inviting her longtime friend and colleague who had never attended a World Series game and who had been a devoted

Red Sox fan since 1944, she chose to take my 14-year-old son, Alan. That was the game when Carlton Fisk hit an extra innings home run to win it for the Sox, still regarded today as one of the very best Series games ever played. Much as I love my son, I don't think I ever really forgave Nancy for choosing him over me that day!

My memories of Nancy as a colleague in the History Department are many and varied. She was a demanding and master teacher whose willingness to teach 8:30 a.m. classes year after year earned the overwhelming thanks of the rest of us, whose verbal and mental powers rarely were fully kicked in at that hour. She liked early classes, she often said, because it gave her less time to get nervous before class, and students who were willing to sign up for a course at that hour usually were really interested in the material. She spent many years, both before and after her retirement from teaching, researching the history of athletics and physical education at Wheaton—ultimately making my job in writing Wheaton's history far easier because I was able to rely in large part on her work about that aspect of the seminary and college's existence.

All of us in the history wing of the third floor of Knaption learned to respect what we called "Nancy's nap." Every day following lunch in the faculty-staff dining room, Nancy would return to her office, lock the door, and without benefit of a mattress or pillow, stretch out on the floor and fall instantly asleep. Twenty minutes later, regular as clockwork, the door would open and Nancy would emerge, refreshed and ready to tackle the tasks of the afternoon.

Nancy was a woman of great strength who at times in her life had to fight courageously, amazingly and ultimately successfully against personal forces and concerns that threatened to overwhelm her. Always anxious to learn new things, she was one of the very first faculty members to learn how to use a computer, and after retiring she audited a course at the college practically every semester, including this past spring. But what remains dominant in my mind, and I am sure in all others who knew her well and counted her as friend, is the memory of her enormous enthusiasm and zest for life. We shall remember, above all, her concern and love for all those who made up her world, and whom she counted as what they most certainly were—her friends. I shall miss her enormously, as we all will. 

