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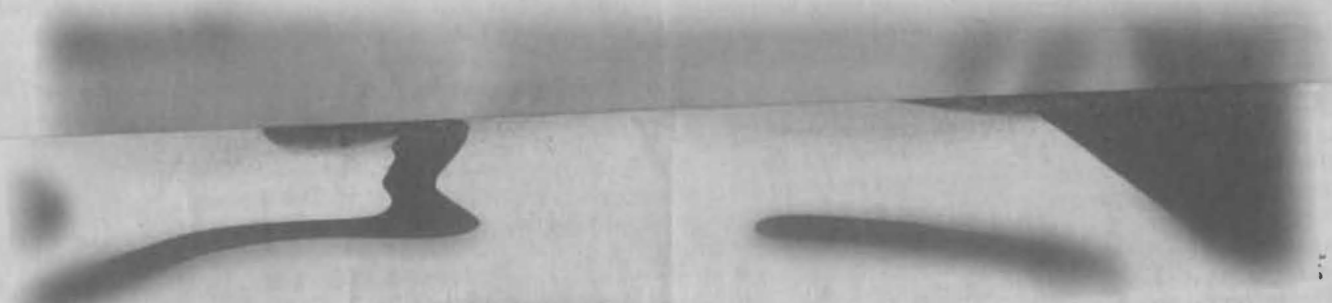


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HANEY FAMILY

THE WAY HE WAS: This photo of Randy Haney at a Wake Forest game hangs in the home office of Ron Wellman, the university's athletics director.

A True Deac

Exuberant, faithful fan of Wake Forest sports is remembered as a 'special, special guy to us'

By Kim Underwood
JOURNAL REPORTER

On a visit to Wake Forest University as a high-school senior, Tyson Clabo attended a football game and saw Randy Haney — the self-proclaimed Deacon Nut — decked out in Wake Forest University attire, sporting a painted face and cavorting as he cheered on the team.

Haney made quite an impression.

"It's kind of hard not to notice him," Clabo said. "The thing I remember most about the whole trip was Randy dancing with the cheerleaders."

In 2000, Clabo became a Wake Forest freshman. He played football for four years, becoming an All-ACC offensive lineman. Haney was there at each home game, and, before the game, Clabo would go over and shake Haney's hand.

"After a while, you learn to appreciate a guy like that," Clabo said. "You wish you had 10,000 more like him in the stands on Saturday."

Clabo was at his home in Knoxville, Tenn., when he heard that Haney, who had been ill with lymphoma, died March 28 at the age of 57. He climbed into his truck and drove four hours so that he could go to the visitation at the funeral home in Thomasville, where Haney lived.

"Randy was there the first time and last time I ever played," Clabo said. "It seemed like the thing for me to do was go.... He loved Wake Forest, and we loved him, too."

Indeed people did.

Athletics Director Ron Wellman, football coach Jim Grobe, football players and cheer-



JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

ALL TOGETHER: Haney, who called himself the Deacon Nut, often celebrated with students on the quad after a victory.

leaders were among those who attended services for Haney. And dozens and dozens of fans posted notes on Internet message boards devoted to Haney.

Haney — who never attended Wake Forest — did more than just go to games. When the team arrived home late at night from an away game, he might be there to greet the bus. And he liked to drop by practices and the offices of people associated with athletics.

"He was a special, special guy to us," Well-

man said. Haney's support for Wake Forest was unconditional, Wellman said. If the team happened to lose, Haney was sure that it would win next time.

"I think it is wonderful to have people who give you that type of support," he said.

Grobe met Haney when he stopped by a practice after Grobe took over as coach three years ago.

"All our players starting shouting his name," Grobe said. "He has become a fixture with our kids."

At a later practice, Grobe noticed that Haney's Wake Forest hat was a little the worse for wear so gave him a new one, which was on display at the funeral.

"We're all so sorry to lose Randy," he said. "He affected the lives of a lot of people in a positive way."

Haney started out as a fan of North Carolina, where his brother, Jerry, went. About 1988 or so, he and his wife, Joan, started attending Wake Forest games. She saw it as a gradual shift in loyalty.

His daughter, April Marie Tollison, remembers that he became upset with Carolina for some reason.

Feeling embraced by the Wake Forest community had much to do with his devotion, Joan Haney said. "How many schools would let my husband get as close to the players as Wake Forest did?"

"He felt like he did not have to have a pocketful of money or be a big shot," Tollison said.

The Haney's bought tickets for all the home

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football games and sometimes splurged and went to an away game. They bought tickets for home basketball games when they could afford them. Sometimes, people gave them tickets.

Although countless Wake Forest fans knew Haney, few knew much about his personal life.

Randall Murphy Haney was born Sept. 10, 1946, in High Point. He graduated from High Point Central High School and went to what is now Guilford Technical Community College for a while before joining the Air Force. He met his wife when she was going to East Forsyth High School, and he was dating a friend of hers.

Joan Haney was quite shy in those days.

"I didn't talk much," she said. "My husband brought me out of that.... I felt comfortable with him.... I felt like we completed each other."

He joined the Air Force in 1969 and served as a clerk. Joan Haney was working as a long-distance operator. (These days, she is a detail sander at Dar-Ran Furniture Inc. in High Point.)

They were married April 4, 1970.

Some family problems brought him out of the Air Force with an honorable discharge after two years. He served in the Army Reserve and National Guard. Over the years, he worked at various jobs, many of them in the furniture industry, doing such things as operating a lathe. He has done security work, too.

"He has done a little bit of everything," Joan Haney said.

He was a big fan of beach music, and the Haney's liked to go hear bands play.

"Most of the time, when you saw one of us, you saw the other," Joan Haney said. "We liked doing things together."

They have two children—Tollison, who is 33, and Deanna Haney, who is 30. The women remember that their father also loved getting in the car and going places—near and far.

"He would say, 'Y'all go put stuff in the back of the car and don't tell your mother,'" Deanna Haney said. "He would take off and not tell us where we were going."

One trip that began in mystery took them all the way to Niagara Falls. That was fine with them. They liked his sense of adventure.

The family thinks that his enthusiasm as a fan has something to do with his mother not letting him play sports. He was small—as an adult, he was 5 feet 4 inches tall—and he struggled with assorted health problems, including asthma, anemia and a severe bout of pneumonia.

"I think it was his way of living out his dream of what he really wanted to do," Tollison said.

"He felt like he mattered," Deanna Haney said. "He wasn't just another faceless fan—he was a part of that team."

Tollison has three children, and Haney showed the same enthusiasm at their sporting events that he did at Wake Forest games. At one of his grandson Josh's Little League games, he shared his dismay over a call so enthusiastically that the umpire ejected him from the game, Tollison said.

"Sometimes, I was embarrassed," she said. "I was like, 'Oh, Lord...'"

But, at the same time, the family also appreciated his willingness to express himself.

Haney never was big on doctors and hospitals, and he went around feeling unwell for a long time before a high fever that lasted for several days sent him

to the hospital in August. Lymphoma, the doctors said.

Even so, the Haney's made it to all the home football games. Because they missed the final games of the basketball season, Wellman was unable to present him with a Wake Forest jacket and name him an honorary letterman at a game as planned.

Wellman said that it's too early to say what they might do to honor Haney next season but that they are talking about it. Wake Forest fans have been posting suggestions on Internet message boards.

Stan Cotton, the radio voice of the Deacons, first encountered Haney when Haney phoned a call-in radio show that he was doing with Jim Caldwell, the football coach before Grobe.

Haney had written a poem about Wake Forest that he started reading.

"He got about halfway through it and got all emotional," Cotton said.

Cotton didn't know what to make of this until Caldwell said, "That's Randy. He's our biggest fan."

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