

Richard Good: Remembrance with Gratitude

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Richard A. Good left the MAA a very generous gift after his death on November 24, 2008: a \$400,000 bequest toward the support of Project NExT. Good was 91 when he died. He received his undergraduate degree from Ashland College in 1939 and his PhD from the University of Wisconsin in 1945. He had been a member of the Association since 1944.

Good had a history of generosity toward the MAA and was made a member of the Icosahedron Society, which publicly recognizes the MAA's largest donors, in 2007. Over the years, he became an enthusiastic supporter of Project NExT, and that support culminated in his generous bequest.

In the MAA office, Good was known for always sending handsomely typed letters or making phone calls — never email. He even typed his annual donation checks to the MAA. He always asked that these donations be listed as “anonymous.”

Richard Good taught at the University of Maryland for 43 years and was known for his sense of humor, his innovative teaching methods, and his interest in mathematics education. Good's humor was perhaps best described by his son-in-law, William Harman, in a eulogy he gave at the memorial service: “A bit of fun and a touch of whimsy seemed for him a requirement for doing anything, even mathematics, and he communicated that light touch without surrendering his sense that humor is always possible no matter how serious the endeavor. Let me offer my own rather memorable first example of encountering this.

“In 1971 Dick and Jo's daughter Mary and I decided that we wanted to get married. I agreed, with much hesitation, to broach the topic with Mary's father, whom I barely knew and presumed at first to be a rather stern figure. During the planned dinner in the Good home I awkwardly procrastinated bringing up the matter until the very end of the meal. Nervously, and as formally as I thought appropriate, I summoned my courage to say ‘Dr. Good, I would be honored and pleased to have your approval in receiving your daughter's hand in marriage.’ After one of those long periods of silence with which he was always more comfortable than just about anybody else, Dick looked at me severely and then with an imp-

ish smile, he said, ‘Only her hand? Wouldn't it be better to marry all of her?’ That was my first introduction to a wit I had not, to that point, anticipated. But it was by no means the last I saw of his delightfully disarming playfulness.”

In 1975, Good became Secretary-Treasurer of Pi Mu Epsilon and served in that capacity until 1987. Good then served as Councillor from 1987 until 1993. Robert Sefton Smith, Pi Mu Epsilon President between 2002 and 2005, remembers that Good continued to be active in the Society and attend Council Meetings into his late 80s in the self-described capacity of “old fogey.”

Good's colleague at Maryland, Jim Fey, writes that “There is a saying attributed to Abraham Lincoln that it is better to remain silent and let people think you a fool than to open your mouth and prove it. For those who knew and worked with Dick Good, one of the striking memories will certainly be the way that he responded to any substantial question with a very long silent pause before answering. However, when he did respond it was invariably with a coherent and insightful piece of advice. If the question was mathematical, Dick's response always showed that he had thought through the fundamental concepts and methods of our subject to arrive at deep understanding of critical issues.”

“I had the good fortune to benefit from Dick Good's mathematical knowledge and gracious personal style for over 20 years. He was a professional mentor and a collaborator on several mathematics education projects. Like hundreds of high school mathematics teachers whom he and Stan Jackson taught in NSF institute programs, I learned things about mathematics and teaching from Dick that influenced my own work in profound ways. Of course we'll also remember the seemingly endless collection of flamboyant square dance shirts that Dick wore during each semester of teaching. But the outstanding memory will be of a wise and thoughtful colleague on whom we depended so much.”

Jonathan Rosenberg, another colleague, describes Good as “a fixture in the department, easily recognizable by his famous collection of one-of-a-kind Hawaiian-style shirts, until his retirement in 1988.

Laurie Heyer (Davidson College) who is a 2000–2001 Project NExT Fellow, remembers Richard Good's interaction with her: “I met Dick Good in the exhibit area at the national meetings, when he asked me about my Project NExT

gold dot. He had seen other dots and was curious what it was all about. I was still overflowing with excitement about my new friends, new strategies, and new job, and I think it was less of a conversation than it was me bubbling over with excitement and him letting me ramble on. Along the way, somewhat analytically, he asked some questions about how Project NExT would help me, how the program worked, what we had learned in our workshops, and exactly why I thought it was all so great. I recall him being very warm in his response, thanking me for explaining, and saying how nice it was to talk to me and learn about this program. And I remember the twinkle in his eye! He seemed to get a kick out of my joy, like a grandfather would out of hearing all about a grandchild's first day of school."

Christine Stevens, director of Project NExT, comments that "Richard Good's extremely generous bequest will advance us several steps towards the goal of making Project NExT a permanent, self-sustaining program of the MAA. His gift builds upon the substantial annual contributions that he had been making to Project NExT, which have sponsored a total of 24 Fellows over the last six years. Dick Good was a smart, gentle, and self-effacing man, and I am grateful not only for his generosity, but also for the faith that he displayed in Project NExT.

"I think it was at a summer MAA meeting in 2002 that I first met Dick and talked with him about Project NExT. He opened the conversation by wondering, in a low-key way that took me by surprise, whether the program stood in need of additional support. After we had talked about the goals of Project NExT and how it pursues them, I outlined the benefits that donors derive from sponsoring Project NExT Fellows, such as receiving the names of 'their' Fellows and periodic reports on their activities. In a manner that I would later realize was characteristic, Dick waved these considerations aside, saying that he wanted no personal involvement and no public acknowledgement, but simply the opportunity to support a program that he deemed of importance to the future of the mathematical community.

"Dick's bequest will support eight Fellows each year for many years to come. It is deeply appreciated by the MAA and the leadership of Project NExT, as well as the Project NExT Fellows whose careers he is helping to launch."

Finally, Aparna Higgins, who will become Director of Project NExT this August, also shares her memories of Richard Good:

"Curiosity, courtesy, and an enthusiastic support for the younger members of our profession are the things I remember about Richard Good. I met Dick about 20 years ago, at the student paper sessions of Pi Mu Epsilon and the MAA at national summer meetings. Dick listened to student presentations with interest and often talked to the presenter afterwards, offering helpful insights and complimenting the student's work. At the PME banquet at summer meetings, I always tried to sit at his table. He was genuinely interested in what his dinner companions were doing in their classes or with their students or with the MAA. That interest, combined with his warm smile and sense of humor and twinkling eyes, made everyone feel very appreciated."

"After Dick retired, he came less frequently to mathematics meetings, so I was pleasantly surprised to see him at the winter meetings some time in the early 2000's. By this time, I had become a co-director of Project NExT. As always, Dick asked about what I was doing, and when I mentioned Project NExT, he asked questions that dug deeper than the initial casual interest that a person might show in someone else's activities. Since it was from our mutual interest in activities for undergraduates that I knew Dick, I remember clarifying that Project NExT was a program for new *faculty*, not for students. Dick said he understood that, and continued to ask about how the program was run, how many people it served, and what the benefits were for the participants and the department and the mathematical community. Then he told me that he had met some of the Project NExT Fellows and asked them about the dots on their badges. They had spoken enthusiastically about the program — the Project NExT Fellows are its best ambassadors — and he was determined to find out more about it. Later, I introduced Dick to Chris Stevens, the Director of Project NExT."

"The result was Dick's generous support of Project NExT, sufficient to support four Fellows annually, beginning in 2003. Characteristic of Dick's modesty, he declined to draw attention to himself and didn't want his donation publicized. I was impressed by Dick's conviction in supporting the future of mathematics, and I realized that this was entirely in keeping with his interests in promoting the participation of undergraduate students in the larger mathematical community."

"We were saddened by the news of Dick's death and deeply touched by his generous bequest to Project NExT. I miss his delightful presence at the mathematics meetings." 🍷