



## Jereial Byron Fletcher

December 28, 1953 - March 7, 2021

Jereial Byron Fletcher died on Sunday, March 7, 2021, at home with his family, after a diagnosis of metastatic cancer. The life of this extraordinary man began at his parents' home in Nickelsville, Virginia, on December 28, 1953. Educated in Scott County, Virginia public schools, he was an honors graduate from Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, a double major in English and Education. Throughout his 45-year-long career in higher education, he carried forward the mission statement of Berea: "To offer a high-quality liberal arts education that engages students as they pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals." He was proud of Berea's history as the first integrated Southern coeducational institution of higher learning, where all students worked and studied and served their community.

Fluent in Appalachian studies and every discipline of English language and literature, Jereial taught at Virginia Tech during his Master's degree program and worked as a counselor for Upward Bound. After graduating from Tech, he and his wife Ramona, a fellow graduate student, moved to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where he completed all the coursework for the Ph.D. in English.

A resident of Bluefield since 1980, Jereial completed later graduate studies in Higher Education at Virginia Tech for the Ed.D. coursework and exams, culminating in the CAGSE. All of these went into the wide-ranging expertise that enriched his teaching, first at Bluefield College for four years, and then at Southwest Virginia Community College since 1984, his service there lasting

37 years. Many thousands of students passed through his courses, and they were enriched and inspired by him. His mentoring of new faculty and his service as Chair of Humanities and Dean at SWCC ensured that his comprehensive knowledge and devotion to the ideals of service will continue long afterward. His innovation and dedication to VCCS and to regional, statewide, and national organizations made his impact even greater. He was preceded in death by his father, Victor Byron Fletcher, and his mother, Rebecca Lucas Fletcher, his uncle Cecil Dwight Fletcher and aunt Lula Foster Fletcher, his cousin Clarion Fletcher, and many Addington and Fletcher and Lucas relations whose genealogy lines were carefully documented going back centuries. He was a fount of knowledge on Scott County, Southwest Virginia, and East Tennessee history, culture, and geography. He was a keen paddler of rivers and a farmer and protector of the land that was his birthright. Jereial Byron Fletcher was a poet. He loved folklore and stories and jokes and linguistic puzzles. An advocate for Appalachian Studies, he was a member of the founding committee that created the Appalachian Heritage Writers Symposium, a key force in the VCCS New Horizons annual conferences, Editor and board member of the VCCS community college journal *Inquiry*. He hosted many writers who visited SWCC, including James Still, author of *River of Earth*. He was a James Still Fellow at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, a Chancellor's Fellow in the VCCS, and mentor to professionals seeking Virginia teaching credentials in the Career Switchers program. He read Old and Middle English, French, Spanish, and Hebrew. He introduced friends and students to Gurney Norman and James Still and many other mountain and southern writers. He loved Geoffrey Chaucer and the British Romantic poets, Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, and Robert Penn Warren and had an encyclopedic knowledge of British and American literature. He leaves behind his wife of 43 years, Ramona Semones Fletcher, and his daughter Rachel Colleen Fletcher. He loved his family and was loved by them. No words can speak to their loss. Survivors include his sister Beatrice

Fletcher Dingus (Wayne), brothers-in-law Michael Semones (Helen), Andy Semones, Vincent Semones (Karen), Joe Semones (Jill), Danny Semones (Anita), and sister-in-law Nancy Semones Knox, as well as mother-in-law Anna McMillan Semones, fellow kayaker and traveller and gardener and lover of nature. He leaves behind many cousins and nieces and nephews. He also leaves many friends and colleagues, former students, everyone fortunate enough to spend time in his company: you know who you are and how much you meant to him. His "first officer" and friend Tammy Austin, valued Division Administrative Assistant at SWCC, kept him organized and punctual; together, they knew or could find the answers to questions all and sundry.

The voice of Alpha Baldrige, in James Still's novel *River of Earth*, could speak for Jereial Fletcher, when she said, "Forever I've wanted to set us down in a lone spot, a place certain and enduring, with room to swing arm and elbow, a garden-piece for fresh victuals .... I'm longing to set me down shorely and raise my chaps proper." Jereial believed in the essential truths of poetry, going again and again to William Ernest Henley's "Invictus":

I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

His family is grateful to Amedisys Hospice for compassionate care in the final hours and for the excellent services of Mercer Funeral Home in Bluefield, WV. A celebration of Jereial's life will be held when it is safe to do so. Those wishing to make a donation in his memory may contribute to the SWCC Educational Foundation or to The Clinch River Valley Initiative/Nature Conservancy partnership working to create a Clinch River State Park in Virginia.

# Tribute Wall

DG

“ I was a student of Mr. Fletcher at Bluefield College in the early 80s. His Socratic style of teaching challenged me to think critically and as a 5th grade ELA teacher today, I think of him often as I try to challenge my students the same way. I was so sorry to read of his passing and I share my belated condolences to his family.

Deborah (Fonner) Griffin - February 22, 2025 at 07:36 AM



“ Jereial Byron Fletcher

October 05, 2023 at 06:08 PM

RF

“ Many thanks to all who have shared tributes.

*Dr. Ramona S. Fletcher*



Ramona Fletcher - May 18, 2021 at 06:08 PM

LB

“ Dearest Ramona and Rachel,

*Please accept my deepest sympathies for your loss. Know that you are both in my fondest memories.*

*With much love,*

*Laura Blevins*

*(Bluefield College, MHR Class of '92)*

Laura Blevins - April 07, 2021 at 08:33 PM

RM

“ I'm so sorry to discover today that Jereial Fletcher has passed away. He was a marvelous and inspiring teacher and one of the reasons I went on to teach in higher education and to write and publish. I was fortunate to be his guest a couple of times at Southwest Virginia Community College when he invited me there as a visiting writer. It was always a joy to see him and catch up. I loved his stories and will greatly miss them. My own life was made richer for knowing him.

*Rick Mulkey*

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**Rick Mulkey** - April 05, 2021 at 02:56 PM

RF

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Ramona S Fletcher** - April 04, 2021 at 08:45 PM

JH

“ Dear Mona & Rachel,  
Jereial always brought even more light to our family gatherings, with his intelligent humor and knowledge of history. He always left me pondering about the stories and jokes he shared with us in our youth; he tried to simplify it for my inexperience, however it always took me a little longer to piece it together. Such an intelligent man! He'll be missed dearly. I'm here for you two ladies, and the rest of our family during these times.

*Love, Jeremy Hawks*

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**Jeremy Hawks** - March 18, 2021 at 12:57 PM

SS

“ Knew Jereial when he was a student at Nickelsville in Scott County. He rode the bus with us to get to school. We walked a good distance to catch the bus which came at 7:30 before daybreak. We all tramped into Bruce Addington’s house to wait on the bus. They never complained. I have such good memories of his family. They were very good people. I am so very sorry for your loss but please know that we homefolks were mighty happy for and proud of his many accomplishments. May God give you peace in this difficult time.  
Sharon Sowers daughter of Virginia Addington and granddaughter of Hugh M. Addington

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**sharon Sowers** - March 13, 2021 at 07:05 PM

AB

“ My thoughts and prayers are with the Fletcher Family during this difficult time. Although I did not have the pleasure of knowing Dean Fletcher as long as most, I certainly appreciated the opportunities and direction he provided during my short tenure with SWCC. As I have read the numerous tributes from his long-time colleagues this week, it is clear the positive impact he had on the lives of many. May family and friends find some comfort in the wonderful memories you shared.  
Angela White Ball

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**Angela White Ball** - March 13, 2021 at 03:23 PM

“ I was only 13 when Jereial officially joined our family. I am sure it seemed overwhelming at times because there were so many of us. There are so many memories of him that I have, but three stand out. The first is remembering how he and my sister Ramona looked at each other with such love on their wedding day. The second is the look of love and pride on his face when he held Rachel in the hospital just days after she was born. And the third is the joy and love he and Ramona shared watching Rachel graduate from college.

When we were together at family gatherings, or speaking on the phone, Jereial would often have a joke for me, a recommendation for something to read, a question about my thoughts on current affairs, or even a suggestion for a YOUTUBE channel I might like. We could always pick up wherever we left off. In later years, when meeting my soon-to-be-husband, he offered tips on what John should know about marrying a Semones. Some of his tips were spot on and some tongue-in-cheek. Jereial danced at my wedding and grieved with all of us when I lost my husband last year.

Jereial had an appreciation for the absurd and had a very dry wit. A true Renaissance man as described so beautifully in his obituary, he was also a lover of history, a raconteur and a great cook. He was the only person I know who willingly ate wasabi. His special dishes of pulled pork, potato salad and sweet dill pickles were family favorites.

We shared a love of literature and poetry, including a love for Robert Frost. My own favorite poem, Frost's *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*, speaks to Jereial's journey as well. The final verse:

*"I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."*

*As a family, we were fortunate to share the journey with Jereial. Native peoples have talked about "a space that no one else can fill." Jereial's space in our lives and hearts will always be his. The love we shared as a family, our memories of Jereial, and the difference he made in our lives will be with us always.*

*Nancy Semones Knox*

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**Nancy S. Knox** - March 13, 2021 at 12:48 PM

SS

“ *Ramona and Rachael,*

*I am so sorry for your tragic loss! Prayers for comfort in the days ahead. I loved Jereial dearly! He was a true friend. When Jereial and I both started teaching at SWCC in the fall of 1984 and we joined the "Bluefield carpool", I was blessed with hours each day to get to know Jereial. He was smart, funny, sweet spirited, and he took care of his friends. I am blessed with sweet memories of my 32 years with him at SWCC and our many carpool adventures! I will miss that smiling face!*

*Sandy Stephenson*

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**Sandy Stephenson** - March 13, 2021 at 11:51 AM

JS

“ *My thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time. I had the pleasure of knowing Jereial during the years I was blessed to be an adjunct faculty member. Unofficially, he was a mentor to me. He was such a brilliant man, one with an humble spirit. I am thankful that I had the honor of knowing him and send my most heartfelt sympathy to you.*

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**Judy Stamper** - March 12, 2021 at 06:45 PM

AH

“ While I support Mary Margaret's words fully, I am feeling such a loss...for the WORLD, for you two, his sister, your siblings, your mom, and for the countless individuals who depended on him as a trusted confidante and sounding board...I am personally and forever indebted to him for serving as an instrument of God in my life (he accepted that accolade without dispute)...thank you for sharing him, loving him, and honoring him with this moving and beautifully eloquent salute. His reach can NOT be denied. Please know that you are being lifted for strength, courage, comfort, and, ultimately, peace as you face this planet with only the presence of his spectre...please know his memory and spirit will transcend all our lives. You are loved.

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**April Hess** - March 12, 2021 at 01:32 PM

MT

“ Dear Ramona and Rachel,  
This was such a beautiful and fitting tribute to such a special man. My heart breaks for you and for all of his SWCC family. He was a beloved member of the SWCC family and his loss will leave a lasting impact on all of us. We do have our memories and they are good ones. He will always be in our hearts.

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**Mary Margaret Thompson** - March 12, 2021 at 12:15 PM

AH

While I support Mary Margaret's words fully, I am feeling such a loss...for the WORLD, for you two, his sister, your siblings, your mom, and for the countless individuals who depended on him as a trusted confidante and sounding board...I am personally and forever indebted to him for serving as an instrument of God in my life (he accepted that accolade without dispute)...thank you for sharing him, loving him, and honoring him with this moving and beautifully eloquent salute. His reach can NOT be denied. Please know that you are being lifted for strength, courage, comfort, and, ultimately, peace as you face this planet with only the presence of his spectre...please know his memory and spirit will transcend all our lives. You are loved.

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**April Hess** - March 12, 2021 at 01:14 PM

PC

“ *Ramona, Rachel and family.  
During my many years in the VP of Academic and Student Services area at SWCC, I had the pleasure of knowing and being around Jereial through many meetings on campus, VCCA and New Horizon Conferences, or just passing by our office just to say "hello"!*



*I can't imagine the impact Jereial has left and the lives he has touched in his 37 years of service at Southwest.. His love for his family, his students and his SWCC family showed at all times. Along with his outstanding intelligence, it also had an enormous sense of humor and smile. Southwest will never be the same.*

*Sincerely,  
Phyllis Christian*

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**Phyllis Christian** - March 12, 2021 at 11:20 AM

ME

“ *During my decade at SWCC, a small and dedicated group of informal advisors emerged to help during some very difficult times. Jereial was one such person. A very clear thinker with a sarcastic wit, his love of SWCC shown thru in his love of his students. He and I also often talked about our time at Berea. He is missed there as well.*

*Mark and Trish Estepp*

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**mark estepp** - March 12, 2021 at 07:37 AM

DC

“ *Ramona and Rachel,  
My thoughts and prayers are with you. The world was a better place with Jereial in it. He will be greatly missed but not forgotten by those who worked with and for him. May God bless and comfort you.*

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**donna corns** - March 11, 2021 at 03:50 PM

KD

“ *Kim C Davis lit a candle in memory of Jereial Byron Fletcher*



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**Kim C Davis** - March 11, 2021 at 12:41 PM

SS

“ *My condolences. Jereial and I were colleagues for over 20 years and I admired and respected him so much. He was a truly special person, so intelligent and funny. Your words here are an amazing tribute.*

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**Shari Stacy** - March 11, 2021 at 12:40 PM

MD

“ *Ramona and Rachel, I had the privilege of taking Jereial's ENG 111/112 classes years ago; and I've had the privilege of working with him these last 15 years. I have learned so much from him, both as a student and as an employee of SWCC. My life is richer for having known him. His passing has left us all shocked and saddened; but as Brian Wright said, all we have to do is remember and smile. Jereial was loved, respected, and admired by all of us. Prayers of comfort to you and your family.*

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**Margaret Dye** - March 11, 2021 at 12:30 PM

RP

“ *Ramona and family. I had the pleasure of working with Jereial on many projects as his colleague at SWCC. He was a true friend and a joy to work for students success. I spoke with him often after my retirement and he clued me on good fishing spots. We had planned for lunch in a couple of months. It’s hard to express the loss he will be to so many people. I had the upmost respect and admiration for him. I pray for comfort to your family in the days ahead.*

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**Ron Proffitt** - March 11, 2021 at 11:31 AM

BW

“ *Ramona and Rachel, I am so, so sorry for your loss...our loss. He was so much to so many of us. I have referred to Jereial as a Renaissance man, and this obit just underscores that feeling. He will be missed by us all, but all we will have to do is remember and smile. All the positivity that was Fletcher will warm our hearts.*

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**Brian Wright** - March 11, 2021 at 11:09 AM