

Tributes to Dr. Anthony J. Sommo (November 15, 1947-August 12, 2023), Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Rowan University

Introduction (by Yuhui Li):

Dr. Anthony J. Sommo (Tony), who taught Sociology at Rowan for thirty years from 1992 to 2022, passed away on August 12, 2023.

Shocked and saddened by Tony's sudden passing, many of us felt compelled to express our condolences and memories of Tony. Tony did not want a funeral service, and so the decision was made by Josephine, Tony's sister, and a few of us, including Jay Chases, Barry Carlson and myself, that a memorial service for Tony on November 15th 2023, which would have been Tony's 76th birthday, would be more to his wishes.

The service, titled *A Celebration of Life for Dr. Anthony J. Sommo*, was held from 5 pm to 8 pm in Owl's Nest of the Student Center on Rowan University campus. Many people attended, including Tony's family, colleagues, students and friends. Some attendees came as far as NC and MA. Those who could not attend the service offered their written tributes and appreciations.

Everyone agreed that the service went exceptionally well and Tony would have appreciated the event. It was informal with delicious food (Tony loved good food!) that Jo and Brad (Tony's brother-in-law) had had prepared for the occasion. People took turns giving presentations to remember Tony with deep emotions mixed with laughter when we recalled Tony's mischievous behavior and unique sense of humor.

Unfortunately, three hours were far from sufficient to allow everyone to share their thoughts and memories about Tony. Besides, there were tremendous eagerness and expectations to access, visit and revisit the memories regardless whether they had been presented at the service. This is the reason for the publication of this collection of essays and comments in memory of Dr. Anthony J. Sommo.

There are two parts in the following collection. Part One are comments by students who nominated Tony into Wall of Fame Teaching Excellence award at Rowan over the years. Part Two consists of submissions by family, students, friends and colleagues after Tony had passed away. Both parts of the collection are arranged alphabetically according to names of the authors.

We welcome anyone who knew Tony and wishes to share with us their memories of Tony to join us in celebrating Tony's life. Please send your comments and notes to li@rowan.edu.

Part One: Wall of Fame Excellence in Teaching Student Comments:

Ann Boyer, 2015:

I nominate Dr Sommo for showing me that the IMPOSSIBLE is POSSIBLE. Thank you for your strength and courage to believe in me.

Lauren Goodman, 2012:

Aside from the fact that Professor Sommo is funny, down-to-earth and personable, he is also extremely knowledgeable in his field of work. I learned so much from only having two courses with him. He challenges his class to think on a level in which no other professor I've had has provoked such stimuli. The material he had us read tapped a part of our brain that stimulated sophisticated thought and thinking outside the box. The first time Professor Sommo walked into our Deviance and Social Control class with his seeing stick, I thought "this guy is going to teach the class?" As judgmental as that sounds, it taught me how strong this individual had to be his whole life dealing with a disability. I had a newfound respect and admiration for him. Professor Sommo is nothing short of an amazing teacher, mentor and human being!

Lena Jones, 2013:

Dr. Sommo, the advisor who knows his stuff! He amazed me by knowing and having the confidence despite his handicap. He is a very intelligent and cool guy. The advising time he spent with me was one of the great learning experiences, because he advised me to take classes that made my time in Rowan University worth the time, and worth the money. I love him.

Sarah Miles, 2017:

Dr. Sommo impacted my education by inspiring me to work to the best of my ability and always strive for excellence. Dr. Sommo always gave me detailed responses from papers to improve for next time or compliments. He also provided me with tons of knowledge in several Sociology courses to prepare for the course exams and future times. I was undecided when I transferred to Rowan, but having one class with Dr. Sommo, he inspired me so much, it pushed me to declare Sociology as my major and to take three additional classes with him. He changed the way I think forever!

Jenae Rich, 2016:

Professor Sommo was and continues to be an inspiring model and teacher. He has always been a helpful friend and mentor despite having his own obstacles and disabilities to overcome.

Scott Rosell-Takayama, 2017:

Dr, Sommo had a major impact on my learning and overall experience at Rowan University. His passion for the topics covered in various courses, as well as

the interesting nature of material covered, made him a standout. Furthermore, his willingness to help and work with me (beyond what a teacher is expected to do) meant the world to me. Lastly, his love and admiration for writing, probably, did more for my writing progression than any other course in literature or composition.

Part Two: Other Comments, Thoughts and Memories:

Edmund Brumfield (né O'Brien), alumnus (2008) and assistant

I worked with Dr. Sommo over the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years as his reader. I was not a sociology student, however, through assisting Dr. Sommo in grading papers and exams, I became interested in the subject. I remember becoming inspired by reading his students' papers based on the class reading assignments to also read the books myself. Though not a student in his classroom, I remember feeling like one of his pupils as discussed what was learned through the course material. Eventually, with his encouragement, I did take one sociology course for fun with another professor. As his reader, I remember always feeling as though we were a team. I took away many life lessons and fond memories from my two years working with Dr. Sommo that I carry with me always.

Rachel Budmen, colleague:

I will always remember Tony as the man who unabashedly sang "I want a new drug, one that won't make me sick..." (lyrics from I Want a New Drug, by Huey Lewis and the News) while walking down the hall to his office. His confidence was contagious.

Shelly Burelle friend at UConn:

My name is Shelly and I met Tony when I was only 18-20 years old at UConn, where I worked as a Clerk Typist. He was an adjunct Professor in the Sociology Department and when we met, we hit it off immediately! Originally, I helped him with his mail and paperwork. Eventually we would go out for lunch during my lunch hour at University Pizza where I would have my glass of wine and he would have his meal followed by Baklava, which I had never heard of until that day! He would often walk his fingers across the table to try to steal some of my fries. We had such a good time together, gossiping about the various personalities around us while agreeing that we were both so much cooler than everyone else. The last time I saw Tony was when he came back for a visit after having moved to NJ. I was happy to introduce him to my daughter who was only 4 or so at the time. Over 20 years have passed since that time but I always made sure to send him a card around the holidays and to give him a call. We would talk for hours about the "good old days". He told me about his life in NJ. and I filled him in with what was going on in my life. He always related whatever I had going on to something he had experienced in life. We often talked movies and pop culture. He would give his bad boy New Jersey accent for fun and let me know he was still the coolest and always asked me if I was still cute!! I loved Tony! ❤️ My condolences to his sister and everyone who knew and loved him. He was a very special person and I will miss him dearly!!

Emily Casey, assistant and alumni 2016:

Along with having Professor Sommo as a Professor in multiple courses, I had the privilege of working with him as his reader for about 2 years while attending Rowan as a sociology major.

As most of us probably know, Professor Sommo was known for his signature phrases. I was quickly reminded of this when I received the unfortunate phone call about his passing. As his sister Josephine and I got to talking, I mentioned being one of his readers and she reminded me how he always used to say, “Yeah I know how to pick them, I always find the good ones.” As I was trying to process the news after hanging up, I came to the simple conclusion that I must have this same gift. Professor Sommo is a constant reminder that I really knew how to pick the good ones too.

I transferred to Rowan for my junior year after attending two different colleges. Looking back I’d say I was at a pretty critical time in my academic career - some may have even called it a crisis. This was mostly because I hadn’t really found “my thing.” I wasn’t feeling inspired and was just going through the motions. Despite these challenges, I tried my best to stick it out and went on to register for my first semester at Rowan. It was then that I picked a course and professor and with that pick, I gained so much more. I gained an advisor, a mentor, a job, and most importantly- a lifelong friend. Despite the terrifying reviews on RatemyProfessor.com about how hard Professor Sommo’s multiple choice tests were, I picked a professor and a course which would profoundly shape my intellect, interest, and life in general.

Looking back at the days when I was significantly struggling to even make it through a semester, to now having a Masters Degree, becoming a Licensed Social Worker and almost to my clinical license, I know I have Professor Sommo to thank.

I’ve learned that in life, coming across someone like Professor Sommo is an invaluable gift. I often think back and find it so ironic how I was technically hired to be his eyes, when in reality he was the one helping me see. It’s the lessons learned from him both inside and out of the classroom that will always be fundamental to my understanding of the world.

I can truly say some of my favorite memories were times spent learning and laughing with Professor Sommo. I feel that it’s only appropriate to end this off with an all time favorite signature Sommo phrase. This one is actually a question that he’d ask every couple hours or so as we read through papers during a work day.

So, to the famous question of “Hey Emily, I’m a pretty cool guy, aren’t I?” I’ll leave you with my final answer. Professor Sommo, you were the absolute coolest and most impressive guy I know. And I will forever cherish your part in my journey.

Jay Chaskes, colleague and friend:

If you ever called Tony, you heard, “This is Tony, you have 30 seconds to leave a message.” So Tony, I’m here to leave you a message, my brother from another mother. It will be

longer than 30 seconds but shorter than the usual 90-minute phone calls we had or the two-and-half-hour dinners we had at the Turkish Mediterranean, Thai Terrace, or Terra Nova. All of you here can listen to my message.

Tony, you left footprints across the hearts of so many people. You were like a diamond with many facets. Everyone knew some facets of you, but I'm not sure anyone knew the complete Tony. We were all shocked and saddened when you took your leave, perhaps your heart could hold no more caring and simply broke. I know you are still with us, only the vessel you came in is no longer here.

We did come from similar backgrounds. We were from blue collar families. Your family was Italian and mine Jewish – very similar really. The big difference was just our mothers' gravy. Our dads both had repair garages. We were both outsiders growing up in a world not yet ready to appreciate human differences. We bonded over many things; our love of sociology, our devotion to teaching and mentoring students, movies, music, good food, the primacy of family and, of course, the lived experience of disability. Humor was our tonic for a world built only for those without a disability. Many of these conversations were not politically correct. I loved your joke, "Why don't blind people sky dive? It scares the crap out of the guide dog!" On occasion, you would misplace your cane. You would ask me to find your cane saying, "You know without my cane, I'm not able." Remember how we wanted to go to the movies together for only one admission? Afterall, you couldn't see, and I came with my own seat!

We spent hours talking about teaching. It was so clear to me that it wasn't a job for you, but a passion and a mission.

Your students were so much a part of your life. You helped so many students, abled and disabled to find their way, not only academically, but through many of life's trials. They sought you out because you never patronized them. You acknowledged their dignity, encouraged them to speak their truth. You mentored so many students with a disability, that the Office of Accessibility Resources created a mentoring program modeled on your work. Which reminds me, did I ever thank you for mentoring me as I became increasingly disabled, finally becoming a wheelchair user? Your insight and wisdom made my journey less of a bumpy road. I genuinely enjoyed collaborating with you. You were so easy to work with and so insightful. We did a joint paper at the Eastern Sociological Meetings and wrote a chapter for a book on disability theory and research.

It was easy to forget you were blind. You remember the time we went to Ruby Tuesday when I was still able to walk? I got all the way to the front door when I remembered you were standing next to my car waiting for me to lead you into the restaurant. Once, our friend Jim Grace came to the department looking for you. When I told him you were in class, he asked me for a piece of paper so he could write you a note. I then asked Jim if he had a braille to leave a note. Jim simply replied, "Oh yea." I know it was hard being blind, but you made it look easy. I knew it wasn't. I knew anxiety was your constant companion, and isolation an unyielding threat to your wellbeing.

You had a bigger struggle than just having no sight. Your ears were your eyes and the tinnitus and hyperacusis severely threatened your sense of agency more than you were willing to share with others. I get it. We had long conversations about aging with a disability and how to confront it. Who, more than anyone else, could appreciate this journey we were taking together? I so miss those discussions, to say nothing of all the banter about restaurants, movies, politics, students, and family. Thirty-one years of friendship and we only had one argument which lasted an hour about a candidate for a position in the department.

You made friends all over the campus. You were equally at ease with the security staff, custodians, and servers in the Owl's Nest as with your colleagues, the dean, or any other functionary on campus and surely with students. All were treated with equal dignity and respect. Your authenticity spoke to everyone. We all knew you were trustworthy. You never said what you thought people wanted to hear, but only what was in your heart and head. Yes of course people admired your independence and the artful way you managed your loss of sight. Your star shown bright because of your intelligence, humility, kindness, empathy, and wickedly sharp sense of humor. You and I both know the most challenging disability is not knowing how to love or be loved in return. That was never a disability for you, my brother. Whenever you come to mind, which is frequently, lyrics from Elton John's song Daniel play in my head,

Your eyes have died, but you see more than I Daniel, you're a star in the face of the sky

I love you brother!

And now a message for all of you. All of us die twice. Once when our physical self ceases to function and a second time when our name is uttered for the last time. The Anthony J. Sommo Scholarship Fund guarantees that Tony will live as long as there is a Rowan University. This scholarship will be given annually to a deserving student with a disability. Please contribute to this scholarship fund. No amount is too small.

Susan D'Aries, friend:

A great guy and brother to my husband.

Tom D'Aries, cousin:

Anthony and I began our journey through life as cousins and over the course of our lives we became brothers.

He became a mentor to me at a very young age, turning me onto the music and politics of the day.

We would listen to doo-wop from 45's on his little Victoria record player.

And when he became proficient on the accordion we would sing and play these same songs.

As teenagers we would sit on the sofa of his mother's house, my late aunt Connie, and for hours sing blues songs and intermittently discuss sports and the political issues of the day.

That was after he had taken up the guitar and he was a helluva blues and folk musician. A real BAS ASS!

Anthony worked harder than anyone I've ever known to earn his academic achievement and enter the profession he cherished for the last 30 years of his life. A professor of Sociology.

He had a great love for classroom teaching. He loved to feel the spark in a student when he believed they were getting it. And in turn, he learned a lot from his students.

His courses are not easy, he expected a lot from his students – he was big on personal responsibility – For knowing the course material.

More importantly, he required his students to exercise and exhibit critical thinking.

It's a funny thing, I never thought of Anthony as a blind person – I knew him from an early age to be fiercely independent. I often thought to myself this guy sees more clearly than the most sighted people I know.

Mary Dauria, friend:

Tony was a true friend of my sister. Their friendship went back to their college days. When my sister had to enter a nursing home in NY, and was unable to communicate by phone, Tony and I would keep their friendship going by the two of us calling back and forth. We would relay messages, many of them encouragement from Tony to my sister. That meant a lot to both of them. She was always so proud of Tony and his accomplishments, but most of all his eagerness to help other students, colleagues and friends. From our conversations, I know how much he enjoyed teaching! He was a special person and friend.

Dorothy Dorr, friend:

Tony, my kind, astute friend of 50 years, who won the hearts of so many during his time at the Storrs UConn campus. As my neighbor for five years, I had the opportunity of knowing him in a unique way. We shared a lot about school, and as older students, our philosophy was similar if not the same. His mom and sister Jo visited often and would oust him from the apartment while they cooked and cleaned. I would find him sitting outside his apartment door and together would have a good laugh. He shared stories about his extended family in his familiar rhythmic New Jersey cadence. His stories, innate wit, humor, and contagious laugh kept me sane during my academic years at UConn and beyond. Most importantly, we always kept in touch throughout different phases of our lives. Our children enjoyed his visits too.

My intellectual friend, dedicated to teaching and sharing vast knowledge of the historical, political, social, and cultural differences that impact society. His goal: raising awareness and understanding for the common good of mankind. During his tenure at Rowan University, he also made significant contributions for students with disabilities. Despite his disability, he lived life with fortitude. Professor Anthony (Tony) Sommo was a loyal friend. I truly miss him.

George Dorr, friend:

"Tony was an icon in Storrs. He walked the UConn campus, wearing his dark glasses and black leather jacket. Alongside, his German Shepherd, Fern. He looked like an actor out of Westside Story, cool and ahead of his time. And fearless.

We met in grad school. He was engaging, witty, with a great sense of humor, and everyone enjoyed his company. He remained a part of my family until his recent passing. It is a great loss to me and our family as well as the many others, I am certain, that had the pleasure of his friendship.

Don Durivan, friend:

From Don Durivan, very long-time Boston-area devoted friend of the great one, Tony Sommo.

Tony and I had a deep friendship that went for 45 years. This has been overall the most unique friendship I have ever had and why it is so painful to deal with losing him. Ours was almost totally a friendship by phone but that didn't seem to get in our way. Over our 45 years when we spoke on the phone our talks would last on average 3 hours. We said that guys in our culture are not supposed to be the ones doing that. And what did we say to that, what did we care? We didn't. We said: "We do what we need to do, sometimes for our sanity. Sometimes you need to be a bit contrarian".

Let's stay with "contrarian". And add his colorfulness. Here's how Tony would sometimes announce himself to me when I picked up his call: "D. It's T Sommo, the baddest man in South Jersey." You can imagine that, can't you? Think about the variety of things coming out of him in that one line - the complete uniqueness of introducing oneself, the humor, the clever projection of some pride in himself but with an element too of self-mockery. Tony was a guy with an intellect I loved but also had that total comfort of being completely down to earth.

A uniqueness to this friendship was that in our phone calls there was an extraordinary range of topics. We could cover things ranging from Dostoyevsky to deeply personal issues, some certainly medical, to the nature of current comedians and how they differ from those twenty years back, of course some sociology, plenty within my great interest of foreign affairs and international relations, then to the nature of capitalism and including some of its worst features. One time we had covered that last topic and closed our evening on it. The next time we connected he said to me: "I made \$15,000 in one day this week." In disbelief I yelped "What?!" He then told me he had taken up what was called at that time "day trading". It left me in stitches. He was hilarious that way, a total character, full of color and sometimes an amusing brand of contradiction.

I'll go back to Dostoyevsky to let you know how great of a reader Tony was and how he by example taught me to be a better one, and given my length with books I'm supposed to be good at it. We talked about the great work, Crime and Punishment. Tony once brought up that crazed character in it. I think it was Raskolnikov. Tony howled about him and it was so clear that he got so deep into a character like that that he seemed to be on a street corner right beside him. I took note.

But you may know better about his deep love of the game of baseball. I had paid scant attention to it but it was Tony's love and so I decided early on I wanted to honor him by listening to what he had to say. I was astonished. And I should say, amused, as well, for here was a blind man telling me, a sighted one, what a given pitcher in that night's Major League game was going to concentrate on for the types of pitches he would throw to the opposing team given the nature of the batters, and then describe the pitches by name and how they were supposed to move as they came to the plate.

And how about music? A centerpiece of his life and my own. What a delight for me to go in depth with him here. He had a fabulous wide-ranging appreciation for varieties of music. We had a common interest in certain areas of jazz, special performers we each had, and vocalists we loved from whatever style of music and whatever era. We might close out an evening's talk and the next day I might send him a selection from the great cellist YoYo Ma and Tony would have great comments in his later e-mail. This was the joy of sharing. Tony was extremely skilled with music, his ear for it was superb and he had great musical memory, even when he was concerned over the past couple of years with his general memory. The character in him could come out in music as in almost anything. If in conversation I brought up the great Ray Charles, in a second Tony would start singing one of Ray's great hits and go on as he loved lyrics and then I would join in. We'd stop and then break out laughing and if that song was a bit racy Tony might say something like "Oh yeah, D, that's my man Ray and you just **know** what he's drivin' at in this song! Talk to me, D!" Speaking of the great Ray, Tony and I concluded that Ray's remarkable version of America the Beautiful was the most soulful treatment of it ever done.

Tony had an openness for giving compliments to those he spent significant time with and these came from him as a result of clear listening and evaluating what you were saying, and who he thought you were. We covered lots of ground about history among our topics. A few years back he gave me what I considered to be a profound honor as he said the following: "Don, if you had lived in Germany at the time of the rise of Adolf Hitler you would have been another Dietrich Bonhoeffer and you would have been executed." He was exactly right.

Tony had a tenderness that I suspect he did not show to all. I would be remiss not to share this phone interaction from only a year back when I asked him to recount his experience with his guide dog Fern back when I first met Tony in the late 70s. Tony then was an instructor at UConn and was working to complete his PhD. I met Fern when I met Tony and saw how close and inseparable the two were. I asked Tony to recall the last period again of Fern's life when Tony had the excruciating experience of having to put Fern down. His voice slowed as he recalled for me the severe arthritis that left Fern frail and unable to function and with this leaving Tony needing to have Fern be put down. How did you work that then I asked. Did you take him *to* the vet or did you have the vet come. Tony had the vet come to Fern's home after all and Fern also knew that vet. Can you play it out for me when the vet arrived? Tony said that when the vet came through the door he knew Fern both knew who he was but also this: *Fern knew why the vet was there*. What then did you do? I called Fern over to me and put my arms around her. Fern knew what was up as I said goodbye. The vet then gave one shot to put Fern to sleep then another to end its life. Tony told this within the last year. He told it with such deep feeling that overnight I wept as I thought of it. The next day he sent me an e-mail and at the end said: I still miss Fern.

I last spoke to this fabulous friend who so enriched my life on that late Saturday afternoon just before we lost him, about mid-August. When I called to see if it was a good time to do our usual carrying on he said “Yes, I’m **up**”, meaning, in a good frame of mind. We spoke for 2 ½ hours and within it indicated he had made some resolutions and I knew these were good.

I may have been the last person on this earth to have talked to him, or surely one of the last, given that on that Monday afternoon I got a call that he was gone. It will always be for me what I call an eerie honor. One of the great, wrenching pains for me has been that I never got a chance to say goodbye. But maybe that was better for the both of us.
Thank you.

Evelyn Fazio, friend:

Tony was my one-of-a-kind, once in a lifetime friend. We met at UCONN in 1976. I was in the grad program in History and one of the guys in my program knew Tony, so one night we all met for dinner. We quickly became friends and he used to call me Carol, because I sounded like a girl he knew back in NJ named Carol Ponapinto. He kept that up for about 4 years, then started calling me Nyleve, which is Evelyn in reverse. My full name became Nyleve Oizaf. He loved words and word games, which I learned when I made the mistake of playing Scrabble with him using his Braille set. He beat me every single time and it was a humbling experience. He ran word circles around me. He also loved spoonerisms and tried to spoonerize everything. So Senator Hickenlooper became Senator Lickenhooper. You couldn’t stop him. He loved word games of all kinds and invented something he called “backwardses,” where he took well-known aphorisms and twisted them around. For example, “An ounce of cure is worth a pound of prevention.” “Children should be heard and not seen.” “Don’t throw the bath water out with the baby.” “Evil is the root of all money,” “Don’t cry theater in a crowded fire,” and “Gone today, here tomorrow.” Over the years he sent me about a hundred of them, all of which I saved. Not long ago, in one of our multi-hours-long phone calls, I read them all back to him. Even he’d forgotten some of them.

Tony was a great listener who remembered stories about my life that even I’d forgotten. He remembered things I said 40 years ago and quoted them back to me. He recalled one particular conversation we were having at the kitchen table with my father. My father made a comment that something was “a true fact.” And I, being an editor, said, “As opposed to a false fact?” Tony reminded me about it every now and then. He never forgot anything.

That brilliant mind of his never stopped. He was always thinking, analyzing, sizing up the world and everything in it. He sent me countless articles about politics, literature, films, books and whatever else struck him. They were always worth reading. We had great email correspondence about politics and current events, things that we found confounding and disturbing, and sometimes silly.

When we were at UCONN, Tony stayed up very late working, writing, and reading articles and books in Braille. So he slept very, very late. Our group of friends all ate together, so I’d call him to wake him up so he wouldn’t miss dinner. Our friend Dan and I would start

walking across the street to the dining hall from the graduate residences and we'd hear the frantic pitter-pater of footsteps rushing behind us—it was Tony being rushed towards us by Fern, his guide dog, who'd spotted us and was hurrying to catch up.

Tony never missed a detail. He noticed everything. One day he asked me why I was all dressed up, and it was true, I was wearing a dress instead of my typical jeans. He wouldn't tell me how he figured it out until much later—he said he could hear the dress rustling. Tony was also mischievous. Once, when we were walking back in the dark from the distant parking lot after going on a dog-food run for Fern, he turned suddenly and said, "What's that?" pointing in the darkness with his cane at some trees, making me shriek with fright. He laughed all the way back to the grad housing.

Tony was my most memorable friend, a touchstone in my life. I could talk to him about anything and everything. Nobody else was like him, never was and never will be again. I'll miss him for the rest of my life.

In closing, I want to say Happy Birthday, Tony. To quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet, "Let flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

Jeffrey Foard, friend

I knew Tony for decades but it was only after his retirement that I spent meaningful time with him. After he moved from Glassboro to Pitman he would often invite my wife, his long time colleague, our son's and myself for lunch and conversation. At this juncture I came to appreciate the talent of a natural raconteur Tony possessed. Not only would he recount an amusing story of his young adulthood but also sprinkle it with interesting details that made every sentence even more memorable. This is my most fond memory of Tony Sommo.

Jimmy Franklin, Nephew:

The first time Tony came to the house I was fascinated watching him tell stories, play the guitar and piano, site rare books, and describe the scenery in great films. I was young and fascinated by how he'd reach for his glass while he was telling a funny story and seemed to be seeing everything around the table with his ears. The three hour phone conversations I had with Tony gave me the feeling that I was discussing things with someone who had a 6th sense instead of lacking one. When we discussed great films, I'd forget he was blind. When we debated philosophy he'd listen to me at a rare depth, ask challenging questions and giving his honest and intelligent feedback without judgement on my perspective. And when something struck him funny, there'd be a pause as he took it in, absorbed it and then threw his head back and laughed from down deep. I loved Tony for his unique attention and rare depth which he brought to every conversation we had together. I'd love to have one more of those deep discussions. I'll miss those but I'll remember the ones we had. Love you Uncle Tony.

Tom Gallia, friend and Rowan administrator:

This is very sad. So sorry. He was a "one of a kind" guy. Will always remember his sharp wit and great sense of humor. Loved and respected by his students and colleagues.

Bud Harvey, friend:

Tony was an acquaintance through a mutual friend, Kathy Coffin. Our interactions, though infrequent, were enjoyable and he was a valued friend to Kathy and, accordingly, a friend of mine as well. Condolences to the family.

Allan Jiao, colleague:

Tony called me in the office in Wilson Hall during my earlier years at Rowan and discussed some civil rights and policing issues related to the events at the time. As a police specialist, I was surprised by and impressed with his detailed knowledge about policing as he mentioned some classic works written by major police scholars such as Jerome Skolnick, Albert Reiss, David Bayley, and Peter Manning. One of the most interesting conversations I have cherished ever since. May Tony rest in peace.

Sharon and Sam Johnson, friends:

My husband Sam and I were friends with Tony for 50 years this month. We met when I was hired as his reader during his graduate school years and we never lost touch. How does one sum up a friendship that has lasted so long and been so good? Tony was a loyal friend to Sam and I through thick and thin, even paying a semester of my grad school tuition when we were struggling students. Throughout our friendship, we spoke at least once a week and emailed frequently - books and politics were our topics. Tony was a voracious reader, and lived through the technology transition from Braille to Audible, always able to keep a foot in both worlds. He used to ask us to send him a list of books we'd enjoyed and movies we liked. He was on top of every political development in our country from the moment we met - and many of the events he predicted in the 70's have come true today. A lover of literature, a gifted storyteller, a humanist, a true patriot who loved our country and wanted freedom for everyone, and a real mensch - who could ask for more in any friend? We will miss him forever, until we see him again. He's gone too soon. Rest in peace Tony, we love you.

Sandra Joy, colleague:

Tony made me feel welcomed from the moment that I arrived as a faculty member in the Sociology Department at Rowan and I could always look to him for a laugh or a venting session, as we commiserated together about the state of the world. He was my very dear friend and I miss him more than words can possibly express. Tony was one of a kind. No one comes close.

Dale Kean alumnus, 2016:

My fondest memory of working with Dr. Sommo, Tony, as I will always remember him was how down to earth he was. He always had the time to talk, asking how the family was doing when I worked with him with his adaptive technology. Even when I returned to Rowan to finish my degree, Tony always had time to talk when we passed in James Hall as he was going to his class and I leaving mine. Tony was a caring individual who always had the time to help anyone who needed someone to talk to, or who would benefit from his wisdom. Tony, you will be missed. Dale Kean, friend, and Rowan grad, 2016.

Martin Kelly, friend:

I can remember the first time Tony walked in to (The Disc) the campus record shop on the Storrs Ct. UConn campus. I did all those awkward and stupid things one does in order to try and help someone with a disability. Tony didn't need my help. He was a charming guy and a real music lover. He had an almost encyclopedic knowledge of popular music. His favorite artist was Bob Dylan. We would laugh about and quote Dylan's clever and insightful lyrics.

We had a spot where you could sit and chat with customers and once or twice a week Tony would stop in and spend some time. Everyone in the UConn community loved and respected him. Simply put, he was fun to be around. After Tony left Connecticut, he kept in touch with me by calling every couple of months. I asked for and took his advice on more than one occasion. My life has been enriched by his friendship, ""A great light has gone out."

Yuhui Li, colleague and friend:

1. Tony as a Colleague

Tony and I were hired at the same time by the Department of Sociology at Rowan College of New Jersey in fall 1992. From the very beginning, I noticed Tony's ability to catch and analyze the very essence of things no matter how ambiguous and complicated they might be. One example was the discussion in the department concerning the role that the university officer in charge of affirmative action was expected to play in the process of hiring of faculty lines. I still remember Tony's contribution on this issue, a matter that divided the department. Thinking back thirty years later and in light of the change and development of the controversial affirmative action policies in recent years, I believe Tony actually foresaw what was coming in the society in terms of protection of minorities and disadvantaged groups.

Another issue over which Tony won my respect and that of many other colleagues is his stand on the debate concerning the division between knowledge-based curriculum on the one hand and applied aspects of programs on the other hand in the department. Even though Tony taught several classes that tended to have a heavy applied component, including Deviant Behavior, Sociological Practice and Sociology of Disabilities, Tony firmly believed that the purpose of university education was first and foremost intellectual training and exchange and sharing of knowledge based on scientific investigation. Theoretical models and scientific research, Tony argued, should serve as the foundation of curriculum of all courses, including those that have an applied aspect. As a result, in Tony's classes, students were expected to learn philosophical concepts, research methods and theoretical frameworks before they learnt specific skills of practicing sociology. This was a major reason why students sometimes complained of his courses being difficult.

Most students, however, viewed Tony's teaching very positively, which can be seen from several indicators. Tony was nominated at least six times into the Wall of Fame for Teaching Excellence at the university, which is remarkable, as any Rowan faculty would attest. (See **Note One** below) Another indicator that Tony was a good teacher is the many comments from his former students after his passing. These comments are included in this collection of memories.

(**Note One:** Every year, newly graduated students were contacted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University and asked to name one instructor who had had the most profound impact on their education at Rowan. The students were asked to present the reason why they nominate a specific professor.)

Tony was a well-balanced person in terms of character and personality. He preferred to maintain a low-key posture and at times could even appear to be humble in the department and at the University. But he never hesitated to express his viewpoint over matters of principle. He was a powerful and balancing force in the department particularly during times of tension and conflict. Tony was elected the interim department chair during one of the most trying times in the department and he performed the difficult task with grace, confidence and diplomacy and successfully led the department through that challenging period.

2. *Tony as a Friend*

Tony's memorial service was well-attended. Several of his old friends who had known him since the 1970s during his graduate school years attended the service. One of his visually impaired friends since high school about 60 years ago could not attend but sent a touching essay to honor Tony. The friends who traveled from out of town stayed in a hotel after the service and continued the momentum of celebration of Tony's life the following day before leaving town. They also visited Tony's old home in Glassboro and the house in Pitman where Tony spent the last years of his life. Words could not express the level of grief and profound sadness these friends have been experiencing over Tony's passing.

Remarks and comments we have heard from Tony's family, students, colleagues, friends and neighbors at Rowan and beyond are equally touching. One of Tony's students commented with deep emotion that Tony had saved her life. Another person noted Tony was a legendary figure. One of Tony former assistants who graduated from Rowan in 2014 said, in tears, at the service that Tony was like a father figure to her.

There are many reasons why Tony was so well-liked and had so many friends. Tony was a genuinely loving and caring person. He was trustworthy, respectful to everyone whether they were students or colleagues, security staff or faculty, janitors or administrators. Tony was considerate and smart and was just fun to be with. One example: Tony had to hire student workers to help with his teaching and research. One of the most important parts of the assistants or readers was reading students' term papers that Tony assigned to all his students, usually around one hundred per semester. It was time-consuming and often tedious work. (See **Note Two** below) During the paper-reading sessions, Tony would think of ways to break up the monotonous process by throwing in jokes and discourses that made the reader laugh and amused and hence feel refreshed and recharged to perform their jobs.

(**Note Two:** The following is how Tony evaluated term papers during most of his teaching career (prior to email and internet devices became popular as communication tools): Students submitted hard copies of papers, his reader read the papers and he instructed the reader to make comments and remarks on the papers before they were returned to students.)

Tony had a remarkable ability to grasp the most essential features of things and people. He hired many of his readers by simply approaching a student who was in his class. As I remember, of all the readers he had hired over the thirty years, only one did not work out.

Most of Tony's readers retained close relationships with him. They kept him updated on changes in their personal life and career advancements by sending him pictures, email messages, letters and presents. They also stopped by his home when they got a chance. Tony was always delighted to have them visit. Four of Tony's readers attended the memorial service for Tony and three of them read or wrote, or both, memories of Tony.

Tony was one of the most interesting people I have ever met. He was well read with an all-around and in-depth knowledge of history, geography, culture, environmental issues and so on. Tony's friends were used to getting articles, book recommendations and other material that Tony had read and would like to share. Tony was a gifted musician. He played piano, guitar, accordion and saxophone. He had a band of his own when he was in high school. The following is going to sound unbelievable: Tony liked movies and closely followed sports of all types and could tell the most detailed and subtle episodes and movements of a sports game and movies and TV shows that he watched.

In addition to all that, Tony was well-known for his unique sense of humor. He had his own way of saying "Good Morning" or "Greetings" when he arrived at the office area or "Talk to you Later" when he was leaving. While walking down or up the hallway, he would sing lyrics from various songs or recite words of wisdom or memorable quotes from movies, TV shows and literature sources. One of the songs that I heard from Tony most frequently was "That's the way, aha aha." There were several reasons why Tony adopted this practice. In addition to sending greetings, this was also how Tony tried to avoid collision with his cane leading him when he was walking, especially when he was in a hurry.

The doormat at the entrance of Tony's home read in large print "Go Away"!

Those who attended the memorial service for Tony should remember the "brailed" outrageous message on the pink T-shirt that no one except Marianne, the department administrative assistant, knew the meaning of. When she clarified what the print said, I just wanted to say what Tony had liked to say to me, but replacing my name with his: "You're killing me, Tony!"

3. Tony as an Advocate for People with Disabilities and the Disadvantaged

Two of the courses that Tony frequently taught were Social Stratification and Sociology of Disabilities, the two subjects that he was most passionate about. Issues of fairness and justice were of utmost importance to him. I believe his family background and the experience when he was growing up had a significant impact on him in this regard. (See **Note Three** below). Tony was a union advocate. He lamented many times about the decrease of power and influence of the union across the country in recent decades. When the UAW strike settled with major gains for the workers at the end of October 2023, merely two months after Tony had passed away, I thought about Tony. I am sure he would have been excited to hear the news.

(Note Three: Tony grew up in a working class family surrounded by his immediate and extended families. His father was a car mechanic and owned a garage in northern Jersey. Tony lost his sight when he was about eight years old. His parents loved him dearly but they were never overly protective of him. They sent him to regular schools and encouraged him to observe the world and pursue his hobbies and interests. His band performed actively in the region. Tony traveled to as faraway places as California and New Orleans with his dog Fern when he was young. I remember Tony sharing with us many years ago his experience in south Philly where he visited fairly frequently when we first joined Rowan.

Tony also shared with me that his father was a very kind man, loved and respected by neighbors and the community. When his father passed away suddenly when Tony was 11 years old, the line of people paying respect to him was so long it went around the block -- what a similarity between the reactions to the passing of Tony's father and his own.)

Tony was generous and giving. Anyone who helped Tony process his mail would notice how many thank-you notes and items of gratitude from schools for Native Indian children, shelters for women and veterans, political parties, environmental protection programs and other institutions and charities for his donations. In his will, Tony donated his estate to charity, specifically research to cure tinnitus, a condition that he had been suffering from for many years.

Prior to developing tinnitus, Tony's hearing was the dominant sense that had helped him with his daily functioning. It let him enjoy music, listen to movies, TV and radio and engage in interactions with other people. But with severe tinnitus symptoms, Tony could no longer play music instruments or go to concerts or gatherings where microphones were used, and he became increasingly sensitive to auditory of his environment. About four or five years ago, he wanted so badly to avoid the sound of fireworks on July 4th that he spent the night in his office that had no windows.

Eventually Tony moved from Glassboro to Pitman where he had found a house in a very quiet neighborhood and with a finished basement. He loved everything about the new house, with the exception of just one not-so-minor a problem. Tony tried to exercise by walking from his home to downtown Pitman, a distance of three or four blocks. But he had to give up the idea when he realized that there was no sidewalk along some of the streets. For someone who had spent his whole life advocating for people with disabilities, this was an issue very close to home. It is just another indicator that community infrastructure is often designed with inadequate attention to people with disabilities.

Tony was a member of my family. We had many gatherings during holidays and weekends. It was in the backyard of Tony's new house where I learned how to do outdoor grill cooking. Incidentally, some friends asked me about the Japanese sweet potato that Tony liked and had told many people about. They look not much different from regular sweet potatoes and should be available in most Asian or Oriental supermarket. I got them at Hung Vuong Food Market in Cherry Hill. They taste like roasted chestnut and Tony loved them!

On a Saturday at the end of July 2023, my husband, our children and myself went to Tony's house to have lunch that I had cooked. After close to three hours of the gathering, Tony and my husband, both of whom had arthritis and were not supposed to sit at one setting for too long, were still chatting with enthusiasm. When I started to gather things together, the following dialogue took place as it often did: My husband, "Are we leaving?" Tony, "Are you leaving me?" and I, "Yes, until next time."

Sadly, none of us expected that there would be no next time. Our dear friend and esteemed colleague left us two weeks later without giving us a chance to say goodbye. We were deeply saddened.

It was a great privilege to have known Tony. He enriched our lives. His memories and legacy will continue to be with us. For all this, we are immensely grateful.

Grace MacIntyre, sister:

A very fond memory was when Tony was to be awarded his Doctorate Degree at Connecticut University and he walked up with my sister and the whole audience stood and applauded and honored him. I will never forget that. Congratulations Tony!!

Ed Macintyre, nephew:

"Nuttin!

Talking with uncle tony was always a pleasure and never a dull moment! One favorite sit down a few years back at his house we got caught up on how we could solve the countries problems ! (for the 10th time !). We would go on and on about a subject and at the end , Tony would say , " and what can we do about it? ". Nuttin. ! We would laugh historically ! Every thread would be the same ! What can we do about it? Nuttin ! Laugh for hours.

But now we have to say goodnight to "the greatest of all time! ". And like Ant would ask " what can we do about it ? ". Nuttin!

But one thing is for sure. Anthony Sommo will never be forgotten and always with us! Rest in peace! Enjoy heaven , they are lucky to have you!

You the man !!!!!!! Love Butch.

Nicholas Mangone, assistant and alumnus 2016:

I remember spending time with Dr. Sommo when I worked for him in his office. Dr. Sommo and I used to make jokes about life and old mafia movies and we used to listen to rap music together. I am sure that is surprising to some. We had great times grading papers and talking politics as well. Dr. Sommo really had a great humor to him as well as a sharp political analysis of the world. He was truly a man of the people. I learned a lot from him about how he grew up in North Jersey with his Italian working class background and his uncle influencing his perspective on being in the labor party. Not only was he a great professor but also a great man. He will be missed and always remembered. RIP Dr. Sommo. Be well.

Bob Manizza, friend:

I'm an only child, but I have two brothers. Tony was one of them. My other brother from another mother is Don Durivan, who is also here to celebrate his relationship with Tony. I introduced them. And Don introduced his friend Steve Hagopian to Tony. Don and Steve went on to have their own tight bonds of friendship with Tony. You see, Tony was like a magnet of great relationships. He knew people from everywhere, man. And when you met Tony you wanted to tell your good friend about him. And if they were cool, they also became friends with Tony. Now 'cool' doesn't just mean street wise, although that was always a plus. For Tony, if you cared about people and truth and justice, you were cool.

We met in the late 70's at the University of Connecticut. I had a work-study job at the office of Special Student Services. This was the office that coordinated the financial, academic, and social needs of the disabled students at UCONN. Tony walks in one day, black hair and goatee, shades, black leather jacket and New Jersey cool filling up the room. We were friends as soon as we were introduced. The time that we had at UCONN together was one of the best parts of my life. We spent many hours talking about life's gifts and its injustices. We listened to music while playing cribbage and scrabble. And we went to a ton of movies, afterwards hanging out at Paul's Pizza. We ate a lot of pizza! Tony's relationship with his dog, Fern, was deep and meaningful. He loved and respected her. We shared our lives and were always there for each other. Comedy and laughter were big for us. Tony had a laughter that was booming and joyful. Our favorite comedians were those who made you crack up while telling the truth about society: Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin and Dick Gregory to name a few. We never could figure out why humans didn't treat each other better.

We went our separate ways after those Uconn years. But we stayed tight from afar. He always stood by me in my defeats and championed my successes. He rejoiced when I met and married Kathy and when I finally settled into a good job. And once, there was a period of time when we lost touch - my loss. That couldn't last though, our bond was too tight and we reconnected like it never happened.

I held Tony in the highest regard for the love and commitment he had for teaching. He was always dedicated to his students, to teaching them how to critically think about the world we live in, and how to write about their experience. They were lucky to get into his classes. I admired Tony for his fierce and unwavering defense of the rights of the disabled among us. I wish there were a better word than disabled. Tony was never disabled, handicapped, or otherwise less than anybody else. In his blindness he saw more than most people. He dreamed of the day when we won't see differences in each other as being deficits to be shunned but as gifts to be shared. He showed us that in the way he lived his life.

And he was my brother. And he's always in my heart.

Kathy Manizza, friend:

I met Tony through my husband, his good friend Bob. I first got to know him by talking to him on the phone. We quickly realized we shared a love of music and movies. When I finally met him in person, almost ten years ago, the first thing he said to me was "Am I as cool as you

thought I would be”? I said, “Oh no, you’re way cooler”! Since then, Bob and Tony would call each other often and in the past year or so, it was even more frequent. He and Bob would talk about what was going on in the world, reminisce about old times and of course quote lines from the Godfather. If Tony asked about a movie, TV show or music, Bob would say “Here, talk to Kathy” and hand me the phone. We would talk about what shows we were watching, movies we’d seen or read about and new music we’d discovered. His recall of lines from movies amazed me! He really appreciated being turned on to new music and especially liked strong female vocalists. When we would stop and visit for a few days in the summer he always made us feel so welcomed and he so loved the peace and quiet of his new home. We would also always go to the Harrison diner, his favorite. A few years back, after we finished our meal he simply said “You payin”? And we jokingly gave him such a hard time about it, that we were all laughing hysterically! I miss talking to him about music and movies, and feel so sad when I hear a new song that I know Tony would have enjoyed. Bob and I recently watched a movie about Yogi Berra’s life. It was very moving and at the end, we looked at each other, tears in our eyes and said “ Tony would have loved that”.

Sharon McCann, colleague:

Dr. Sommo and I maintained an informational rant correspondence for years. I always enjoyed his emails where he would send me articles, links to web sites he thought I would find interesting and we would share our rants about the state of the world. I got the last one the morning after he passed. I picture him still ranting in the afterlife! I will profoundly miss those exchanges and his mentoring.

Paul Morline, friend:

"This I will never forget as long as I live.

We were attending a Wedding of a mutual friend. I was sitting directly across from Tony at a round table for eight people. I am also blind. So, when the Toast honoring the newlyweds was announced I reached for my wine glass and accidentally hit my water glass and sent this cold glass of water right into Tony's lap. Tony was so gracious about having to spend the day wearing his wet pants. He made light of it with some good humor relieving me of my embarrassment.

Karen Munar (Richter), alumnus and Tony’s assistant:

I was a reader for Sommo in 2013 and we stayed in touch ever since. Sommo was realistic. Even after the harmful decisions made by the Trump administration, Sommo's advocacy and generosity never ceased. He supported groups to advance women's reproductive rights, read books and articles on the topics constantly, and shared that wisdom with his students. We discussed disability rights, prison documentaries, shared book recommendations, and would have lunch together every couple of years-- a real Italian hoagie, of course. Sommo provided encouragement through some very challenging years and the joy of finishing my MSW program and becoming a school social worker and mom. Sommo was one of a kind.

Christine Murphy, friend:

I met Tony in 1974 at the University of Connecticut. Since then he's been my closest friend. I still imagine having conversations with him. He had a great sense of humor and a brilliant mind! He had a way of getting right to the essence of things. I find news articles and book and movie reviews online that I want to send to him and then realize all over again that he's gone. I'm going to feel his loss for a long time! I know that many other people share my grief at his passing.

John Myers, former colleague:

I knew Tony. I feel I knew him well. We shared sociology, tinnitus, and a similar outlook on life among other things. I always felt that we were colleagues and friends.

I knew blind people. I taught at a school for the blind early in my career while I was in graduate school studying sociology. I knew blind children, young adults and adults. As was the fashion in the early 1970s, blind people were demanding to be included in more and more. I believed that blindness was not something that should keep someone from trying to achieve their goals. Tony believed that too. I never doubted his ability to be a great college professor. Neither did Tony. Like his students, I rarely saw Tony as a blind person. It faded into the background.

I knew Tony as a teacher. I observed his classes. I talked to many students who had Tony for a teacher. I never heard one complaint about his teaching or about anything else. Students didn't even see his blindness for the most part. They saw him as a person who knew sociology and understood students. He helped many students academically and personally. Students always knew they could talk to Tony.

I knew Tony as a sociologist. I read his application. I interviewed him for the job. I talked to him about his dissertation. We discussed research especially on "the making of blind people," which I could relate to with my background as a teacher in a "school for the blind." I know he imparted the sociological perspective to many students improving their knowledge, understanding and their lives.

I knew Tony as a person. He was open, kind, vibrant, and always willing to take chances, listen, and empathize. But, when I put myself in Tony's shoes, I can clearly see his courage and drive shine brightly. He was my friend and shall miss him.

Samantha O'Neill, Alumnus 2014 and Tony's assistant:

being a student employee for dr. sommo was an invaluable experience - i fondly look back on my time spent reading essays to him, discussing literature, and making hilarious jokes back and forth to one another. he will be sorely missed, but my memory of bringing him coffee and reese's peanut butter cup cookies from the cafe i worked at will continue on with me forever. rest easy, sommo :(

Diane Pullen, Niece:

My most vivid memory of my Uncle Tony from when I was very young was one Christmas when the whole family went to our Vermont house for the holiday. I'll never forget

him sitting near the radio in the kitchen and singing Feliz Navidad all by himself, quite loud and clapping his hands to the music. He was such a funny and happy uncle. He will be missed but remembered with inspiration and love.

Lin Rubright, alumnus 2021:

Dr. Sommo was an amazing professor that inserted his real life experiences into our classroom. He gave us guidance on how to work with him and his disability. He was encouraging and respectful to us while asking us to work harder and give more. He was someone I looked up to that impacted my own ability to seek accommodations for myself at school. He was unapologetic about disability and was a great example for me to follow in my own studies about disabilities in grad school. I think about him often and his contributions to the Rowan community will be missed a great deal.

Seran Schug, colleague:

I miss Tony's words of wisdom as he walked by my door.

George Snedeker, friend who is visually impaired:

When Tony Sommo passed from this life into the next on August 12th of this year, the world became a lonelier place. Tony was my soul brother. He and I met in 1963 at a summer program sponsored by the NJ Commission for the Blind. We were still in high school. After graduating from high school, we spent 8 months at the Maryland School for the Blind to prepare us for college. We did well. The Commission for the Blind awarded Tony and me college scholarships. We studied sociology in college, ending up as sociology professors.

I often took a train to Newark and then a bus to West Orange in order to get to his house. It was there that I met his grandmother, mother, sister Josephine and his two uncles, Lawrence and Ralph. I often stayed over. I also visited him at the University of Connecticut, sleeping on the floor of his dorm room.

When we were away in college, Tony and I communicated with each other by sending Braille letters and tapes in the mail. We visited each other after college when I was living in the Inwood section of New York near the 207th subway station, the last stop for the A train.

Toney and I went to a Bob Dylan concert at the Newark Mosque in 1965, AKA Synphiny Hall. Tony recently told me that it was the best concert of his life. Dylan's encore was "Like A Rolling Stone" and Positively 4th Street." He tore the house down with his rock band. Dylan had begun the concert by playing his acoustic guitar and singing his great folk ballads.

Tony loved music and was a great musician. While still in high school, he had his own rock band called, the Demigods. They performed on channel 13. the D.J. known as Zackary had a contest of local bands back then when WNET was still located in Newark. The Demigods did not win the contest, but it was fun anyway!

Tony reminded me that he had been caught in the Newark riot. After the riot we continued to hang out in downtown Newark. Tony had a free pass to Newark movies. Tony was a movie buff even then.

We often took the bus to NYC and then a subway to the Village. We walked around the Village and went into the Café Wha to hear Josh White who had sung with Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly. He brought his teenage daughter on stage to sing the St. James Infirmary. We also hung out in Washington Square Park. Then we took the train and bus back to Newark and another bus to West Orange. I recall the day after when Tony's grandmother would cook fried eggs for us. She would tell Tony in some southern Italian dialect to eat his eggs!

One night around ten PM Tony and I were walking passed a construction site in downtown Newark, where the sidewalk was narrow. A guy stood against the wall of a building; Tony brushed against his arm as we passed and politely said, "excused me." The guy then said, "Son if you did not ware those shades at night you could see better." Tony and I then laughed! The guy must not have seen Tony's white cane. Tony always wore those shades, just like Brother Ray. They were part of his dress code.

Tony could do a great Ray Charles impersonation. At the Maryland School for the Blind, they had a piano in the recreation room. He would play the piano and sing the first few lines of, "Yesterday," which was Ray's cover of a popular John Lennon song.

Reality was often difficult to deal with for a visually impaired person. People were not always kind. But Tony was always able to face the problems that confronted him. He was a great traveler and could make his way around West Orange and Newark with his cane tap, tap, tap tapping along as he made his way down mean streets toward the next bus stop. Then he and I would make our way toward the next adventure that life offered us!

Tony and I recently reconnected by phone. I can't tell you how good it was to be in touch again as soul buddies. He often called me "buddy" as a term of endearment. We spoke for hours on the phone. We discussed common memories and the people we had known.

I can't tell you how much I miss talking to him. There were things that only he and I could discuss together. I know that I will never see or hear him again. I am left with only my memories of him.

Erica Tait alumnus, 2014 and assistant:

When I was Dr. Sommo's reader, we would be loud laughing so hard in his office that other professors had to come in and ask us to quiet down regularly. He was a mentor and dear friend.

Noah Weinstein, colleague:

I remember proctoring his exams in Robinson Hall, James Hall and Savitz Hall. I also remember when he sat in our office before his classes in Savitz Hall.

You can say I was his proctor/helper.

Marissa Wood-Roletter (nee Wood), alumnus:

"Dr. Sommo was critically important in my development as an academic and critical thinker. As a sociology major, I often had heard that his classes were hard - and they were - but he challenged me in a way that helped me to grow. I have a disability, and he was one of the first instructors that I had ever had who also had a disability. He showed me that I can succeed too, that I have a place in academia, and in the world.

I'm not sure if I ever shared this with him, but Dr. Sommo is one of the reasons I chose to go to grad school and pursue a master's degree specific to adult education. His legacy lives on through the lives of all of the students he inspired.

Robert Zazzali, friend and Rowan administrator:

Regrettably, I am unable to attend the memorial service for my colleague and friend, Anthony "Tony Soms" Sommo. I was fortunate to have known Tony since his arrival to the College/University until I retired over 3 years ago. I cherished our regular interactions and our friendship. Through it all, we laughed....A LOT! He was one FUNNY person who loved teaching and his students. But the thing I remember most was how inspiring he was...how he marched on and navigated....literally and figuratively....all the curves and obstacles he encountered. Tony Soms WILL be missed, but when I think of him I WILL be smiling....just like I am now.

Robert "Zazz" Zazzali