

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2015

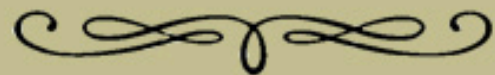
LOCAL DO'S

In Memoriam



DOUG SMESTAD, CALHOUN H.S.
11/13/1951 - 09/17/2015

A LIFE HONORED & REMEMBERED



The BMUST community lost a beloved and respected colleague this year. Doug Smestad, Social Studies Teacher at Calhoun High School, passed away on September 17, 2015. For over 25 years he committed himself to his students and staff members. We dedicate this issue to his memory.



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"A MAN ADMIRED"

BY BRIAN MOELLER (CALHOUN H.S.), LOCAL DO'S WRITER

Doug Smestad lived life. Every day was precious and every moment counted. This is not something that Doug said; it was just something he did. Doug played music, acted, sang, wrote, researched, encouraged theoretical conversations, and taught. Doug's curiosity lead him in many directions. He loved music, so he learned to play. He loved history, so he studied and taught it. He loved the Renaissance, so he became a knight.

In fact, this love for life, students and history became evident in his students reverence for him. When you were near Doug, you knew you were around greatness. Kids flocked to him. They called his name out in the hallway just to say hello in passing. They reached out to him for advice or for a friendly conversation. They loved him because he loved them. When he was sick, all he wanted to do was get back into the classroom and teach. Doug's kids and he had a relationship that was beyond teacher and student but more like a mentor and mentees because he was able to bridge any gap in age and life experiences. He looked at his students as equals who just did not know enough yet. He took that as an awesome responsibility and cherished



it because he wanted to help kids learn and tackle the challenges of high school. He wanted to help them conquer adolescence knowing that it was ok to like what you like and be who you are. He wanted all of this because he was a good person and wanted to do good.

There is a serious loss at Calhoun not having Doug around. There is a devastating loss in Social Studies not having Doug around. And for those of us who admired him, loved him, and respected him, there is a void that cannot be filled. However, we all have the example of someone who did it better than any of us,` so we know what to strive to become.

“WHY WE LOVE DOUG”

BY BETH FINNERAN, (CALHOUN H.S.), LOCAL DO'S WRITER

I know I am not alone when I say I love Doug. When I talk to any student I know that had him, it's the first thing they say, "I Love 'Smes!" I have grown a little envious over the years of this student adulation of him, so I've grown to asking them why. And the best answer I've heard is this, "It's so obvious he loves us so much."

That's the amazing thing about Doug. He made us all feel so loved. He stopped. He looked us in the eye. He asked us about our lives with sincerity like he really cared, because he actually did. He remembered the things we told him last time like the name of the guy we were dating or how many years we were married before we got divorced. He shared his life stories in ways that made them inspirational messages. Like how he, too was divorced, and still found true love afterwards. He was so damn kind. It was incredible. In all these years, and I think I've known him for about 16 years, I have honestly never heard him say a bad word about anybody and I've only seen him mad once and it was totally justified. He had this incredible gift of empathy. He could always feel what it was like to walk in another's shoes.

Everybody always says Calhoun is a special school -- tolerant, accepting, caring. The culture is a very healthy one, where people speak their minds, share their gripes, and talk through problems. We support each other with everyday needs, as well as, in crisis. I think this culture is largely due to the tone that Doug and Fred Harrison set years ago and it has stuck. It's so engrained in our culture now, that I don't think many people realize that it

started with Doug and Fred, or at least that's the way I see it. I think this is an incredible legacy that Doug and Fred have created and will live on.

As far as teaching goes, Doug was a master. I remember working on a curriculum writing project on cooperative learning with him when I was untenured. He had so many ideas and was so inspirational. It was clear that the administrators respected him tremendously and I realized pretty early on that he was a teacher to strive to be like.

Doug was an advocate for students, teachers, and good education. He spoke out at union meetings, waved banners at numerous rallies, and marched on the capital to advocate that education should be about kids and not tests. He gave out buttons to all of his A.P. students before the A.P. test that said, "This test does not define me!"

And when I came to Calhoun, he was such a support and encouragement as I tried

to find my niche amidst three new preps, three classrooms, and a new collab partner. His classroom was a constant haven for anyone who needed support or advice.

Doug generously shared his wonderful sons, Dylan and Ethan with us and they are now part of our Calhoun family.

Doug was and will continue to be a source of inspiration, good advice, and unconditional love.

Whenever I pass by his classroom, I hear his words of wisdom whispering in my ear.



Doug Smestad was a valued member of the Bellmore-Merrick community. His commitment and dedication to his students and staff members at Calhoun is something we should all aspire to achieve. Doug always actively participated in BMUST and helped make us a more effective, responsive organization. He served on numerous committees, participated in contract negotiations, and was Head Building Representative at Calhoun. Doug was always great at seeing the "big picture" when any issues came our way. I will miss Doug at our union meetings. I will miss his kind words and support. We are all diminished by his loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with his sons, Dylan and Ethan and the entire Smestad family.



Mark Steinberg,
President, BMUST

The Celebration of Life

A Memorial Service

DOUG SMESTAD

at Calhoun High School

**Donations Received Will
Fund the Doug Smestad Scholarship**

**22 December 2015
Doors Open at 6:30 p.m.**

A \$10 Donation Will Be Collected at the Door

"A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT FRIEND"

BY NEAL MADNICK (CALHOUN H.S.),
LOCAL DO'S WRITER



I have always wanted to believe in the concept of Karma: "What goes around, comes around".

I wanted to believe that injustices ultimately get righted, and bad people get their comeuppances in the end. However when Doug Smestad suffered the double tragedy of, first losing his beloved wife Janice to cancer several years ago, followed up by he, himself being stricken a year and a half ago, it has become almost impossible for me to cling to that belief. Doug Smestad was an individual of such high integrity, generosity of spirit, altruism, kindness, and just pure goodness that only wonderful things should have been his lot in life.

I first met Doug in June 2000 when I interviewed for a teaching position at Calhoun High School.

He was the Faculty representative on the Interview Committee. After I was hired he and his colleague offered to meet with me over the summer to give me a tour of the building and to answer any questions I may have. That offer of generosity eased my entry into Calhoun High School that Fall. That seemingly small gesture was emblematic of the type of individual that Doug was. He was always generous with his time and would make himself available to friends, students, colleagues and strangers, alike. He was among the most giving people I have ever met.

Doug's impact as a Social Studies teacher at Calhoun High School can not be overstated. I had a front row seat to his personal magic since my classroom was across the hall from his and I could literally see into his classroom from mine and overhear much of the activity emanating from that space. Every day, at the end of every period as the bell rang, I was treated to his closing encouragement to his students, "Remember. YOU are the future!!!"



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Officially, Doug taught Global History, AP World History, AP European History, Psychology, and Philosophy. But what he was really teaching his students was empathy, compassion, self-worth, optimism, and to always see beauty and wonder in others and in the world around us.

At the end of every school day as his last class of students poured out the door and into the hallway, various conglomerations of his students would then make their way back INTO his classroom. His classroom was transformed into "Smes' Clubhouse", where students came for a variety of reason. It could be for standard Extra Help, or it could be for exam review sessions, or it could be the home base for an extra curricula club. And Doug would stay there for as long as students needed to be there. Most days he was still there in his classroom hours after the end of the official school day. Not infrequently he would be there counseling just one or two students who needed someone to talk with about the stresses of the college application process, or even family problems or girlfriend issues. Doug was always there for his charges no matter the topic.

His classroom, both during class and afterward was a safe place for his students, a safe haven at times, and that is just one of the reasons he was so trusted and so loved by his students over the decades he taught at Calhoun High School.

When I was informed on Thursday morning a few weeks ago that Doug had passed on, I was pleased. Not pleased that I had lost a close and very dear friend. Not pleased that the world was now minus one truly extraordinary being. But pleased that he would not suffer. I was pleased that Doug died peacefully at his home surrounded by his two sons, without having had to endure what can often be an overly protracted period of suffering. He slipped away from us gracefully, which was so fitting of his humble, unassuming nature. Having been a regular visitor to Doug's home the last several months of his life, I was prepared for his passing and went about the rest of my teaching day, sad, but composed. However that evening surfing on Facebook I was overwhelmed by the torrential outpouring of both grief and love from hundreds and hundreds of his former students. Students who had just graduated very recently, to students who had taken Doug's classes years, and years ago, The sentiments expressed were all the same. What struck me most was the universally profound depth of the love and grief being shared. Student after student maintained that Doug Smestad was not merely the best teacher that they ever had, but that they felt that he had changed their lives. Changed their lives! That is an extraordinarily powerful thing.

The composure I had maintained earlier that day melted away as I read post after post, crying my eyes out as I read each and every one. I stayed up well past my normal bedtime, because as much pain as this was causing me, I felt compelled to read them all. But even as it was gut wrenching to read these posts, it was also cathartic for me, and truly beautiful all at the same time. These Facebook posts were the greatest tribute anyone could possibly have given to Doug Smestad.

Doug Smestad not only touched the lives of thousands of young people in the Bellmore-Merrick Community, but he made a difference. He changed lives for the better. What greater purpose could any of us ever ask for ourselves as we make our way through our time on Earth?

“THE SOUL OF CALHOUN HS”

As Shakespeare said, “He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.”

Doug was my good friend and colleague for 26 years. I met him 26 years ago when he came to see The On Tour production of Twelfth Night. He was a student teacher and came because his students invited him.

After the show, this bearded fellow with a ponytail came up and congratulated me. He said that it was so ambitious to be doing a Shakespeare play in a high school and that he was very impressed. Well, he certainly stroked my ego. We continued to talk and he explained his activities with the Medieval recreations group and offered to help if we ever needed stage combat.

Over that year, we continued to talk after school. One day we were walking out and I noticed he had a Jeep. I said, “Cool, I always wanted to ride in a Jeep.” He immediately took me for a wild nauseating ride that was to be a foreshadowing of many things to come.

As time passed we continued to have conversations and we discovered that we had much in common. He was a devotee of the Medieval era and a fan of the Renaissance. I was a devotee of the Renaissance and a fan of the Medieval era. We complemented each other.

He moved from student teacher to building sub and finally to full-time faculty.

At the start of his probationary period, he decided that he needed to do things so the administration would grant him tenure. He had already cut his pony tail when he was a building sub, but now he felt that his wardrobe needed to change.

He went out and purchased a polyester pants and blazer outfit. I told him he could wear khakis but he insisted that polyester

BY SAL SALERNO (CALHOUN H.S.),
LOCAL DO'S WRITER

was the ultimate conformity. Both he and Janice hated the pants. When he was finally granted tenure, he took the outfit and burned it.

He was adored by students and respected by colleagues. He became the soul of Calhoun. He went to every play and concert, as well as many sporting events, building and union functions. As a teacher, he quickly grew to be a most talented educator. He was the most positive and supportive individual and became an inspiration to his students and faculty both young and old. His mantra repeated at the end of each class, “Remember, you are the future,” reverberated with each graduating class. Although Doug split his time with his Medieval group, his motorcycle, his growing family with the addition of Ethan and his Friday D&D Gaming Night, we still found time to see each other. Often, I would go over to his house to work on his computer. Janice would call me to come over and help me because he was clueless to it and she would make me linguine and clam sauce as a lure and reward.

Doug was a multi-instrumentalist. He played banjo, guitar, bass, lute and hurdy-gurdy. I had known about the lute and Hurdy-Gurdy as he demonstrated them to classes, but it wasn't until 2000 that I started playing guitar again and Doug and I began to get together to play.

He was much more accomplished than I was or could hope to be. He became a mentor and instructor to me. Using the same skills he used with his students, he was encouraging and supportive, helping me refine what skills I had and teaching me new things as we got together.



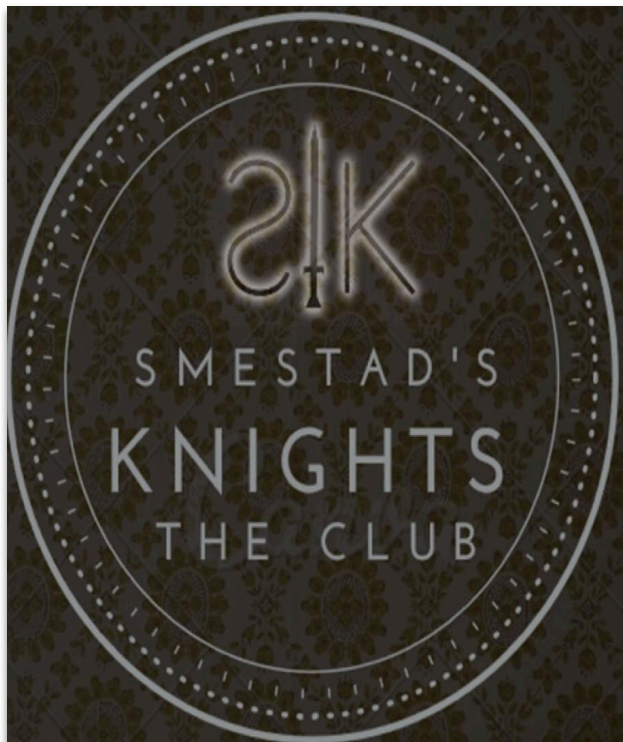
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After his beloved Janice passed away, he came to me and said, "I'm going to have to hang out with you more often." I said of course, but he insisted I had to. I said why and he said, "You're a bachelor, and now I'm one and all my other friends are married and I don't want to be a third wheel."

And so our friendship deepened, as we began to travel together to England, Scotland and Ireland, and numerous trips to Mandolin Brothers on Staten Island, where he played for hours every vintage or new instrument they had often bought more guitars or banjos. After his cancer diagnosis, he refused to stop living and did everything he could to maintain doing what he loved: teaching his classes, riding his Harley, playing his instruments, hosting game



nights, going to concerts and shows and traveling. I made two trips with him to London and what would be a final trip to Disney with choir. On that trip, he explained to choreographer, Brie Piccirillo, his statement about his life, which I had heard him say on many occasions after his diagnosis. Fortunately, she remembered it verbatim and quoted it in her Facebook tribute: He was hopeful for a new treatment he would be starting when he got home. "But", he said, "if something doesn't work out, I know I've led a good life...I'm not afraid to die..... I've raised my two boys, I got the chance to find the love of my life, and I got to marry her! Hey! And I get to do what I love, for as long as my body will let me." Although I have three best friends who are like brothers - of different kinds, one a little brother, one a twin, Doug was my best friend "older brother." I looked up to him and admired everything about him. I loved his sage wisdom and comforting support and I will miss sharing the good times.



"Reflections"

"Perhaps his greatest gift to his colleagues and students was his time. I've never met anyone who was as generous with his or her time as Doug. He would always make time to listen and find ways to support those he cared about. His generosity and unwavering commitment to the students was even more evident in the last couple of years. And I would bet that he is beloved for that aspect of his character as much for his impersonations and storytelling."

- Jay Kreutzberger, Calhoun H.S.



"The loss of Doug creates a gaping hole that I don't think will ever be completely filled. However, we are each taking a little bit of Doug with us. Maybe through the collective taking-on of Doug we will be able to continue on, giving his spirit to others."

- Nicole Hollings, Calhoun Principal

Doug Smestad is survived by his sons, Dylan and Ethan, both Calhoun graduates. He was predeceased by his wife, Janice. Having touched the hearts and lives of so many, we who have been inspired by Doug promise to continue his legacy.



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Are you ready to answer these questions?

What would happen if you suddenly died? Have you ever considered what would happen to your spouse and/or children? Take a few moments and answer these questions now:

- 1) Would your loved ones be able to afford their current home?*
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