

By James Nelson

'Dave Henderson was becoming an embarrassment'

*A few too-racy items in his alma mater's
class notes, and an elusive son of Eli,
class of '43, had to be discreetly done in*

I didn't want to kill Dave Henderson. Though I didn't know him well, I had grown surprisingly fond of him. For six years, I excerpted his many newsy and colorful letters for inclusion in the class notes column that appears in each issue of the *Yale Alumni Magazine*. I had, in fact, taken a certain vicarious pleasure in his opulent and sometimes slippery escapades. The powers that be, however, did not share my feelings. Henderson was becoming an embarrassment to his—and my—university.

Dave hadn't always been such a thorn in Yale's side. In fact, during the first 41 years following the graduation of the class of '43, Dave left Yale entirely alone. *Lux et Veritas* was nothing to him, it appeared. No one in the class reported hearing from him; he sent no news to the class secretaries, and he sent no money to the alumni fund. Moreover, when it came time to bring out a new class directory, Dave didn't even bother to send along his address.

It was as if he didn't even exist.

It was not until early 1984, in fact, 18 months after I'd taken on the task of assembling class notes for the alumni magazine, that anyone heard from Dave.

His first message came in the form of a short post-

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card from Mexico. Dutifully—and more or less innocently—I included the following in my column:

Writing from his winter home in Cancun, DAVE HENDERSON reports that his company finally lost its long bout with Chapter Eleven. Says Dave philosophically, "I didn't really mind—I was sick and tired of trying to breathe life into the damned thing!" Dave says he had several pleasant conversations with two class members he met at the Betty Ford Institute last fall."

A month later a second communication from Dave appeared. This time his tone was more mellow, and he extended the first of many hospitable invitations to his classmates, indicating, I felt, his desire to rejoin our world. I included it in the June 1984 issue:

From Cartagena, Colombia, DAVE HENDERSON writes: "Marge and I flew down to the boat early this year to escape the Mexican heat. We plan to cruise the East Coast of South America for awhile, but we'll be back home in Cancun by October first, with plenty of Margaritas and spare bedrooms for all visiting '43-ers. . ."

Early that fall, I had another note from Dave. Before I give it to you, though, a few words about class notes in general. As everyone knows, they are a very popular item in every alumni magazine. No matter how relevant or flashy the editors try to make their lead articles, the first thing alumni turn to—if they turn to anything at all—is the back of the book where the class notes are buried. The habit is so addictive that people often find themselves reading about the lives of classmates they've never met or about alumni in other classes. Hard-core class notes junkies even read about the alumni of other schools. I've heard of a man, 40 years on, who for some reason still keeps track of the doings of his wife's Wellesley classmates, a number of whom he used to date.

But if your class notes are anything like mine, in a class of 850 there are 25 active, extroverted, well-placed members whose names seem to appear in the column—in boldface—in each and every issue. There are also 825 normal folk, drudges and geniuses alike, whose names, since graduating, have appeared once or, more likely, not at all. This isn't elitism on the part of the class notes secretary. Several times a year, every member of the class is encouraged, nay hectored, to send in news of himself or other classmates. The 825 average Joes (and where applicable, Jills) ignore the request. The active, voluble 25, on the other hand, send in their news. And send, and send, and send.

The nature of the news, of course, has something to do with it. If you've just been named to the boards of three Fortune 500 companies and your youngest son

Illustrations by W. B. Park
Smithsonian, March 1991

has reached the quarterfinals at Wimbledon, you're a bit more likely to send your news in than if you've been in the same nothing job for 29 years and your kids are still tie-dyeing T-shirts.

To be perfectly honest, a principal reason I took on the class notes job was to search for the silent 825. I wanted to hear about what they were doing. Thus, I sent out flight after flight of letters, trying to pry news from them. To classmates I knew, I made the letters personal. Others I tried to stir into action by referring to some item from our class book, published at the time of our graduation more than 40 years ago. "Do you still fence?" I would ask. "Have you kept up your interest in drama?" "Do they still call you 'Stumpie?'"

As a further incentive, I included a self-addressed, stamped envelope, in the deluded hope that my Yale classmates, moved by the appeal, would instantly scribble a few lines and mail them off. No dice. For every 20 letters sent out, I got back—well, maybe 2. There are days, indeed, with deadline near and copy short, when a class secretary may feel a strong urge to invent. In any case, had a few more of the uncommunicative 825 replied to my requests, Dave Henderson might never have turned up in the *Yale Alumni Magazine*. And I, as a result, would not have been compelled to take his life.

His November 1984 note, unlike his first, was as lively as could be:

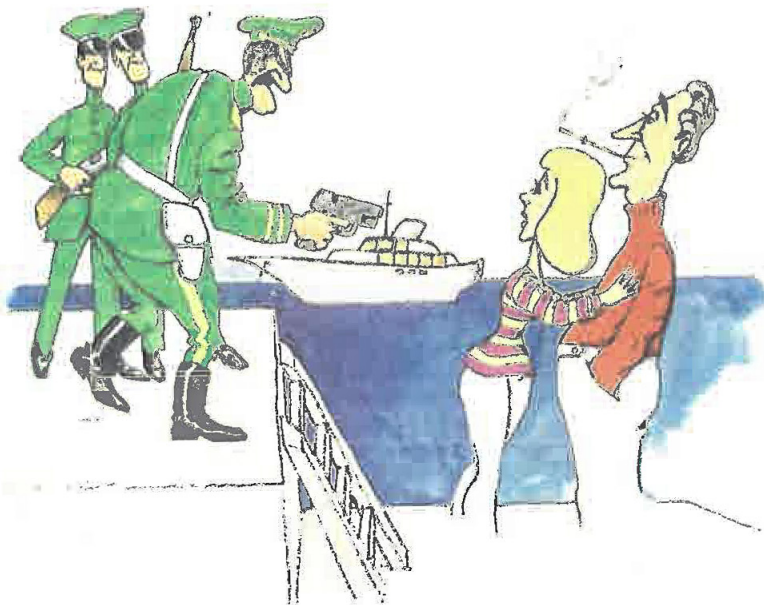
"Back in Cancun earlier than expected, thanks (no thanks!) to Marge and self having been put

under 'boat arrest' for ten days in S. João do Monte, a tiny port town north of Recife (east coast of Brazil) for suspected trafficking in 'illegal substances.' The whole thing was poppycock, of course, and ended only after we gave a lavish party on the boat for the entire police department, their wives, girlfriends, and God-knows-who-else! The incident shook us up, nevertheless, and we flew home, leaving the crew to take our boat back to Cartagena. Still hoping some '43-ers will look us up in Cancun this winter."

Dave's messages kept coming. It was as though, having finally pulled the stopper from the bottle, he couldn't keep the contents from gushing forth.

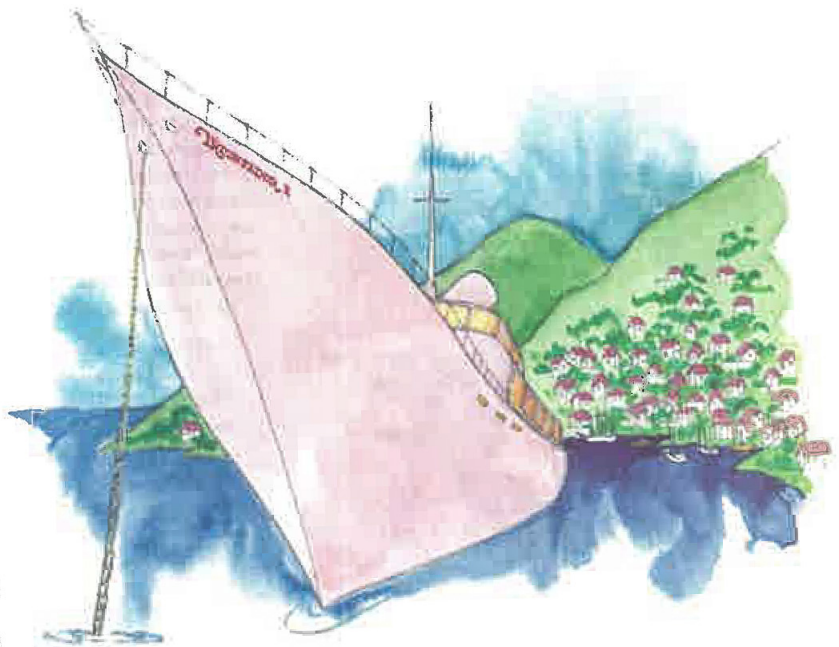
April 1985:

From even further south—south of the border, in fact—DAVE HENDERSON sends several color photos of his fabulous Cancun home, together with the following note: "Marge and I plan to have the whole family here for Easter, provided the court will modify the terms of our daughter Sondra's parole to permit her a brief trip out of the U.S. If she gets turned down, we'll gather instead at the Plaza for a week, in which case I'll hope to catch up with a few venerable New York '43-ers whom I haven't seen since New Haven days. Incidentally, watch for Sondra's book, *Triplecross!*, which will be out in September. I believe it will cause quite a stir in the intelligence-gathering community. . ."



"Back in Cancun earlier than expected, thanks (no thanks!) to Marge and self having been put under 'boat arrest' for ten days in S. João do Monte, a tiny port town north of Recife, for suspected trafficking in 'illegal substances.'"

"Marge and I plan to fly to Italy. . . . We'll be anchored a great many nights in the little harbor at Portofino, and would be happy to have any touring members of '43 who find themselves in that lovely spot come aboard for a drink or a meal . . ."



June 1985:

Heading west across the Caribbean to Cancun, Mexico, we have this report from **DAVE HENDERSON**: "I hope none of my classmates gave credence to the recent and extremely scurrilous *Wall Street Journal* story about the demise of my company. In spite of the fact that they didn't actually use my name, I found their raking of coals now dead for nearly two years both unnecessary and reprehensible. Their further gall in printing a totally unfounded rumor that certain senior officers had delayed the Chapter Eleven filing until they could siphon off the assets represents the most irresponsible kind of yellow journalism! A pox on them! On a much happier note, Marge and I plan to fly to Italy and spend the entire month of June aboard our boat, *Triunfador II*. We'll be anchored a great many nights at Portofino, and would be happy to have any touring members of '43 who find themselves in that lovely spot come aboard for a drink or a meal . . ."

Apparently no one showed up in Portofino. At least Dave did not mention a reunion in any of the letters that followed the Mediterranean trip, such as this one from February 1986:

Received a note and a wedding snapshot from **DAVE HENDERSON**, wintering in his palatial home in Cancun, Mexico: "Just back from a quick trip to Paris to attend our daughter Karen's wedding to Attilo Katakunle, number three man in Zaire's Ministry of Tourism. This is Karen's third marriage, and we are hopeful that Attilo's sense of humor and impressive good looks—he's 6'7", 290 pounds—mean that he is Mr. Right for her. . . . they will go to Zaire in late spring for the birth of their child in the capital city of Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville), following which they will journey to the interior to spend a month in Attilo's village where, as nephew of the Chief, he is regarded as royalty."

After a longer than usual silence, I received the following report of the Hendersons' hectic life:

Finally, from Cancun, Mexico, **DAVE HENDERSON** writes: "A busy winter with many visitors. Burt Lancaster was with us for a long weekend while starring in a TV miniseries being shot in Mexico

The author, Yale '43, once served as class notes secretary for the alumni magazine. Mr. Henderson, he insists, is the only person he has ever killed.



"Having Imelda as a guest is quite an operation. Her security people check out the premises. When Herself arrives, she comes complete with secretary, maid, hairdresser, three bodyguards, and a driver!"

City. He was followed by Imelda Marcos and her entourage, who stayed nearly ten days. Having Imelda as a guest is always quite an operation. Her security people arrive a week early to check out the premises and environs, and when Herself arrives, she comes complete with personal secretary, maid, hairdresser, three bodyguards, and a driver! The driver, Tony, occasionally doubles as a gourmet cook. This time Tony had just returned from a refresher course in Evasive Driving Techniques at the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving near Sonoma, Cal. He gave us a demonstration using our stretch limo, which he spun around as though it were a sports car!"

Dave's letter concluded, as always, with an open invitation to his classmates: "Incidentally, Marge and I are still hoping a few '43s will find their way here this spring for a week, a weekend, a meal, or whatever, plus some pleasant reminiscing. . ."

Not long after Imelda's sojourn, the Marcoses' position in the Philippines deteriorated considerably. In a subsequent issue, Dave commented: "You can imagine the shock Marge and I feel over what has happened

since Imelda's visit to us last December! . . . After all that she and Ferdie did for the Philippine people, it seems their ingratitude knows no bounds!"

I was beginning to wonder if Dave's classmates had taken any notice of his letters or of his invitations. Certainly by now *someone* should have contacted me to ask for Dave's address. Even if he hadn't been well known as a student, I thought his recent letters should have piqued his classmates' interest just a little. Apparently, however, his activities had not been sufficiently remarkable to cause a second thought.

In December 1986, I printed the following:

Enclosing a color snapshot of his 54-room *palacio* in Cancun, Mexico, DAVE HENDERSON writes: "Marge and I are heartsick that in July, pirates boarded our motor-yacht *Triunfador II* as it was passing through Malacca Straits, stripped it clean, and then opened the sea valves, sending the most comfortable cruiser we ever owned to the bottom of the sea. Two of the crew were killed scuffling with the boarding party, and the remaining ten were put off in lifeboats with little water and no food. They drifted 36 hours before being rescued. Fortunately, Marge and I had disembarked in Dar es Salaam and flown back to Johannesburg to check on some of our investments. We are now battling with our Panamanian insurance company about the sinking—they claim it was an act of God! Meanwhile, in Kobe, Japan, we have laid the keel for a new, much larger vessel. We hereby officially issue an invitation to all '43-ers in the area to attend the party when *Triunfador III* comes down the ways, God willing, in July of '87. . ."

Shortly after this note appeared, I received the letter I had been waiting for. A classmate wrote, wondering why he had been unable to locate Dave's name in the most recent class directory. But that was the only inquiry. "Who is Dave Henderson?" did not seem to be a burning question for the members of the class of '43.

If the readership of the alumni magazine had been limited to Yale alumni, Henderson's little notes to his classmates clearly would have caused no stir. But when one of his letters was reprinted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* the pot began to boil. The letter appeared in the daily column of the *Chronicle's* venerated Herb Caen, under the title "Monday's Mildewed Memos." The item opened with the words "Dave Henderson has it made!" after which it quoted a letter from Dave, word for word as it had appeared in the alumni magazine:

I have a long letter from DAVE HENDERSON, with pictures of the launching of his new boat, *Triunfador III*. Says Dave, "Our shiny new putt-putt was to have been 163 feet overall, but after Marge's father kicked the bucket last year, we



“Pirates boarded our yacht, *Triunfador II*, passing through Malacca Straits, stripped it clean, and then opened the sea valves, sending the most comfortable cruiser we ever owned to the bottom of the sea.”

figured we could go another 30-40 feet. So, we redid the whole plan, and now it's 197 feet stem-to-stern, fitted out with every electronic marvel known to man, and furnished like a Sultan's harem! I feel like a kid with a new toy, and so does Marge! The other day she walked into the owner's suite—the whole thing's done in white-on-white—collapsed on the bed, and began to cry, she was so happy! Incidentally, we've got a wonderful new chef on board, and we're heading for Italy and the Cote d'Azur in May. Any '43-ers who spot us in one of the harbors in that neighborhood are hereby invited to come aboard for drinks and some of Andre's gourmet chow . . .”

Caen closed with the comment “Hold the Boola-Boola soup, Andre, and pass the Mothersills—I'm feeling a bit queasy.”

Soon thereafter, a concerned Yale graduate wrote Yale president Benno C. Schmidt jr. and enclosed a copy of the Caen column. The letter commented, first, on the poor taste exhibited by the Hendersons in lengthening the *Triunfador III* by 34 feet as a direct result of the death of Marge's father and, second, on Dave's even poorer taste in writing about it. Implicit was a third comment—on the notes secretary's poor taste for having included the item, and on the alumni magazine's for having printed it.

A short time later, Dave's letter gained a national audience. The *New Yorker* reprinted it as a column filler under the provocative heading “Department of Life Styles (Old Eli Division).” This time Dave's letter had company, a note from the Yale class of '44 concerning one Larry Vaughn.

Vaughn sounded as if he might have been a good friend of Dave's. For one thing, he had been canny enough to get out of the market before the October '87 crash. For another, he had left his wife, Claudine, and daughter Fleur at their comfortable villa in Porto Cervo, Sardinia, while he spent two years high in the Himalayas, in Nepal's Chonro Lamasery, where, he reported, he was finding himself anew and meditating on the future.

Larry Vaughn shared another important characteristic with Dave Henderson. I could not find his name in the *Yale Alumni Directory*.

This odd coincidence did not surprise me. Though I'd never heard of Larry Vaughn, I'd already learned that David Henderson was not as unique as he seemed. A few months earlier, my wife and I had been entertaining Osborne Day, then our senior class officer, at our home in California. Over dinner, some wine and a discussion of the trials of corresponding secretaryship, Oz confided that some years earlier, when he had had my job, he had invented a classmate.

I could hardly believe my ears. I pressed him, and



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although Oz couldn't remember the chap's name, he did remember that he had put him into the Foreign Service and sent him to a U.S. Consulate in some Caribbean republic. Finally, he had thrown the poor fellow into jail (quite unjustly, of course—mistaken identity or something like that), and there the man languished, probably to this day. In one of his columns Oz urged classmates to write their beleaguered classmate and cheer him up.

I refilled Oz's wineglass.

"Oz," I said, "let me tell you about Dave Henderson."

The inventor of a bogus classmate is subject to one omnipresent fear: discovery. But he has an even greater fear: the possibility that discovery may never occur. He wants to know that at least *one* reader has felt that the events described are not the normal activities of a member of the class of '43. Thanks to Herb Caen and the *New Yorker*, as querying letters began to pour in from across the country, this latter fear, at least, was allayed.

What could I do but press on? In the December 1988 *YAM* another Henderson letter appeared:

From Cancun, Mexico, DAVE HENDERSON sends a hurried note: "You can't imagine the damage Hurricane Gilbert inflicted on our spread here! If you can believe it, the winds actually *emptied* our Olympic-size swimming pool, then the rain filled it halfway-up again! A number of outbuildings—two barns, one of the guest houses, the airplane hangar—were completely blown away! I am talking to several highly-placed government people in D.F. (Mexico City) about disaster relief. . ."

The next column with word from Dave was for the May 1989 issue. But when the May column appeared in print, Dave's item was not part of it. I sent a note to the alumni magazine: "Sorry my copy ran so long you had to cut it. I assume the unused matter is in the overset, available for my next opus. . . ." No reply.

I queried again and received a cryptic response: "I think the overset might be termed a sleeping dog."

It was then I knew I would have to kill Dave. His time had come. But I wasn't sure quite how to do it. Should he fall overboard from *Triunfador III's* skyscraper bridge? Should he charter the Concorde and choke on a truffle en route to Paris? Should he expire when his stretch limo totals Zsa Zsa Gabor's?

Thinking of his high-flying style of life, I finally decided that he should die a pedestrian death.

And so I wrote Dave's obituary. I included it in the next column I sent in. A short time later, I phoned the editor and pleaded my case for its publication. He lectured me at some length on the innumerable reasons why he himself would rather die than run it.

And that is why you are only now learning the tragic facts, as originally conceived and submitted for publication, concerning the death of David Underhill Henderson, Yale, class of '43:

Closing on a somber note, I have a letter reporting the death of DAVE HENDERSON three weeks before Christmas. From their home in Cancun, Dave's wife Marge writes, "We were about to take *Triunfador III* through the Canal, and with all the unrest in Panama, Dave thought it would be a wise precaution to arm the crew with assault rifles.

He had gone ashore in Belize to try to buy some and was walking back to the boat empty-handed when he was struck down by a speeding pickup truck loaded with mangoes. He died on the way to the hospital. . . ." Dave was buried in a simple family service on the ranch where he was born, now belonging to his brother Richard, near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. The Class extends its sympathies to Marge and her family.

As I finally came to accept Dave's death, I found I had no feelings of sadness. Dave had had a long and happy life. Six years of that life had been reported extensively in the notes column. In the midst of unlimited corporate success, academic and professional achievement, philanthropy, public service and happy family life, Dave Henderson had provided a cheerful example of greed, insensitivity and wretched excess.

What more could a classmate do?

"With all the unrest in Panama, Dave thought it would be wise to arm the crew with assault rifles.

He was walking back to the boat empty-handed when struck down by a pickup truck loaded with mangoes."



James Carmer Nelson, Jr.

(11/10/21 - 1/13/15)

Former San Francisco advertising executive James C. (Jim) Nelson, Jr. passed away at home, January 13, 2015, at age 93.

Mr. Nelson, the son of a dairy salesman, was born and raised in Denver, Colorado during the Great Depression and earned a full academic scholarship to Yale University. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, his graduating class was accelerated to matriculate a year early, in 1942, in order to join the war effort. Mr. Nelson enlisted in the Navy and was stationed at Del Coronado Island in San Diego where he trained crewmen in anti-submarine warfare before they shipped out to the Pacific Theater.

After the war, Mr. Nelson returned to the East Coast and worked as Marketing Editor for Business Week Magazine in New York City. It was there in New York where he met his lifelong partner, Mary-Armour Ransom of Rye. The two were engaged within one month and married a year later in 1950.



After the birth of their first child, the Nelsons decided to seek their fortune in the San Francisco Bay Area. They moved to Sonoma, California where Mr. Nelson freelanced for magazines while he and his wife operated a mini-empire of gumball machines—an experience that inspired his first novel "The Trouble with Gumballs."

In 1957, Mr. Nelson became a copywriter at the former San Francisco ad agency, Hoefler, Dietrich & Brown—which later became the largest independent ad agency west of the Mississippi. While at HD&B, Mr. Nelson served the majority of his tenure as Creative Director before rising to President and then Vice-Chair of the Board. A talented musician who composed well-known jingles for radio and television—as well as a nascent artist—Mr. Nelson's office was always home to an upright piano and his paintings and mixed media pieces.

Mr. Nelson sat on several industry boards and was regularly invited to speak at advertising conferences due to his insightful and humorous perspectives. In 2012, Advertising Age Magazine hailed his 1967 short film, "2017 Revisited," as prescient at foreseeing the digital media boom. In it, Mr. Nelson plays the role of U.S. Secretary of Advertising in the year 2095 looking back at an imagined 2017. (<http://bit.ly/1CixjDA>)

Mr. Nelson retired from full-time agency life in 1980, shortly after overseeing the merger of HD&B with Chiat Day SF. However, he did not retire from his creative endeavors. He continued to write articles for magazines and consult for Fortune 500 companies. He studied figure drawing and created a prolific series of pen and ink drawings that chronicled trips and life events he and his wife shared together. Mr. Nelson also wrote books on wine as well as penned several novels and a screenplay. His novel, "On the Volcano," was published by Putnam and Sons when Mr. Nelson turned 89.

As secretary for his Yale Class Notes of 1943—and unbeknownst to anyone other than his wife—Mr. Nelson embarked on a 6-year adventure of 'spiking' the Notes with a fictitious classmate, Dave Henderson, and his egregiously selfish exploits. Mr. Nelson's Henderson was so believable yet so outrageous that the Notes attracted the attention of, among others, SF Chronicle columnist, Herb Caen. Articles began appearing condemning Henderson and his tastelessness, and soon thereafter Mr. Nelson was removed as class secretary. Mr. Nelson subsequently killed off Mr. Henderson in a humorous Smithsonian Magazine article that recounted the entire incident.

Throughout his adult life, Mr. Nelson loved to travel the world, learning about different cultures and mastering a basic command of a country's language prior to visiting. During the last 20 years of his life, Mr. Nelson's travel slowed as he began to battle the effects of post-polio syndrome. Post-polio took away his tennis game but not his curiosity to try new things. When he could no longer walk, he developed a style of photography taken from a car or wheel chair—photography that won awards in judged competitions. When he became unable to type, he learned to use speech recognition software and wrote two novels.

By far the most important thing in Mr. Nelson's life was his family and his wife, Mary-Armour. Their 65-year love affair was an inspiration to their children, their grandchildren, and friends. Mr. Nelson is survived by his wife, Mary-Armour, his children Jamie Nelson of San Rafael, Marshall and Marie-Louise (Nelson) Graves of Sacramento, Jeff and Sabrina Nelson of Los Angeles, Tom and Rebecca (Nelson) Sylla of Kentfield, as well as seven grandchildren—Jackson Masters, Randa, Nina and Willie Nelson, and Tyler, Eli and Cameron Sylla. A celebration of Mr. Nelson's life will be held Sunday, February 15th, 1pm, at the Mill Valley Recreation Center, 180 Camino Alto.

Published in San Francisco Chronicle on Feb. 1, 2015