All Freedom In Action in person events are canceled until further notice. Freedom In Action events are being held via Zoom. If you are interested in more information, contact your local Freedom Resource Center office.

Fargo 701-478-0459
Fergus Falls 218-998-1799
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This issue of
The Independent
is dedicated to our dear friends and co-workers
Nathan D. Aalgaard
July 17, 1959 - March 31, 2020
Diane K. Siekaniec
August 31, 1954 - April 11, 2020

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!

Contact Freedom Resource Center at (800-450-0459) or email (freedom@freedomrc.org) to schedule a virtual or phone appointment with our staff.

We are not open for face to face appointments yet, but we’re looking forward to seeing you again soon.

We are working hard to re-open as quickly and safely as possible.

To stay informed follow us on Facebook or Instagram.
It took me many years before I realized that my brother, Nate Aalgaard, was kind of a big deal. If he were alive now and sitting next to me, his reaction to that sentence would be a loud “Ha!” and then he would say, “kinda, kinda,” and we would laugh and say that word over and over in a variety of accents, ending with the one most familiar to us: “oh yah, ya’betcha, kinda a big deal then.” But we would never actually talk about the “big deal” part of the statement.

Nate was the oldest of six, so by birth order alone, he was a big deal, but we never thought of him that way. He was the one who brought the buns when we grilled, the one who always said “yes” to trying new recipes. He was the one who was always up for a drive to the farm, or art night, or Soup Sunday. He was easy to be around. Modest. Unassuming. Funny, in an oh-so-dry sense of humor kind of way.

This was the brother I knew, so when he would show up from time-to-time on television or on the radio or when I would run into his name quoted in the newspaper or read what his column here, in this newsletter, it would always take me aback for a moment: “Oh, that’s right…he’s kind of a big deal.”

He had a lot of big deal moments in his life. He wrote about them in this column over the years. But for me, it was his ordinary moments that accumulated into an extraordinary life: a life well-lived. Each day was a gift he celebrated in a variety of ways, and for me, he’s still alive in all these moments:

- I see him with his arms thrown out to the sides, head back, singing as loud as he can to The Rolling Stones.
- I see him hamming-it-up as he wheels down the ramp at the family farm, winning both “Best Presentation” and “Ugliest Shirt,” hands-down.
- I hear him calling to tell me to bring coleslaw to our next family gathering.
- I listen to him rattle off the most obscure detail, winning, again, at trivia.
- I see him driving the rest of us to the country to pick chokecherries.
- I hear him coordinating a get-together with his fellow deer hunters.
- I see him sipping a glass of wine and wheeling over to his tomato plants to check on their progress.
- I hear the crack of his cue ball as it hits the 8-ball smack dab into the corner pocket, and his “WooHoo!” as he beats me, once again.

I’m dropping the “kinda” now because my brother, Nate Aalgaard, was a big deal. Not only in his advocacy work, but also in how he lived his life and how he treated people.

Nancy Aalgaard Hanson is the third child of George and Jane Aalgaard. She lives in Moorhead, MN with her husband, K.C. and their two Brittany dogs, Riley O’Riley and Nelson. Nancy teaches English at MSCTC (MSState), Moorhead.
In her poem called “The Dash,” Linda Ellis writes about how the dates carved into our gravestones represent our “dash” from birth to death. What matters more than the time it takes each of us to “dash” to the end is “how we live and love and how we spend our dash” (Linda Ellis). Nate’s dash is an inspirational reminder to the rest of us that it’s not about the number of years we spend on this earth, but rather it’s about how we live those years that truly matters.

The following is what some of Nate’s many friends had to say about how he lived his dash:

**DAN HOLTE:** “I would like to mention a few things about the fun side of Nate. It started out with peer mentoring, so one week we asked Nate if he would like to join us. He very rarely missed one of our Tuesday nights, having a beer, and talking smack about our favorite sports team. Most of the time just a fun evening of laughter and enjoying each other’s company.”

**BILL WILLIS:** “I wish instead of me writing you this message, we were sitting on your patio in the warm summer sun, grilling hotdogs and hamburgers and enjoying a glass of wine. I so treasure our friendship and the many good times we have shared together including almost freezing to death sleeping in a tent on your successful deer hunt. Nate, I am very grateful to you for including me along the way and I know others you have mentored over many years will carry your mission forward.”

**DAN WESTPHAL:** “I met Nate in 2009 after I moved in next door to him. Occasionally we would set up his fireplace between our houses and have a campfire and drink wine until the mosquitoes drove us inside. Nate was a good billiards player and he had his own table. We played many times and sometimes I beat him. Sometimes Nate and I would watch the Vikings game at his house and split a pizza and wine or beer.”

**KRIS BURNS:** “Nate was such a great guy, and great leader. We had been friends for over 15 years. It was always so much fun to see him or run into him at different community functions as well. Nate also became a client of mine, when I worked in staffing and recruiting. Everyone who worked at Freedom Resource Center, always had such a positive experience. Nate touched my heart and made a mark. I will never forget him and will always be a supporter of Freedom Resource Center and their Mission.”

**JUDY SIEGLE:** “My friendship with Nate began as teammates in quad rugby with the North Dakota Wallbanger’s in the 1990s. More recently, we battled on the softball field with Hope Inc. and loved every moment of it! Nate had a heart of gold and made a tremendous impact while advocating for people with special needs. He was a friend to all.”
A poster hangs on the wall in my office. It depicts the ceremony for the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act—the ADA. I’m in this photo, and I’m very proud of that fact.” This was a culmination of a long struggle—the struggle to get this law passed, so that we could finally have civil rights protection in all aspects of life.”

“This is a time to celebrate the achievements of the ADA—greater access to businesses, transportation, communication, and job accommodations. We fought for this, and we should be proud of what we have done.”

Excerpts taken from an article, Nate Aalgaard, former Executive Director of Freedom Resource Center wrote five years ago, in a book that was published for the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of Independence Inc. Center for Independent Living and the 25th Anniversary of the ADA.
IRINA BIDIVANU: Nate had a presence that I will forever remember. His leadership made all of us feel confident in Freedom’s mission and values and set us on a path to our goal of independent living, that we can never falter from. We miss you.

JOYCE WOLTER: Nate you will forever be one of the most important people to have taken this journey with me in this moment on earth that we call life. It goes without saying, you are missed daily. Until we meet again my friend.

PAM FOERTSCH: I admired all the wonderful qualities that made Nate the special person that he was. He had intelligence, wit, charm and a caring heart that made him a great friend and an unbelievable boss.

RANDY SORENSON: Nate lived his life never giving in; he always fought to improve this world for the better. He was very multidimensional and I cherish the fact I knew Nate the athlete, Nate the Options’ Founding Board Member, Nate the hospital marketing employee, Nate the Options Information Specialist, Nate the husband, Nate the student, Nate the Executive Director, Nate the hunter and Nate the friend. Nate personified the cliché, “Stoic Norwegian”; I never did see him lose his cool even when he would have been justified in doing so. He brought a temperament of calm in the face of adversity while we worked on various advocacy issues causing some of us with less control to be tempered. In a world with so many advocacy issues in which to fight, he was able to see the end goals with clarity and knew how to incrementalize the work which needed doing in order to accomplish the main goal.

As one grows old, fighting those medical issues which become even more compounded with disability, it is easy to become complacent to let someone else fight the fight, Nate never did. He never left anything up to someone else if it was within his abilities. Even while in the ICU important court decisions came down which he had a hand in filing. As people navigate the world Nate has left they will not have the trials and tribulations Nate had when navigating the world due to the changes he had a hand in making. I think he would like us to continue his legacy of change for the better so people with disabilities can navigate this world without the forethought one once had to consider simply to live one’s life.

MARIE CHRISTINE FOUQUETTE: Thank You! Thanks for giving me the opportunity to fit! I advocated for systemic change in previous employment to no avail. Thanks for taking a chance on me! You taught me how to listen to the message behind the words. You’ve shown me how to be humble. You pushed me to believe in myself, and helped me grow by asking me to do things outside of my wheel house. I am forever grateful to you. I will continue pushing for social justice and equality for all of humanity! Rest easy my friend!

CINDY GABBERT: I considered myself fortunate to have the best neighbors in the office. My office was in the middle, with Diane on one side and Nate on the other for several years. We would joke about our neighborhood, sharing laughs, quick stories and potluck ideas when it was our turn to serve with our other co-workers. I learned many life lessons from these two mentors, their presence is greatly missed.
Extraordinary Is an Understatement

By Angie Bosch

The definition of extraordinary at dictionary.com is: “exceptional in character; remarkable”

This is the word I chose for Nate’s 20th anniversary video for our Freedom Facebook page. Looking back at the thirteen years I had the privilege of working with him, no word could have been more fitting.

There are so many memories and so many moments it’s hard to put into words the remarkable impact Nate had on so many people. He made those around him strive to be better, to do better and to believe in themselves. He could look at any challenge or situation with quiet, careful reflection and come up with a smart solution. He was one of the most patient, accepting people I have ever known.

I am grateful for all the ways he supported and cheered me on. I will never forget that “less is more” and that it is relevant advice in all areas of life. I will miss the sound of his voice and his infectious laugh but most of all I will miss my incredible friend. He left an imprint on my heart and set my soul on fire to make the world a better place.

That is just a fraction of what made my friend, Nate, one of the most extraordinary people I will ever know!

Life Lessons

By Cindy Gabbert

Dr. Seuss, Frank Lloyd Wright, Diane Siekaniec. What do they have in common? They were all artists. Diane was also a Friend, Co-worker, Instructor, the list could go on and on. Earlier, Tom Thompson, wrote about The Dash. Diane was the dash, she could draw the dash, paint the dash, sculpt the dash. She lived, she loved, she oozed life into everything that she did. In addition to being artists, Dr. Seuss and Frank Lloyd Wright were people Diane looked up to, admired, and respected. Diane was admired by many people. Her knowledge and skills were endless, she could turn a piece of fabric into a bag, a book, or a quilt. She was a life-long learner, in the past few years, she said “I finally learned to draw.” I admired the way she could engage with people, she often told me that the most challenging people she worked with in her job, were the most rewarding. Diane was respected by many, she had a way with words, “SERIOUSLY?” and a way with people. Her quips and endless ideas allowed those of us who worked with her to open ourselves up to new possibilities, to dream, to understand that through this path we are on in life, the
IRINA BIDIVANU: What I miss most about Diane is her talent, and how excited she got our consumers about art, about creating, and about discovering your own talent. Diane made a big difference in her work, and her niche can never be replaced.

PAM FOERTSCH: God gave me a wonderful friend in Diane. I will always be thankful that I had the opportunity to get to know Diane as a co-worker and friend. I will cherish her memory for years to come.

RANDY SORENSON: It was a North Dakota State Independent Living Council (SILC) meeting where I first had the pleasure to meet Diane as she explained some of the volunteer work she was doing on behalf of Freedom. It was later after volunteering her way into a position and becoming a member of the SILC I was fortunate to get to know her better. When you meet folks in independent living you can always tell which ones are part of the movement due to their passions and which people are involved due to a need for a job. Diane was part of the former. Like many with a deep seated passion Diane brought a new dimension to Freedom which involved her love of the arts and you could see the wide world she opened up for others who normally were not able to access this world. As she would describe her programs, how she opened up this world, tears streaming down her face, as she relayed the stories on how she touched so many members, you could not help from being touched by her zeal and what that brought to people.

Like so many in independent living she entered into our world at the close of another chapter in her life, one which involved working with her hands in the elements repairing and installing phone lines. She saw the opportunity to share a love of hers and gave that gift to others. While talking to her we spoke about a dream we shared, to both settle down at each of our respective lake lots, her dream involving the building of a small log cabin at the lake and to be able to sit on the porch and enjoy the sights, smells, and sounds of the wilderness. Though she never realized the dream in this world she never let go of it. On our last conversation she said she would still build it and she expected Nate would stop by and sit upon the porch with her.

MARIE CHRISTINE FOUQUETTE: I wish I could remember your last words to me, but I was attempting to hold back tears. I believe you laughed, and said something like “it’s your life Marie! You’ve got to do what is in your heart because look at me. Life goes by much quicker than you think!” Your smile lit up the room! Your laugh brought tears of joy to my eyes! You taught me life is about the little things. I slow down a little more often to smell the first rose blossom, and watch children experiencing life with pure joy! I’ll miss your passion Diane! Thanks for showing us how to live our best lives!

JOYCE WOLTER: Diane my dear soul, what are you creating now? I hear your laughter even today and it soothes me. You are one of the kindest most thoughtful souls I have had the chance to meet; how lucky am I? No really, SERIOUSLY. “See ya, later...in the sun, rocks, butterflies, wherever we happen to meet.”
HELPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LIVE MORE INDEPENDENTLY OVER 30 YEARS

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