

# Constant Gardener

**N**athaniel Wilson, Jr. (right) was a true southern gentleman—warm and dignified, with a keen, dry sense of humor. The Virginian’s life was rich and his experiences varied. He had a life-long love of airplanes, proudly serving his country in the Navy as an aeronautics specialist, and working for years for the Air Transport Association. He lived in Spain for several years while in the Foreign Service, and was fluent in both Spanish and French. During his retirement, Nat regularly traveled to New York, San Francisco, Santa Fe and beyond to share his passions for opera, the symphony and architecture with friends and family.



Nat was a heart transplant recipient. Despite his generally private nature, he was open about the impact that the donation had, giving him 13 additional years to live life to the fullest. Nat’s friends uniformly report the awe and inspiration they felt as they gathered for his annual transplant anniversary celebrations, cheering both the humbling, generous gift and how well Nat used it. He and his friend Larry Slagle, the only people they were aware of who were both gay and heart recipients, formed a mutual support group and were proud to share with others: “Donation works!”

In addition to volunteering as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and for the Association for Retarded Citizens of Virginia, Nat was a long term civil rights activist. He served on the board of the ACLU of Virginia, and volunteered for both the Arlington Virginia Gay and Lesbian

Alliance and as a counselor for youth with Metro DC PFLAG (earning that group’s volunteer of the year award.) “He wanted gay people to have a better life, easier and with more acceptance, than what he went through as a young man,” says one of his best friends, Murray Bond.

“Nat wasn’t a front-page person, not at all splashy,” says his former life partner Stephen Nash. “He was the steady and persistent person willing to work for years to see results.” His good friend and fellow Arlington activist James Fisher adds, “He wanted to put his dollars to a good and effective use, and he went at it in a foundational way—looking for what he could support so that his investment in the organization would grow and mean something over time.” His support was both thoughtful and loyal. “He truly cared, in an ethical and moral way, about the groups he supported,” says Rhonda Buckner, who met Nat when she led

DC PFLAG. His many years of support as a major donor to Lambda Legal reflect that commitment.

One of Nat’s great loves was gardening, and he spent years cultivating a stunning garden surrounding his Arlington home. After Nat’s death, his sister Sue shared some of his plant cuttings with friends. “I now have these lovely Japanese bloodgrass and ferns,” Fisher says. “When you can walk around each year and see something that returns again and again to keep you company, something tied to someone you loved who is gone, it’s a tremendous comfort and wonderful remembrance.”

Nat’s generous bequest of over \$380,000 to Lambda Legal is also a gift that will sustain generations, supporting our fight for full equality for LGBT people and people living with HIV. We thank him, and miss him dearly. —*Judi O’Kelley, Director of Life Planning*

*“On the Defensive,” continued from page 13*

The Alliance Defense Fund, an antigay legal group, filed a lawsuit against the city saying *any* governmental recognition of same-sex couples was an “approximation” of marriage and thus a violation of Ohio’s constitutional amendment. The trial court dismissed the case because of binding precedent, but the Alliance Defense Fund and their client, a local antigay group called Cleveland Taxpayers for the Ohio Constitution, appealed to the Court of Appeals, Eighth Appellate District. The Court unanimously affirmed the lower court’s dismissal, declaring, “Any legally established relationship bearing less than all the attributes of marriages is constitutional.”

Indeed, Cleveland’s domestic partnership registry is important and meaningful for those who benefit from it, but it cannot approximate marriage unless it provides the extensive legal structure that protects married couples’ families. The state’s antigay amendment should in no way restrict Ohio cities from helping same-sex couples obtain health insurance benefits.

**THE CLEVELAND DECISION IS** especially important because the Court recognized that the legal status of marriage is “exceptional.” Citing the friend-of-the-court brief that Lambda Legal submitted in defense of the registry, the Court noted the difficulty of arguing that “domestic partnership” could ever equate to marriage:

As stated in our amicus brief, the term “domestic partner” completely lacks the social and emotive resonance of “husband” and “wife.” Domestic partnerships are not given the same respect by society as a married couple, and they share none of marriage’s history and traditions.

This compelling logic has direct application to the domestic partner challenge in Wisconsin. As Lambda Legal advances its defense of the Wisconsin registry, we will urge the Wisconsin court to reach a similar conclusion: that constitutional amendments prohibiting marriage for same-sex couples have no bearing at all on laws providing LGBT families with limited, but important domestic partnership protections. **L**