



Nathan Smith

February 3, 1930 - January 16, 2026

Nathan Smith died on Friday, January 16, 2026, in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, just a few weeks shy of his 96th birthday. Nate was a loving husband, a devoted father, and a deeply caring mentor and friend to countless students, colleagues and community members whose paths he crossed in a long life committed to the highest ideals of his vocation as an educator.

Nate was born in Chicago, Illinois on February 3, 1930 to Celia (Satz) and Abraham Smith (originally Avram Smikun), Jewish immigrants from Ukraine and Lithuania. Nate's early home life was filled with love, family, and music. His father owned a barbershop, but also played several instruments, encouraging Nate and his younger brother Boris to take up the double bass and, later, the mandolin. At Harrison High School, Nate played in the school orchestra and performed in a local swing band called "The Twilight Swingsters." The first in his family to pursue higher education, he graduated from Roosevelt College (now Roosevelt University), where he discovered his calling as a scholar.

Nate earned his Ph.D. in Russian History from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in 1956. Drawing on his Eastern European heritage and his language skills, Nate's research on the Russian revolution included travel to the former Soviet Union and collaboration with the Russian novelist, Nina Berberova, to document the lives of anti-communist refugees.

According to Nate, it was at an American History seminar in graduate school that he looked across the table and was immediately smitten with the sole

female student in the class, Margaret “Jeanne” Larson. They were married on June 28th, 1958 in Rockford, Illinois.

Nate and Jeanne settled in Chestertown, Maryland, where Nate would embark on his long career as Professor of European History at Washington College. Arriving at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Nate embraced the cause of racial integration both in the town and at the college, participating in Chestertown’s Freedom Rider protest of 1962, and leading the college’s efforts to welcome a more diverse student community. He carried his passion for social justice, historical awareness, and institutional integrity into every facet of his service to Washington College, where he taught generations of students, chaired the History Department for decades, and served as Dean of the College. He received the prestigious Lindback Award for excellence in teaching along with other accolades for his service to the college. In his later years, he and Skipper, the family dog, were a beloved fixture on campus. In retirement, Nate and Jeanne moved to Wynnewood, Pennsylvania to be near his young grandchildren, David and Ned. In addition to providing invaluable help with child care and home repairs, Nate continued to pursue his passion for music. He joined the Munier Mandolin and Guitar Orchestra playing venues across the city of Philadelphia, including a televised performance at a Phillies game. He shared his love of classical music with his grandchildren, frequently taking them to see the Philadelphia Orchestra. In his last days, Nate was thrilled when his grandson, Michael, recently performed at Carnegie Hall as concertmaster for the New York String Orchestra.

Nate was a consummate family man. His four children remember him as a constant presence in their lives, from the earliest days of childhood, when he would share his favorite books, take them on camping trips, and follow their every move with a home movie camera. In later years, he would offer emotional support, professional and academic advice, and his indispensable handyman skills. He warmly embraced his children’s spouses and rejoiced in the lives of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Nathan Smith is survived by his wife, Margaret Jeanne Smith, his four children and their spouses: Sarah Smith-Putman (Jeff), Jeremy Smith (SoYoung Lee), Karen Smith (Eleanor ter Horst), and Samuel Smith (Patty) as well as his six grandchildren, Jenna Joswick (Donny), Laura Putman, David Smith, Edward (Ned) Smith, Michael Smith, Todd Rhoades, and his great-grandchildren Payton Putman and Luca Joswick. He was predeceased by his parents, Abraham and Celia Satz Smith, and two younger brothers, Boris "Buddy" Smith and Sheldon Lawrence Smith.

Services will be held at Fellows, Helfenbein, and Newnam on Monday, January 19, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. All in attendance are invited to a reception luncheon at the funeral home with interment to follow at Crumpton Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, and as a tribute to Nate's love of animals and advocacy of civil rights, memorial gifts may be made to the ASPCA, ACLU, or the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Cemetery Details

Crumpton Cemetery

Crumpton, MD

Previous Events

Service

JAN **19**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Fellows, Helfenbein, and Newnam Funeral Home
130 Speer Road
Chestertown, MD 21620
<http://www.fhnfuneralhome.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Nathan Smith*



Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home - January 20 at 11:37 AM



“ *Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home created a Webcast in memory of Nathan Smith*



Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home - January 19 at 08:01 AM



“ *I am so sorry to learn just now of Nate's passing. He was a cherished, dear friend and colleague of my dad, Joe McLain, and he and Jeanne are much missed by the Washington College community. Deep sympathy to his family.*

Lynn McLain - April 25 at 02:11 PM

EA

“ I remember Modern European History with Professor Smith in the 1980's and how his easy manner made class enjoyable. Later on, I would walk his black lab Skipper for him when needed. I would find the leash next to dog treats for along with a handwritten note expressing gratitude for the walk and signed by Skipper.

Eugenia Auchincloss - January 22 at 10:07 AM

PG

“ Nate Smith, never forget you, a great teacher and kind man. One of the greats! RIP - Pete Goode

Pete Goode - January 21 at 08:49 PM

LF

“ Love, Quarantillo & Jenkins Families planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Nathan Smith.

Love, Quarantillo & Jenkins Families - January 20 at 01:01 PM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Nathan Smith.



January 20 at 01:01 PM

ES

“ Thinking of you, Sam. The loss of a parent is profound.

Erica Stetson - January 19 at 08:05 PM

DH

“ I took several of Prof Smith's classes at Washington College in the 70's. History was my major and I always liked his laid back style. He served as my advisor on my Senior Thesis and was an all around nice guy. Glad to hear he had a long life!
Dan Hudson '80

Dan Hudson - January 19 at 07:22 PM

PB

“ So sorry to hear of Dr. Nate Smith's passing. I remember when I was in Chestertown High School (class of 1966), that Washington College offered college classes. One of the classes I attended was a history class that Dr. Smith taught. He was a delightful teacher. Also, he was a friend of my family.
Rest in peace,
Phyllis Hudson Brown



Phyllis Hudson Brown - January 19 at 11:41 AM

TS

“Nate Smith was a colleague whose life shaped Washington College and the people within it. In 1989, he was instrumental in bringing me to Washington College as a faculty member. From the very beginning, he was my counselor, mentor, and a generous guide—always giving his time freely and offering wisdom with kindness and care.

He believed deeply in developing the careers of junior faculty. Nate encouraged growth, independence, and integrity, not only in the classroom but in service to the College itself. When I was appointed to the Search committee tasked with selecting the next President of Washington College, his counsel was decisive and thoughtful. It was with his encouragement that the committee pushed to hire Dr. Toll—an outstanding decision guided by his remarkable judgment, intellectual clarity, and deep commitment to this institution.

Nate was more than a colleague. He was a steward of Washington College’s values, a source of continuity, and a quiet force for excellence. His legacy lives on in the faculty he mentored, the students he influenced, and the institutional decisions he helped shape.

He will be deeply missed. Washington College is better because of him, and we are better for having known him.

Tahir Shad

Tahir Shad - January 19 at 06:48 AM

GS

“Nate was the moral and intellectual leader of the faculty for decades; a model of what a professor should be. Good teachers teach content, but great teachers teach how to think critically and in doing so, their influence goes on for generations. Nate was a great teacher. We will miss you, Nate

George J Spilich - January 18 at 10:13 PM

PS

“ *Patricia And Billy Sutton lit a candle in memory of Nathan Smith*



Patricia and Billy Sutton - January 18 at 07:58 PM

ER

“ *Elizabeth Rich lit a candle in memory of Nathan Smith*



Elizabeth Rich - January 18 at 09:14 AM

ER

So sorry to hear this....to Sarah, Jerry, Sam, and Karen...and Mrs. Smith...loved your Dad ... I remember going to Roy Rogers in town when Tim was a toddler and Mr. Smith was there and had a ball with him! Always welcoming to me when I would come over. One in a million. My condolences to you all.

Elizabeth Rich - January 18 at 09:19 AM

CB

“ I only got to know Nate at the end of his career at Washington College. I was hired to fill the position that he was vacating after his retirement from the History Department. I was young and inexperienced, but Nate was generous with advice and encouraging words. He once asked me to pass along some things to his relatives in St. Petersburg, Russia, sharing that his family name had originally been Smykun' (I think I've got that right), and they met me as if I was family myself. I always felt that someone should record his memories of his decades at the College, but I never did it myself and I'm not sure it ever happened. His passing is a great loss for Chestertown and for our historic institution.

Clayton Black - January 17 at 09:03 AM

PW

“ So very sorry for your loss

Patti Webb - January 17 at 08:47 AM

PW

“ Patti Webb lit a candle in memory of Nathan Smith



Patti Webb - January 17 at 08:47 AM