



A glimpse at your faculty instructor ...

Professor Rayens was born and raised on a knob farm in southwestern Boyle County, on a creek just northeast of the notorious Rolling Fork. In the summer time baths were taken in the front yard in a large “warsh” tub filled with water from that creek and warmed by the noon sun. The farm was filled with hogs and chickens and several acres of vegetables and berries. When the time was right the hogs were killed with a sledge hammer, cut up on a table in the front yard, dressed and left to sugar cure in the “smoke house” which sat just below the pig pen.

Professor Rayens’ parents hail from Whitley and Harlan counties where the coal mines figured prominently into the family’s history. His father worked for many years in the mines in Harlan County before moving to Central Kentucky; his death in the early 1980’s was attributable partly to complications from black lung. Rayens’ grandfather on his dad’s side was killed as a young man in a cave-in at a mine outside of Woodbine several decades before. Most of his uncles were also career coal miners, although, interestingly enough, one or two later became evangelical preachers. One uncle, in particular was an accomplished snake handler in his local Pentecostal church. He was rumored to have kept snakes under the floor of his stilt-supported house there on a hillside between Harlan and Evarts. Although the snakes were surely safely contained, sleeping on the open-plank floor there in the summers was a nerve wracking experience for a young boy.

Most of Rayens’ summer vacations in his youth were split between those communities in Evarts and rural Whitley County. At a little farm off the side of the highway in Woodbine relatives would gather unannounced off and on all summer long at his Aunt Mary’s house. Late into the summer night, through the open windows and on the cool mountain breeze, he could hear the voices of grownups talking and singing out on the porch, mixing with the night sounds of whippoorwills and crickets. Tucked beneath a generations-old handmade quilt, he would be forever changed by those sounds. It was there that he learned about life in the mountains and the incalculable importance of family.

Professor Rayens’ most notorious relative is Devil Jim Turner, who is his great-great grandfather. Turner’s son was James Turner Jr. and James’ daughter was Jane Turner, wife of David Crockett Kelly, Rayens’ grandfather on his mother’s side. You can read more about Devil Jim at:

- <http://www.rootsweb.com/~seky/famfile/turner/djt.html>
- <http://www.rootsweb.com/~seky/folfoot/010.html>



Somehow from this wonderful beginning filled with shotguns, copperheads, gooseberries and tobacco patches, Rayens managed to graduate from Boyle County High School and then, later, from Centre College of Kentucky where he double majored in mathematics and religion. At Centre, Rayens found his academic spark thanks to several committed professors who dared to expose a bright farm boy to the wonders of learning and the complexities of an intellectual life. After Centre, Rayens went on to earn his masters in mathematics from UNC Chapel-Hill and then a doctorate in mathematics from Duke University. He joined the faculty at the University of Kentucky in 1986. His research specialties are in the areas of multivariate analysis and statistical pedagogy.



Professor Rayens is married to the ever-beautiful Mary Kay O’Neill Rayens. Mary Kay is a professor on the medical center campus and they have six kids – Kelly, Emily, Nathan, Delaney, Flannery, and Liam.

Rayens has been a serious runner for well over 30 years, having once upon a time established a handful of school records at Boyle County and Centre, records long since replaced by the efforts of those now much younger and faster. He still enjoys 5K competition from March through September.