

# Miami Herald

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## Miami Dade College dean Clinton Cooper dies at 84

By Howard Cohen

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Courtesy Nora Cooper/Facebook

BEACH DAY: Clinton Cooper, with son Michael, circa 1965-66 at Matheson Hammock.

Miami Dade College never had such a fierce advocate for the institution as Clinton Cooper, according to his daughters.

Sisters Mara and Nora laugh when they remember outings around Miami with their dad because those outings provided him with the opportunity to have lengthy chats with strangers about the school and its role in higher education.

Cooper died Aug. 7 at age 84 and, to the end, talked up Miami Dade College where he held numerous positions for 32 years. He first joined the institution when it operated a temporary satellite location in 1965 at Miami Palmetto Senior High. Two years later, the school's main Kendall campus opened and Cooper served as Student Activities chairperson, dean of students, assistant to the vice president, dean of administration and, finally, district

dean of students.

Just about everyone he met — the waitress at the coffee shop, the gas station attendant, customers and clerks in supermarkets — heard from Cooper about the value of an education at Miami Dade. Even the nurses at Kindred Hospital in Coral Gables who cared for Cooper in his final days would get a jovial greeting and a plug for the school.

“We almost didn’t like going to Publix with dad because everywhere he went, he talked to everyone. ‘Where are you going to college?’ He was always encouraging them, ‘If you need help at Miami Dade College, call me.’ You couldn’t go anywhere, literally, because it was going to be an hour in the parking lot or inside,” Mara Cooper said. “Even in the last five months that he spent in the hospital, to every single nurse he’d say, ‘Hi, how are you? Where’d you go to school?’”

Said Mara: “It was a part of who he was. So was coaching baseball and softball Saturday mornings at the Howard Palmetto Khoury League, of which he had served as commissioner.

“He believed in winning but he did everything with a sense of humor and encouraged everyone the same,” Mara said. “Our family was into sports and he coached us and our friends. Miami has changed so much but it was kind of small-towny, even in those days, and everyone cared about everyone else.”

Cooper was born in Homestead, graduated from Homestead High in 1948, and went on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Miami and Appalachian State University in North Carolina, respectively.

His first teaching job was at Escuela Bella Vista in Maracaibo, Venezuela in the late 1950s. One of his students from his 1959 class, Susan McClurg Berman, remembered him fondly. She began an email correspondence with Cooper 45 years later. Nora Cooper emailed Berman in June when her dad broke his hip.

“He was always so tall and thin I guess he didn’t have enough padding for his hips,” Berman said. “He used to tell me that I should be his most outstanding student.” Berman, now an author, released Maracaibo Oil Brat: Book One (Andrew Benzie Books) in 2013 .

In Venezuela, Cooper met his wife of 45 years, schoolteacher Gloria Hayes. The athletic couple married in Jamaica in 1960 and soon returned to South Miami-Dade to raise their daughters and son, Michael. Cooper took a job as a counselor at Palmetto Middle School.

Cooper also loved raising orchids, a skill he learned from his mother.

Cooper, in his planter’s straw hat and paint-splattered shorts, tended to his orchids regularly in the back of the family home. His late wife cataloged, tagged and maintained files on them.

“I’m management and marketing. Clint is labor,” Gloria told the Miami News in a 1984 article about local orchid growers.

“He won all sorts of ribbons. Raised them to the end, and beautifully,” Mara said as she perused the plants at the Palmetto Bay family home, picking among them for the days ahead. “We will have fun at the service tomorrow night.”

In addition to his children, Cooper is survived by his sister Marie Conway and five grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at 5 p.m. Friday at Stanfill Funeral Home, 10545 South Dixie Hwy., Miami.