

NATHAN ALLMAN

May 17, 2020



By Thomas Rayfiel

Nathan Allman, who became a Coop member relatively late in life but whose influence on the Coop began long before, died on March 22 of complications resulting from the coronavirus. He was 85. Nathan joined the Coop in 2007, when he married Ellen Krüger Allman, and retired in 2010, one of the first members eligible to do so under the Coop's age-related retirement policy. Long before that, in the early 1980s, then an insurance broker, he sold the Coop its first employee health insurance policy—to current General Manager Joe Holtz. But Joe had a problem getting services,

and abruptly switched to a new policy with a different provider. Joe recalls the phone call he received from Nathan:

“A few weeks later Nathan called me and in a remarkably non-defensive and non-accusatory way explained to me that what I had done was not the way people who engage in business together should behave. He explained that the way to act was to reach out and discuss what the problems were before simply removing yourself from a business arrangement, before dumping a company or person you were doing business with. This free of charge lesson was something I really took to heart and learned from and went on to use in the ensuing years. I never forgot the lesson from that conversation and, just as importantly, how, without anger or acrimony, Nathan gently taught it. “

A longtime resident, his family bought their Park Slope house here in the late 1950s, Nathan witnessed great changes as the neighborhood lost much of its diverse character and “stoop culture.” But he never stopped being a vital part of the neighborhood, serving in many civic and community organizations as well as welcoming all newcomers. This same openness applied to the Coop, where he worked checkout. His wife recalls, “He was one of these rare people who never lost his cool when he was out in the world. So no matter how crowded it became or how stressed a member checking out was, he was a balancing influence.”

Music was one of Nathan’s great loves. During his last days, he was being kept in isolation. But his friend, the pianist Fred Hersch, hearing of his condition, dedicated to him a live-streamed performance of “Valentine,” a song of Hersch’s that Nathan particularly loved. The nurse held the phone to his ear as it was played. ■