

Uncle Bijan!

Bijan Saadatmand brings an international flavor and caring attitude

BY NANCY DELOSH RUSINAK ('88, '91M)

During my first semester at JMU I took the Intro to Psychology class taught by Dr. Bijan Saadatmand. It was a large class of about 150 students, and we met in Godwin Hall. Each morning Dr. Saadatmand bounded into the room — he bounded everywhere — instantly captivating his

audience. He was able to talk to that very large class in a way that made us feel like he was talking to each of us individually. Always approachable, Dr. Saadatmand explained his name in this way: “Some people have a very hard time with my last name. It’s Saadatmand, and if you ever need to pronounce it, you say ‘Saw That Man,’ and you’re just fine. But most of my students call just call me Uncle Bijan, and that is fine, too.”

His lectures were full of energy and fun to experience. His tests, however, were not. I remember being quite flummoxed because even though I liked his class, and loved him, I struggled to keep a ‘B’ because the tests were so challenging. He definitely made sure we had a good introduction to the world of psychology.

At the end of the year, he told us if we ever needed a letter of recommendation for anything to just ask. He would “remember us.” I felt cynical about that, thinking there was no way he could remember all 150 students. Yet, shortly after deciding to declare psychology my major, I began a work/study job in the psychology department. My duties included answering phones, making copies, mimeographing (yes, I am dating myself), and greeting visitors. I saw many of Uncle Bijan’s well-written letters of recommendation. Each letter contained something personal about each student. I was amazed at how well he could remember all of us.

About the Professor *Bijan Saadatmand joined the JMU faculty in 1971 and directed JMU International Student and Scholars Services for decades. He retired as a full-time psychology professor in 2003 but has remained an active part of the JMU community. A native of Iran, Saadatmand has recruited hundreds of international students and professors and helped them navigate complex and changing visa issues. He also created the “Parade of International Color,” in which JMU students from 94 countries processed in native dress and carried their countries’ flags during JMU President Linwood H. Rose’s 1999 inauguration celebration. The parade has become a tradition during JMU’s annual International Week.*

It was always a treat to hear Uncle Bijan coming — and more often than not, you heard him before you saw him. Whistling, singing, greeting other students or professors, he was a party on two legs. At that time, the psychology department’s main office was situated in such a way that you couldn’t see who was coming from the side hallways. Many professors would round the

corner without warning. Not Uncle Bijan. He was also known for his strong homemade Mandarin Vishnofka, which I heard was served in extremely tall (three-foot high) decanters full of fruit.

Bijan was a hugger. He hugged other professors, he hugged students, he hugged custodial staff and he hugged the mailman. His office door was always open. You always felt welcome. If you had a problem, he wanted you to come tell him about it. If you were struggling with a class, a friend, a roommate, he wanted to help.

Uncle Bijan taught me more than introductory psychology. More importantly, he taught

me to live each day to the fullest — that was his *modus operandi*. No matter what the circumstances, he said to live, enjoy, smile and help someone in need.

I spent many years employed in the psychology field, mainly in industrial organizational work. But, that’s just work; not life. Every day I try to find an opportunity to bring some joy into someone else’s life. Everyday I find someone to hug.

I spent three years at JMU working on my undergraduate degree and three more working on my Ed.S. in Counseling Psychology. Throughout my Madison Experience, Bijan Saadatmand always brought a smile to my face, always made me feel reassured. There are many wonderful psychology professors, and happily many of my professors still teach at JMU. I can honestly say that Uncle Bijan was a professor I loved.

✍

About the Author *Nancy Delosh Rusinak ('88, '91M) is a self-employed survey/data analyst and adjunct faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University. She teaches research methods in the VCU Wilder School of Government. Her life’s passion is her family. She lives in Richmond with her husband, David Rusinak ('87) and her dying-to-go-to-JMU kids, Matthew and Ashleigh.*



Psychology professor Bijan Saadatmand is best known by students as “Uncle Bijan” and remembered for this giving attitude, welcoming nature and his hugs. He directed the JMU International Students and Scholars Services for many years and still teaches part time. (Below): “Uncle Bijan” takes a photo with the home economics faculty in the 1975 *Bluestone*.