



Marvin R. Zahniser

June 29, 1934 - December 31, 2020

Marvin R. Zahniser, age 86, died in Columbus on December 31, 2020. The child of a Free Methodist ministerial family, he was born in New Kensington, PA, to the late Rev. Dr. Clarence H. and F. Elizabeth (Weir) Zahniser, and spent his early years in the Pittsburgh area.

He was educated at Greenville College (BA), the University of Michigan (MA), and the University of California, Santa Barbara (Ph.D. 1963), one of the first students to receive a doctorate from that university.

After teaching a year each at the University of Washington and the University of Iowa, he came to The Ohio State University in 1965, where he taught the history of U.S. foreign relations for twenty-seven years.

During these years he acted briefly as Assistant Vice Provost for the College of Arts and Sciences, served eight years as History Department chair, and concluded his final years at Ohio State as Associate Dean for faculty affairs in the College of Humanities. He took great pride in the many doctoral students he directed and delighted as well in teaching undergraduates. He was devoted to the University and to his colleagues, whom he admired and found immensely interesting.

After taking early retirement in 1992, Marvin moved south to continue his teaching career at Dillard University in New Orleans, a historic black university; after four years he returned to teach part-time for seven years at the Pontifical College Josephinum (PCJ) in Columbus. During his career he wrote three books, many articles, and edited a fourth book; most of his writing dealt with U.S.—French relations.

Marvin was a member of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), and the Conference on Faith and History, a society of evangelical historians which he helped to found. In addition, he spent time as trustee for Spring Arbor University and later for Northern Baptist Seminary. He also served on the PCJ Board's Education

Committee and on the Historical Archives Committee of the Free Methodist Church.

His private life was a very happy one. His beloved and able wife of 64 years, Adrienne Allen Zahniser, was first his college classmate, then his best friend, his skilled manuscript editor and critic, his chief comfort, and the mother of their three exemplary sons, Mark Howard, MD, (Francine) of Cleveland, Keith Allen, Ph.D., of Alexandria, VA, and Craig Alexander, RN, (Amy) of Columbus. Their daughters-in-law and their lively, talented grandchildren, Joshua, Nathaniel, Sarah, David, Leah, Stephanie, Justin, Luke, Hannah, and Tom have been sources of great pleasure and pride to both Zahnisers.

Marvin was a member of the Northwest Church of the Nazarene in Columbus, and an associate member of the Greenville, IL, Free Methodist Church. He enjoyed church school teaching and vocal activities. He sang in several male gospel quartets through the years. Although a tenor, he hoped following resurrection to sing low bass in a gospel quartet!

The Zahnisers established academic scholarships at Greenville College, Dillard University, The Ohio State University, and, jointly with the Diocese of Columbus, an encouragement fund for students attending PCJ. They are supporters of Hope Africa University in Bujumbura, Burundi, the Salvation Army, Lutheran Social Services, and the Marston Memorial Historical Archives of the Free Methodist Church.

Marvin loved classic cars of the 1950s and 1960s. He was also a fan of Ohio State basketball, and the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Marvin will be interred in Union Cemetery, Columbus. A memorial service was held on Saturday, August 21, 2021, 2PM, with Rev. Dr. Ron Emptage presiding at Northwest Nazarene Church. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be directed to any of the groups mentioned above.

Comments



“ Marvin was my pal at Greenville College. We were together in many classes since we both were History majors. We did our practice teaching together at Vandalia High School. Before I withdrew from the race for Student Body President, Marvin honoured me by offering to be my campaign manager. I had the further honour of standing up with him at his and Adrienne's wedding. Although we did not see each other for 50 years, as he pursued higher degrees and I returned to teach in Africa(my childhood home), when we met again at our 50th class reunion Marvin with his gift of making one feel important, picked up with me as if we had never separated. I look forward to fellowship with him again in a Place where neither age nor Parkinson's exist. Ellen and I want you, Adrienne, to know you will always be our dear friend. I trust we will be an encouragement to you. You are regularly in or prayers.
Clarke De Mille
British Columbia, Canada

Clarke De Mille - February 02, 2021 at 10:29 PM



“ I was one of Marvin's last PhD students. He had a big impact on my life and career. Decent, honest, encouraging. Although he was good at playing department politics and a good administrator, I think he enjoyed being a role model more. I am forever grateful and blessed to have worked with him. I still approach USFR the way he taught me.

W. Michael Weis - January 31, 2021 at 12:03 AM



“ Marvin supervised my M.A. thesis in 1970. More than that he provided direction and encouragement for a young man who loved history and wondered if the study of history, especially U.S. foreign relations, could become his life's work. Marvin's devotion to his students was part of the example he set for others in the giving, generous way he lived his life. To wit, in the turbulent spring of 1970 at Ohio State, Marvin asked his students to join him for lunch. This gathering of seven or eight took place as campus protests were increasing in intensity. Marvin gave us a simple message that I recall to this day: However you participate in what is happening, he said, do it with commitment and do it peacefully. If you do so and trouble arises, I will do whatever I can to support you. Some years later, in a very different time, Marvin gave my career a boost when it was much needed. His personal and professional decency I tried to emulate throughout my own career. His spirit lives with me.

William O. Walker III, Santa Fe, NM

William O Walker III - January 30, 2021 at 04:37 PM



“ I have the fondest memories of Dr. Zahniser from the Josephinum. He was an excellent teacher and a Christian gentleman. His love for God, family, country, history, and his students was evident. He went out of his way to join in prayers in the chapel on occasion. We were honored when he and Mrs. Zahniser attend our Italian Feast in the College. I will pray for him and your family in this time of grief. Fr. Christopher Cicero, Pastor Blessed Sacrament and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parishes, Warren, Ohio

Christopher Cicero - January 28, 2021 at 11:30 AM



“ On behalf of Josephinum Rector/President, Very Reverend Steven P. Beseau, STD, the seminarians, faculty, staff, and administration of the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio, send their love, prayers, and deepest sympathies to the Zahniser Family during this time of loss. “Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.”

Pontifical College Josephinum - January 25, 2021 at 09:56 AM



“ My late husband, Tom Hartig, was one of Marvin's Ph.D. students at The Ohio State University. I remember when Marvin and his wife came to our modest home in Columbus after Tom graduated in 1974 and had dinner with us--and I know Tom was so very grateful for his friendship and collegiality. He supported Tom when Tom's first wife died suddenly and unexpectedly just as he was beginning his Ph.D. studies and that meant the world to my late husband. In the acknowledgments of his dissertation, Tom wrote "the advice, criticisms, and motivation which I received...cannot, however, compare with that extended to me by my adviser, Professor Marvin F. Zahniser...." Tom used to say how incredibly lucky he had been to work with him and how much his life changed because of him.

Jeanne Hartig - January 23, 2021 at 09:05 PM



“ My love and prayers go out to Adrienne and the entire Zahniser family. I worked with Marvin for 30 years. He was the chair of the Department of History when I first knew him, and twenty years later he served as Associate Dean in the Dean's office of the College of Humanities. We could always depend upon Marvin to work hard, give sage advice, and support our work with humor and good will. He was not only smart and sensible, but fun and encouraging. I know his family will miss him forever and always.

All best,
Phyllis M. Newman

Phyllis Newman - January 15, 2021 at 05:22 PM



“ Our Deepest Sympathy and Love to our good friend Adrienne and all the Zahniser family. We have been touched beyond words by having this couple in our lives. Their humor, their friendship and obvious love and respect for each other will not be forgotten. Marvin gave us biblical leadership along with always sharing his strong faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Marvin was a true leader in so many ways. Of course that leadership showed as he was a Professor/Head of the History Dept. at The Ohio State University for many years. He also shared his gifts with us and many others at Northwest Church of the Nazarene. We will miss our friend, Marvin. We will do our best to share our lives with your loving wife as you enjoy your heavenly home.

Until we meet again.

Bob and Miriam Miller

Miriam and Bob Miller - January 11, 2021 at 08:52 PM



“ Condolences to Adrienne and the rest of the Zahniser family.

Marsha Hamilton - January 08, 2021 at 03:22 PM



“ Marvin was a great scholar, friend, and neighbor. He was always welcoming. I remember when I began at OSU in 1978, he was chair of the History Department and asked me to feel welcome at any time. He will be missed by many.

Raimund E Goerler - January 08, 2021 at 11:32 AM



“ Marvin was one of my cousins. He was superior to me in education and in many other ways but he always spoke highly of me and was a great encouragement to my wife, Mary Lou, and to me. He and his wife, Adrienne, always welcomed us to their home. We will miss Marvin's sense of humor and his love of gospel music. Back when hitchhiking wasn't so dangerous I made it to their wedding as Adrienne was walking down the aisle.

Wayne DeFrance Lawton - January 08, 2021 at 10:54 AM



“ Adrienne and the entire Zahniser family: I worked with Marvin at OSU for 30 years. I knew him first as our History Department chair, then he joined the College of Humanities Dean's office for several years until he went to Louisiana. He was one of my favorite people. Always hardworking, responsive, thoughtful and full of humor. I could always depend upon him to give me sage advice and to be honest and fair.

He was charming and a pleasure to work with.

I know he loved you all and that you miss him. My thoughts and prayers are with you.

Phyllis M. Newman

Phyllis M. Newman - January 13, 2021 at 06:23 PM



“ Adrienne and family: Marvin was a great professor and I enjoyed learning from him at The Ohio State University. Everyday, class was a special treat and I looked forward to going. I never missed the opportunity to listen to him and learn. He pushed me to be a better historian and to hone my writing and research skills. I also knew him in a less formal way through our church attendance together at University Baptist Church in Columbus. He cared about both the academic and religious life of students there. He was a wonderful person. I am a better person from knowing him.

Leslie A Floyd - April 01, 2021 at 03:24 PM