

A Tale of Three Mikes

For me, one of the great things about going away to college in the Fall of 1982 was meeting so many new and interesting people. Along those lines, one of the best things I did while in college at Tennessee Tech University was to involve myself with the University Christian Student Center (UCSC) -- a ministry of the Colleside Church of Christ. We were quite an active group of 100-150 college students, and some of the best friends I have ever had or ever will have come from that group. Interestingly, there were 3 special men in the college group who made a lasting impact on many lives at the UCSC -- and it just so happens that these men were all named "Mike." All three of these men left this earth many years too soon, and I would like to take a few moments to share a few memories about these three interesting brothers in Christ.

Michael Davis

Michael S. Davis (or "MSD") was one of these special brothers. I can truly say I have never met anyone else quite like MSD. I don't know what it was, but our personalities lined up such that we became fast friends. I guess it was our off-the-wall sense of humor. MSD was a few years older than most of the students at the UCSC (mid-20s?), and he had become a Christian sometime after I had started college. He had some medical problem (I don't recall what it was called) that had caused him to lose a leg, so he used crutches -- but later got an artificial leg.

MSD could be loud, obnoxious, annoying, funny, aggravating, sharp-witted, silly, abrasive, sullen, crazy, loving, caring, and sensible -- somehow all at the same time! He had a keen wit, and a very sharp sense of humor that sometimes could cut... but most often, you just had to laugh along with him. We spent a lot of time together at the UCSC -- much of it just being goofy (he could bring out my inner-goof like few others).

I sold him a 10-speed bicycle one time, and my dad called me a great salesman, saying: "Who else could sell a bicycle to a one-legged man?" I told that to MSD and he laughed loudly! MSD and I made a few "custom" cassette tapes for people -- usually for birthdays -- we would just ramble and talk and sing and do ridiculous things for 30-45 minutes and fill up the tape, and then we would give it to the person for a gift! One time we kidnapped a girl's Kermit the Frog stuffed toy and held it ransom for a while -- we would send her pictures and ransom notes of Kermit being served on a plate for dinner and in all manner of "fake" distress. Finally, Kermit "escaped" and made his way back to her (with occasional letters, pictures, etc., from various towns in Tennessee, as he got closer) -- and he finally mailed himself back to her in TTU campus mail in a big shoebox! MSD and I also had a special goofy handshake that had many odd and complex motions -- we called it "The UCSC Handshake," although few dared learn the many complex and dangerous moves involved in this handshake (always had to keep a fire extinguisher handy -- ha)!

All of it was silly, ridiculous, and wonderfully crazy! Did I mention MSD was a great drummer in a rock band -- an appropriate instrument for such a loud guy! I am both laughing out loud and tearing up as I type these words and memories! A few years after I graduated from TTU, MSD passed away from complications of whatever it was that caused him to lose his leg (I think),

leaving behind his dear wife. I miss this brother! I know he is laughing loudly, playing the drums, and riding his bicycle in heaven today.

Mike Lanius

Mike Lanius was another of these special "Mikes." I met Lanius shortly after he had gotten to TTU and had come over to the UCSC. I think he was a couple of years behind me in school -- I had Co-oped for a year and come back to TTU, and Lanius was just starting. He was such an outgoing guy, even from our initial introduction. However, I remember I ran into him early in his first Fall quarter outside the TTU cafeteria -- he looked at me and then walked right past without even saying hello, smiling, or anything! I thought, "What a snob this Lanius guy is!" I found out the next day that the reason he didn't say anything and had such a faraway stare was his lung had just collapsed -- it had apparently JUST happened -- he was struggling to hold himself together! Seems like he missed quite a bit of time that quarter in recovery from that little problem!

Lanius was very outgoing, funny, smart -- and so talented! He started working with the teenage group at the Collegeseide congregation as an intern youth minister. A short time later, I became one of the Student Directors at the UCSC -- and Lanius and I shared a bedroom in a duplex apartment next to Collegeseide dubbed "The SD's Apartment."

Lanius was another guy who had a great sense of humor. His humor was different than MSD's, but still he was extremely funny! He looked a lot like Weird Al Yankovich, and he did a great Weird Al impersonation! Many nights as we were attempting to go to sleep in the apartment, Lanius and I would talk. We would talk about current events, girls, church issues, people, school, dreams, goals -- anything and everything! These conversations seemed to go on and on... sometimes they were quite serious, and other times they were beyond silly!

Sometimes in the apartment (4 guys shared this 2-bedroom apartment), the dishes would pile up in the kitchen -- and continue to pile up -- until the smell was overpowering! Something had to be done! Someone (seems like it was usually me), would forcefully proclaim that a mandatory dish-washing (known as a "Celebration") must occur at a certain time and date during the week. The four of us would gather in the kitchen, crank up the music, and enjoy some special dish-washing fellowship! I remember Lanius going crazy one time jumping around the room dancing to some obnoxious song, and he bounced over to the wall and slammed his shoulder into the wall -- leaving a huge dent in the sheetrock! As I recall, we hung a poster over that dent... and it stayed there until we moved out.

Lanius graduated with a Mechanical Engineering degree from TTU, and he lived in Cookeville a few years after that... then he moved to Nashville. We kept up with each other via email -- from time to time discussing things of interest... but distance and life caused us to drift apart some. But he was always someone I could call or email and it would be just like we were back in school again -- just pick right back up where we left off. Sadly, Lanius was stricken with Stage 4 Colon Cancer, and he passed away at about 44 years of age, leaving behind his wife and 2 pre-teen children. I still think of him often, and I know he is in heaven -- likely having long conversations with these other two Mikes, and laughing loudly!

Mike Matheny

Mike “Mull” Matheny was from a “previous generation” of UCSC students. He had already graduated from TTU with a degree in Electrical Engineering and moved away by the time I had started at TTU. He was one of those guys I heard talked about in UCSC lore, but I had never met. By all accounts, Mull was an excellent Electrical Engineering student, and he had offers for big money from some high-tech companies -- but instead of pursuing a career as an EE -- Mull chose a “path less traveled.” He chose to get his Masters of Divinity degree from Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis. Interestingly, after Mull completed his MDiv, he returned to the UCSC to be the Campus Minister there -- and it was there that our paths crossed!

Mull was unlike MSD or Lanuis in that he was (or at least he seemed to me) quiet and reserved most of the time. During my time at the UCSC as Student Director, Mull provided steady and kind leadership. He taught many of our Wednesday Night classes at church, and he led several devotionals and talks at the UCSC. He also spoke from time to time at Collegenide. He provided guidance for us as students as we planned the student ministry. Mull always had something meaningful to say, and I still remember many of our conversations, his Bible class lessons, and his talks.

Mull spent several years as the Campus Minister at the UCSC. During this time he also worked hard to complete his ThD -- and eventually he ended up being a Bible Professor at Lipscomb University! Occasionally, over the years, I would seek out Mull’s wise counsel about decisions I was making. I always valued his thoughts and opinions. I admired his courage to pursue his calling in ministry -- even when he had invested so much in engineering. I also admired his love of learning and his scholarly abilities -- and just knowing what he had achieved has inspired me to “study a little harder” through the years.

Mull was in his early 50s when he lost a long battle with a cancerous brain tumor, leaving behind a wife and 2 teenage boys. Like the other Mikes, I think of Mull often, and I treasure the powerful influence for good that he was -- and is -- in my life.

Wrap Up

I hope you have enjoyed listening in on some of my memories of these three very important Mikes in my life from my college years. All of these guys left this world many years too soon, but I am very thankful for the lives they lived -- such good and rich memories! They were all quite different (aside from the name they shared), and they were all such special people to me in so many ways. My only regret was that I did not keep in touch with them as closely as I should have after our college years were over.

Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful influence of these three Mikes!

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