

OBITUARY

Nathan D. Strickland, Jr.

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BY JASON A. MICHAEL

He had, friends say, warm eyes and a nice smile and always a kind word for everyone. Community activist Nathan D. Strickland Jr., widely recognized as an up and coming leader in the LGBTQ community, succumbed to his lengthy battle with cancer Jan. 24. He passed just two weeks before what would have been his 28th birthday.

Strickland grew up in Grosse Pointe Woods and graduated from Grosse Pointe North High School in 2009. He went on to earn first his bachelor's degree in criminal justice, specifically forensic psychology, from Tiffin University in Ohio. Later, he picked up a master's degree in community counseling from Oakland University.

In 2013, Strickland started attending Talk Tuesdays at KICK, which led to him volunteering for the agency, which later changed its name to LGBT Detroit. He attended the agency's Leadership Academy and finished the program in 2013. It was through KICK that he met Logan McClendon and Darius Baty. The trio, with a couple of additional friends, would go on to call themselves the Sailor Scouts, a name taken from the popular Japanese anime series "Sailor Moon." In "Sailor Moon," the scouts, who are all female, are a team of magical soldiers who protect the solar system from evil and injustice. Strickland's scout name was Mercury.

"Nathan was an optimistic, happy, quirky, nerdy person," Baty said. "Those were all his qualities and they played into his professional life and his social life. I met him in 2013 through KICK. After that we just got really close and he wound up joining Kappa Psi Kappa fraternity and he crossed in 2015. His fraternity name was Kaliber. He was my pledge and I was his assistant dean of pledges for that."

Also in 2015, Strickland was chosen as one of 10 leaders in Detroit to receive a Black Male Engagement Leader Award and was given \$10,000. At the time, LGBT Detroit Executive Director Curtis Lipscomb said that Strickland was "the epitome of what young leadership looks like."

By then, Strickland had worked his

way up to health and wellness director for LGBT Detroit, but he would eventually leave the agency in 2016 and move to the Community Health Awareness Group, where he worked as a high impact prevention specialist. While at CHAG though, Strickland would continue to volunteer for LGBT Detroit and Hotter Than July – Detroit's black gay pride festival. He had also by this time started playing the violin and the viola in the Detroit Medical Orchestra.

Through it all, Strickland continued to hang out with the scouts.

"We would go out dancing together and of course have a night out on the town," McClendon said. "We would go out to dinner together very frequently. We would travel together. We would visit each other's houses and help each other move and go to each other's house warmings and things like that. We were really integrated into each other's lives."

Among the scouts, Strickland was known as the sweet one.

"He was always kind with his words," McClendon said. "Nathan was one of the most intellectual people I've ever met, so as deep as you want to go or as surface level as you want to go, Nathan could hang with you. He was that guy you could talk to you about anything. He could give you advice about anything."

Both McClendon and Baty agree that one of the things they will most remember about their friend is his laugh.

"When he laughed everyone in the room had no choice but to laugh because it was so boisterous, it was so peculiar," McClendon said. "It was so all-encompassing. We could never not acknowledge it because it was so prominent and so heartwarming and endearing."

Baty said much of the same.

"Not only was his laugh infectious, it was a standout sound," he said. "He



started laughing and he would be like gasping. Every time he would start, I'd be like, 'OK, Nathan, stop.' It would go on for 15 minutes and then everybody there would start laughing until we forgot what we were laughing about."

In recent years, Nathan continued to laugh even as he battled cancer. Though he initially contracted it in the muscles in his back, which he would have removed, the cancer would eventually come back and continue to spread.

"We talked about it all the time, about his different treatments," Baty said. "He worked with Henry Ford and his primary care doctor was at St. John's. When they did the last trial, the doctors were pretty much saying they didn't know what else they could do. Nathan started losing weight and he started looking older and we were talking and I said, 'Are you sure you want to keep doing this? Because now it's not the cancer that's doing this, it's the treatment.'"

As recent as a couple of weeks ago, Strickland would reunite with the scouts for what would be the last time.

"We finally did our brunch for the new year and Nathan was still bright, happy Nathan," Baty said. "But he looked like he was 86 years old. His hair was totally white, he was on oxygen. Yet he was still optimistic."

Strickland is survived by his parents Debra and Nathan Sr., as well as his brother Tony Strickland and his sister Nicole Strickland.

Visitation will take place at the A. H. Peters Funeral Home, located at 20705 Mack Ave. in Grosse Pointe Woods, from 2 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 1. Funeral services will take place Saturday, Feb. 2, at 11 a.m. at the Grosse Pointe Congregational Church, located at 240 Chalfonte St. in Grosse Pointe Farms.