

# Eulogy for Rick Plunkett

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Please everyone look around you. I wonder if many of you might notice that the room and things around you are somewhat darker than they were last week. That's because a very bright light that has been among us brightening our world and lighting our way for many years has finally faded away.

Last week we lost the bright light of Rick, my best friend. And I get to tell you about him.

Rick was a king among men. That is feeling shared by all of us. But he was first a son, a brother, a husband, a father. And he was a friend to us all.

The light that he shone on all of us was one of wisdom, compassion, love, goodness, courage, intelligence and perception.

When I first met Rick at age 15 he was just a regular guy. Good-looking, comfortable in his own skin. He had girlfriends before I even knew what girls were. He did all the cool things, skied, snowmobiled, rode horses, played tennis, football and boxed. He had a cool scar on his face.

He loved nature, and when we were 16 he suddenly wanted to know about birds of prey. I tricked him into thinking I knew all about falconry -- and suddenly we were training a hawk together.

That experience brought us closer as friends and we began to spend as much time as we could together even after we released Timmy the hawk

into the wild. I still assumed that he was just a regular guy, but just with some extra cool stuff like hawks and horses.

But I remember the day like it was yesterday when I realized that Rick was someone really special, with a really remarkable mind and sense of our place in the world and the cosmos.

We were just two 18 year-olds driving down the road. I was babbling on about something that stupid 18-year-olds are supposed to babble about. He was not even listening to me.

He suddenly looked up in the sky. He said "Look at the moon!" "God! Look at the sky oh my god!" "Fuck! We're a planet!"

I had still been talking, rambling on with nonsense. I heard him and stopped silent, thinking about what he had just said. You just don't talk like that. I don't mean the swearing. This was an incredibly precocious 18-year-old's way of realizing our existence in this universe.

It woke me up to his wisdom and understanding of our place in the world. It changed the way I thought of him. This was why he had always seemed so wise to me. He was no longer just a regular guy. I knew I had better start, listening to everything this guy told me. I began to call him an "earth watcher", someone who had a singular perspective on humanity and the universe. I learned last week the kids, unaware of this story, had recently redubbed him "skylooker."

This wisdom imparted Rick with as much practical knowledge and perspective as philosophical insight. For years I came to him with questions about everything, life and love, life and family, life and money, life and work, bosses, career, all kinds of challenges.

The thing is, Rick did this for everyone. Throughout his full and rich life and perhaps even more so during the latter years of his illness, he became

the natural sounding board and advisor for so many extremely intelligent friends and family members (his wife, sisters and kids, Carol's brother, Mike, friends like Doug McGill and Terry Klampe) who just wanted to stop by and bounce ideas off him.

Rick was a spirited and clever organizer. He coached kids football for many years. He set up or restructured foundations such as MPIRG and Minnesota Justice Foundation, and took on the Herculean challenges of organizing sales or developing properties for his family. I think he did all these things just because he saw a need that he was delighted to fill.

Despite his natural role as organizer and advisor, Rick was immensely humble. No one would ever know of the many organizational feats, acts of charity, financial or otherwise, that he was responsible for.

Beyond just a wise person – of anybody I ever knew Rick really knew how to walk the talk.

In his awe for the world and his tiny place in it he would eventually travel to visit Warsaw during Solidarnosz, to Nicaragua during the revolution, to Northern Ireland during times of the IRA and to Mount St. Helens to see the aftermath of an exploding mountain. During all this time, as he eventually told me, I was too busy looking at my feet.

He showed us how to love life by really loving life, both the peaceful and raucous parts of life.

He loved the camaraderie of a group of friends or family. He loved spirited intelligent conversation with everyone.

He loved laughing. He had at least three kinds of laughs: The explosive, mouth-open, knee-slapping laugh; the squinty-eyed, shoulders-up giggle; and my favorite, the Count Chocula-like triplet, "Ha Ha Ha."

He loved being on the canoe trail with his friends and family, being out the middle of nowhere under both calm and stormy skies of the north woods. It was all good to him.

He showed us how to love his family by really actively loving his family, admiring them and caring for them and worrying about them all in the same moment. He showed us effortlessly that care for the family is the most important thing.

Rick was a courageous human being. No one would ever be aware that he had achieved a lifetime of such amazing accomplishments, enjoyed life so much, and touched so many people, while simultaneously suffering from the endless macabre parade of complications from his disease since age 15.

Last September, more than 40 years after he uttered that 18-year-old's phrase of amazement about us BEING a planet, as he lay in his bed withering away in the final chapters of this awful disease and pondering his imminent death he opened up his computer and showed me a NASA picture of the star-studded galaxies of the universe.

He said to me, "Who can regret having been part of all this!" I just sat there silently, in absolute awe of this man. I had been right to keep returning to the oracle to seek enlightenment from him, his wisdom and perceptions. I was still learning from him.