



## Dr. Deane L. Shaffer

August 4, 1929 - August 19, 2017

Dr. Deane. L. Shaffer, 88, of Hartsville, SC, died Saturday, Aug. 19, 2017, in McLeod Hospice House, Florence, SC. Shaffer was professor emeritus of religion at Coker College, where he taught for 51 years, longer than anyone else in the school's history. He also was the long-time dean of the Liberal Arts department at Coker.

“A gentle, and courtly man, Shaffer pushed his students to apply themselves and consider things that they were not always comfortable with,” according to an article in “Forty Teachers, Forty Paths to Coker College,” a short book about some of the school’s best professors.

“Over time, assisted by his assiduous preparation for class, an ability to effectively relate complex ideas, and a truly marvelous speaking voice (which generations of Coker students still refer to it as “The Voice of God”), Shaffer established himself as one of the most respected and beloved teachers ever to work at Coker, twice being selected as Master Professor of the Year,” according to the book that was published in 2015 by Dr. Shawn Lay, a Coker history professor and one of Shaffer’s former colleagues.

Shaffer was born Aug. 4, 1929, in Iowa, a son of Jenny Jewel and George Shaffer. He grew up with his parents and two siblings on a small farm near Windom in southeastern Minnesota. He enjoyed reading and studying as a

boy, developing a particularly strong interest in India and the American West. Although his parents were strict Methodist fundamentalists, they allowed Shaffer to watch movies like “The Good Earth” and “Gunga Din,” stimulating his interest in foreign places, and they supported his plans to attend college. He also benefitted from excellent teachers in high school, who provided him with a solid background in history, literature, mathematics, and science.

After graduating as valedictorian of his high school class, Shaffer enrolled at Bethel College, a small but highly respected Baptist school in St. Paul, MN. Majoring in psychology, he took courses with a series of talented professors and immersed himself not only in his major field but in philosophy, theology, sociology, and classical Greek.

Shaffer worked his way through school, unloading crates at a large shipping company and performing seasonal factory work, but remained an exemplary student, graduating from Bethel at the top of his class.

Anticipating a career as a minister, Shaffer entered the doctoral program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. The faculty included a number of prominent theologians who were, during the social and political ferment of the 1950s, exploring new ideas and approaches. Under their influence, Shaffer began to move away from the staunch fundamentalism of his youth. As a teaching assistant, he also was introduced to the basics of classroom mechanics and graded “lots of papers.” Looking back at his time in the seminary, Shaffer feels that the faculty provided superb role models -- intellectually engaged, hard-working, and generous.

While finishing his Ph.D., Shaffer served as the pastor of a small rural church near Lexington, KY, but the low pay convinced him to explore other career opportunities. In 1961, after learning of a job opening at Coker College, he visited Hartsville and was hired as a professor of religion.

Coker was a small, struggling school at the time, but Shaffer greatly enjoyed working in a liberal arts environment that valued open discussion and academic freedom. He also liked and admired the people he worked with, including such legendary professors as Dr. Elizabeth H. Davidson and Dr. Valleria Grannis. Shaffer earned the respect of his colleagues and often was selected as a faculty spokesman and leader. In particular, he played a prominent role in advocating for more enlightened and progressive attitudes concerning race relations on campus and in the local community.

Soon after his arrival, Shaffer began reshaping the religion program at Coker to better align it with the overall mission of the liberal arts, phasing out courses on religious education and introducing new material on non-Christian faiths. Pedagogically, his primary goal was to broaden his students' horizons and allow them to examine the beliefs of others in an open, nonjudgmental, and empathetic fashion.

“Dr. Shaffer is a genuine humanitarian, a peace-filled human being and the best lecturer I ever had at Coker. I hated for his class to end each day. He definitely pulled the best out of me,” said one student quoted in “Forty Teachers, Forty Paths....”

Shaffer is survived by a son, Mark Shaffer of Beaufort, SC; a daughter, Lisa Wylie, and son-in-law, Hammond Wylie; a brother, David, sister-in-law, Jody, and nieces Laurie Mech and Cindy Loftsgard; and a niece, Sue Sharpe.

Shaffer was predeceased earlier in 2017 by his beloved daughter-in-law and former star pupil, Susan Shaffer, wife of his son Mark. He also was predeceased by a sister, Norma.

A private memorial service for friends and family will be Sept. 23 at one of his

favorite places, Kalmia Gardens in Hartsville. An inclusive memorial celebration of life on the Coker College campus will be announced soon. Brown-Pennington-Atkins Funeral Home is serving the family.

The family suggests that, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Susan Kelley Shaffer Endowed Scholarship Fund, Coker College, College of Advancement, 300 E. College Ave., Hartsville, SC, 29550. Brown-Pennington-Atkins Funeral Home is serving the family.

# Tribute Wall

RA

“ *Robert Andrews lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Robert Andrews** - June 22, 2025 at 06:09 AM

JA

“ *I'm very sorry to hear of Dr. Shaffer's passing. I was fortunate enough to take a number of classes with him and I will always remember his gentle wisdom. Requiescat in pace.*

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**James Arrington** - September 17, 2018 at 02:08 AM

RD

“ *I learned so much about various religions from Dr. Shaffer. He was really kind. Condolences to his family.*

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**Renata Durant** - November 30, 2017 at 01:40 PM

 Joseph  
Bell

“ I had the privilege of living beside Dr. Shaffer as a teenager and into adulthood. I always enjoyed our conversations and how full of life and intelligence he was. He was always so kind to not only me but my whole family. I was able to visit with him briefly a few months before his passing and I'm truly glad I did. He entrusted his cat "Nosebud" to my family and now he resides in the care of my sister. It's nice that we get to keep a piece of something so important to him with us. My thoughts and prayers are with your family in this difficult time. He truly was a great human being.



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**Joseph Bell** - September 25, 2017 at 09:01 PM

 Sharon  
Hill

“ Sharon Hill lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



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**Sharon Hill** - September 05, 2017 at 11:11 PM



“ I had the privilege of studying theology under Dr. Shaffer in the mid 1980s. Peace be with his family and friends.

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**Jeff Riehm** - August 31, 2017 at 07:37 PM

MW

“ *Michael, Renee, And Noah Webb lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Michael, Renee, and Noah Webb** - August 30, 2017 at 06:06 PM

MW

“ *Michael, Renee, And Noah Webb lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**michael, Renee, and Noah Webb** - August 30, 2017 at 06:02 PM

BM

“ *I met this kind gentleman once. Unforgettable..... I had no doubts about his spiritual connection. He was one of those people you meet once in a life time and never forget. My condolences to his family and friends.*

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**Bryan McKenzie** - August 30, 2017 at 04:12 PM

CS

“ *I'm honored to have known Dr. Shaffer at Coker. Please accept my sincere condolences.*

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**Cheryl Spencer** - August 30, 2017 at 04:07 AM

CH

“ I learned so much about world religions typing Deane's syllabi and assignments. It was a joy to spend time with him in and out of office. A gentle soul with a wonderful sense of humor and a voice you couldn't get enough of listening to. He will be so missed.

Cheryl - August 27, 2017 at 08:19 PM

JA

He did have a wonderfully soothing voice, didn't he ? I can remember it 35+ years later.

James Arrington - September 17, 2018 at 02:11 AM

MD

“ I was privileged to be Deane's colleague in the religion department for twenty-one years, during which time I marveled at his exceptional skill as a teacher and mentor to students. It is difficult to think of Coker College without his presence, as he was practically synonymous with the institution. My best wishes and condolences to Mark and the extended family.

Malcolm C. "Mac" Doubles

Malcolm Doubles - August 27, 2017 at 03:20 PM



“ A gentleman and a scholar. Rest in peace.

Russell Hamby - August 27, 2017 at 10:31 AM

RE

“ Sending love, hugs and our deepest condolences to Mark & the Shaffer family. We love you! Rebecca & Ron Tucker

RebeccaTucker - August 27, 2017 at 08:52 AM

LB

“ Willie and I have had the pleasure of providing uncountable meals over the years at our establishment in Hartsville, Bizzell's Food & Spirits, for Dean Shaffer and Ms. Bloodworth. They were always together for a late dinner after classes. Nothing was more enjoyable than to watch the two of them interact together over dinner. It was obvious they had a special relationship and I'm so honored they chose my restaurant for their dining table. Dean Shaffer will be missed by all of our staff.

*Leigh Ann Bizzell*

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**Leigh Ann Bizzell** - August 26, 2017 at 11:08 PM

MC

“ Scott and I were blessed to have Dr. Shaffer marry us back in 1979. He was a very kind man and a very good and patient teacher. I am glad to have known him.

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**Maria Campbell** - August 26, 2017 at 02:20 PM



*Deane was on the committee that hired me. He buried my first wife and married me to my second. A gentleman and a scholar.*

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**Russell Hamby** - August 27, 2017 at 10:29 AM

RG

“ We were neighbors in Forest Hills for many years where our daughters were friends who shared growing up adventures. Decades later I took several religion courses from him that were just plain awesome - and hard! He opened exciting doors and urged and encouraged students to walk through. We would see him or Lisa from time to time through the years and always enjoyed catching up on family news. He was indeed a very special man who will be missed by the many people who were fortunate enough to know him.

*Rolfe Godshalk*

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**Rolfe Godshalk** - August 26, 2017 at 11:49 AM

PA

“ *Philip Asbill lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Philip Asbill** - August 26, 2017 at 10:47 AM

LJ

“ *Levon Jacobs lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Levon Jacobs** - August 26, 2017 at 08:52 AM

SA

“ *Sheila Abraham lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Sheila Abraham** - August 26, 2017 at 07:58 AM

TW

“ *Lisa and Mark-*

*I have many fond memories of growing up with your family....your father was a kind soul. He was one of the shining lights at Coker that made it such a special place. My thoughts are with you....*

*Tommy Wise*

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**Tommy Wise** - August 26, 2017 at 07:28 AM

LG

“ *Linda Gilliard-Johnson lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Linda Gilliard-Johnson** - August 26, 2017 at 07:14 AM

TP

“ *Those of us at Coker College today stand on the shoulders of giants. Wishing strength and comfort to the entire family. ~Tracy Parkinson*

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**Tracy Parkinson** - August 26, 2017 at 06:51 AM

KS

“ Kelly Shields lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



Kelly Shields - August 26, 2017 at 06:40 AM

DJ

“ Mark and family, So sorry to hear about the passing of your father.... sending thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.



Dianne James - August 25, 2017 at 11:08 PM

LD

“ Laura Dawkins lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



laura dawkins - August 23, 2017 at 04:16 PM

RB

“ Randy Byrd lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



Randy Byrd - August 22, 2017 at 01:29 PM

MF

“ *Mary Funderburk lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**mary funderburk** - August 22, 2017 at 01:26 PM

MH

“ *Maxine Howle lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Maxine Howle** - August 22, 2017 at 06:56 AM

RP

“ *Rest in peace Dr. Shaffer...*



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**Rick Price** - August 21, 2017 at 11:58 AM

DH

“ *Debby Hemby-Smith lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



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**Debby Hemby-Smith** - August 21, 2017 at 09:59 AM

DH

*Dr. Shaffer was my favorite out of all my professors at Coker College. And that is saying a lot because I had some of the best. He inspired me to think outside of the box. He was a gentle soul and will be sorely missed. RIP Dr. Shaffer.*

**Debby Hemby-Smith** - August 25, 2017 at 01:55 PM

BJ

“ *Bonty & Leslie Jerman lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



**Bonty & Leslie Jerman** - August 20, 2017 at 09:59 PM

BW

“ *Bess And Bobby Watkins lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer*



**Bess and Bobby Watkins** - August 20, 2017 at 09:00 PM

BW

*To Susie and the entire family we are very sorry to hear this. RIP*

**Bess and Bobby Watkins** - August 20, 2017 at 09:15 PM

KC

*As a Coker Student in the sixties I took every class he offered and will always be grateful for his knowledge. The lessons from Comparative Religions have been useful my entire life. Earth was truly blessed when God shared him with us.*

**Kathleen Canada** - August 22, 2017 at 07:48 AM

MW

*I majored in Elementary Ed. and Religion. I majored in Religion because Dr. Shaffer was the one man department. He was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful person. He really cared about his students. We were all mesmerized by his lessons. I remember that he always had a mug of coffee in his hand, and his voice was so deep. There has never been a better teacher or a better man than Dr.Deane Shaffer!!!!*

Mary Ann Wingard - August 23, 2017 at 02:54 PM

RS

“ Rebecca Skinner lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



Rebecca Skinner - August 20, 2017 at 08:32 PM

DS

“ Donna Sansbury lit a candle in memory of Dr. Deane L. Shaffer



Donna Sansbury - August 20, 2017 at 07:04 PM

JC

“*Dr. Shaffer was my advisor at Coker College. Most women in my freshman class daydreamed about his being the amazing voice for their future weddings. His classes were popular as we all struggled to understand our beliefs and identify our priorities. Recently I had the opportunity to chat with him at a church service and was thrilled he recognized me. We had a wonderful visit. I'll be forever grateful for the wonderful influence he had on my life. Heaven has received a treasure. My deepest sympathy to his family and friends. ~Janie Campbell, BA Religion, '72.*

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**Janie Campbell** - August 20, 2017 at 01:49 PM