

Remarks for Mark Smith's Memorial

October 1, 2023 Hilton Downtown Vancouver

What a LIFE !!!

How many people do we know who get to do as an adult exactly what they loved doing as a kid, and then getting PAID for it ?? Mark Smith had no boss, got to wear whatever he wanted, go wherever he wanted and spend most of his days outside, getting dirty, chasing around critters -- His own nature nirvana...

His parents met as Hyster employees in Holland, and shared a love of each other, and tennis. Dad Milton (he went by Mike) was a Hyster executive and mother Maria "Reit" Jansen was a secretary, 25 years his junior. Their marriage brought Bob, Mark and Carol into the world.

In 1963 Mark's parents decided to move the family to Portlan., They set sail on the SS Staaten Dam. The luxury liner delivered Mark right to Mrs. Setzoil's kindergarten class at our Robert Gray Elementary School.

That makes 60 years of friendship. I knew Mark's parents and he knew my family, both my parents and my grandparents. I have an image in my memory of his mom Reit sitting at their kitchen table with blonde pigtails and bright red lipstick in a tennis outfit smoking a cigarette. She was kind to me, yet a serious personality. Probably not a good idea to cross her. Mark's Dad was quieter, friendly, had a bum arm. He drove his green International Travel All and played tennis using just one arm.

The Smiths lived at 5251 Dosch Road, not far from school. Their house abutted the neighborhood sports field and Mark's room could have qualified as an OMSI annex. It was stuffed with bugs, snakes and small animals of every description. Calvin the 10-foot pet python was NOT small, and made quite an impression on every visitor, and Mark loved to tell the tale of when Calvin disappeared during a party his parents were hosting, only to turn up coiled around the springs of a couch where guests were sitting.

We were both OMSI kids. On Saturdays parents would drop their kids off at OMSI for a few hours in the mornings to have a science free-for-all. Mark took things a little further, and I think he memorized the name of every living and dead thing in the building. Birds, bugs, mammals, rocks, shells. That was Mark's early PHD in the natural world.

To get to school, Mark would walk from Dosch to Boundary St. and across the footbridge (where the 8th graders practiced kissing). Speaking of which, in 8th grade Mark became the boyfriend of class President Martha Gambee. Had they married it probably would have resulted in a double homicide because both of them were always right and everyone else was always wrong.

Mark and I were both on the Robert Gray 8th grade basketball team. The team had 16 players. I rounded out the bottom, lucky to be the 15th or 16th best player, and Mark was one of our best. Mark was a sharp shooter, representing Robert Gray along with Bill Nicholson at free-throw shooting contests around the city.

Mark and I were also MAC Club gym rats (Multnomah Athletic Club). When nature wasn't calling, Mark and I would sometimes spend entire weekend days at the MAC, trying every sport that was available. Mark was skilled at everything: ping pong, tree climbing, gymnastics, swimming, **badminton**, and tennis. Mark loved to compete, he wanted to be the best. He was fast, he was tall, he was long and could jump. Maybe the best all-around athlete in our grade and high schools. He was the #1 ranked junior badminton player in the Pacific Northwest. Had he focused on tennis he would have been #1 in that sport as well.

Growing up Mark and I would play tennis at our neighborhood court or at the West Hills Racquet Club, where I give Mark credit for inventing Dr. Pepper. The drink should have been called Dr. Smith. At the time, Dr. Pepper was not yet in the stores, but after we played he would get some Coca Cola from the soda machine and mix it with cherry juice. He should have patented the idea !

At Wilson High School Mark and I played on the tennis team all 4 years. Mark was nice enough to give me the nickname "Killer Keller," in response to my hitting the ball as hard as I possibly could at all times. He was always one step ahead of me on the team ladder. While Mark was playing singles, I was bringing up the rear on the team, paired with the one and only Bob Smith, brother of Mark, playing doubles.

Give Bob his mother's racket !!!

Senior year the tables turned. Mark and I had a challenge match on court number 4 at the MAC Club, and a miracle happened. I beat Mark, barely, in a match that lasted so long we needed 2 days to finish it. So that year I was at #1 singles and Mark was at #2 singles. I bring this up not to make me look good, but to reinforce what a good person Mark was. At the end of the regular season I asked Mark to be my doubles partner for the city and state tournaments. I really hoped we could go further playing doubles together. We both could have made it to state as singles players, but it also could have happened that we would have ended up playing against each other in the City tournament draw, knocking one of us out before state. I still remember exiting the Wilson doors on that May afternoon, chasing down Mark who was 20 steps ahead of me on his way home. I didn't know what he would say, but I got up the courage to suggest our teaming up.

When he agreed on the spot I WAS PSYCHED !. And you know what ? Even though we never played competitive doubles as a team before, we fought our way to the City finals. Mark was an amazing partner with the focus of a raptor, the reflexes of a cat, great hands at net and an overhead smash that could cause bodily harm to any opponent. He could get down on one knee and overhead any ball over 5 feet high. To this day I have never seen any other player even attempt that shot.

In the finals we lost in a 3rd set tiebreaker to the Bonime brothers of Lincoln. Not bad for a brand new team. And those Bonime brothers had played together for years. In the state tournament we won our first 3 matches, securing our position in the semi-finals, as the tournament moved from the Portland Tennis Center to MT. Hood Community College. When Mark and I started driving toward Gresham we each assumed the other know how to find Mt. Hood Community College. That assumption was incorrect. We showed up in a panic a half hour late, 2 minutes from being defaulted and not allowed a warm-up. Our opponents? The same Bonime brothers from Lincoln. They got the best of us again and went on to be the state of Oregon champions in 1976. But Mark and I had every right to be proud. We had a good run, and I am so grateful to this day Mark gave up his own good chances in singles so we could play together. I think it brought us closer for the rest of our lives.

Things came full circle a few years ago when Mark and Falco were in the front row to see our son Wilson win the Vancouver high school championship in singles. How cool it was to share that moment with my doubles partner.

After graduation Mark and I went our separate ways. I went to school in California and Mark enrolled at OSU in biology. Because Mark knew more than most of his professors, he dropped out to do a walk-about of the planet, and to share his knowledge with tour customers from all walks of life. He and I completely lost contact for over 15 years.

What happened next might only happen to doubles partners. I was flying on business to San Francisco. Halfway through the flight I was just sitting there gazing at all the seats in front of me on the plane. The back of one of those anonymous heads caught my attention. But why? After pondering a few minutes, I thought I just might be looking at the back of my doubles partner's head, the same one I had probably pegged with a few errant serves many years before. The head was higher than all the other heads in front of me, and it had long blond hair. Could it be? I waited until we landed to find out and tracked that head down in the jetway. "Mark, is that you?" It actually was.

Mark and I stayed close friends ever since. He kind of adopted our boys and us as his own local family, and we in turn adopted him. We travelled together to Kenya, Utah, and all over Oregon. Our boys know him as marksmith, 1-word (to differentiate him from other "Marks" that the boys knew). Still to this day. And wherever we went we would bring, or find, tennis rackets and tennis courts. Special memories include the court in Fossil Oregon where a dozen bald eagles were soaring overhead, and of course the clay court at Hotel Boulevard in Nairobi (More to come on that later!). And after 50 years of tennis together, it never mattered who won, we were just looking for the perfect shot. Didn't matter if he hit it or I hit it.

So who was Mark Smith??

He was an encyclopedia of natural knowledge. His own personal Google. He was more fluent in BIRD language than English. Mark could identify every bird chirping and what they were gossiping about, too.

He was thorough, intense, committed, loving, caring and also a tyrant at times because he was such a perfectionist, ESPECIALLY with relatives.

He was an adventurer. He was a teacher, and an especially adept teacher of kids. Mark was a precise and colorful writer. An athlete among athletes. He was kind. He was generous. And a tight wad to himself. A Robin Hood who took from the landlord and the IRS and gave to the needy. Mark had unlimited curiosity. He was an aspiring father and a loyal yet sometimes aggravating brother. He loved challenges, and figuring out new ways to solve problems, something that helped him survive ALS for as long as he did. And don't forget, Mark Smith was as courageous as they come.

About 15 years ago after no contact for 9 months or so, I got a call from Mark. He said, "Oh by the way my aorta burst, I passed out in tub, crawled to phone, spent awhile in the hospital, but I'm feeling fine."

About 5 years ago when we played tennis his left side began bothering him. Over the next few years things got progressively worse, and when his dominant right side began shutting down, he became for the most part confined to his Olympic Park apartments, still trying to do eco tours with the help and

kindness of others. Our last trip together was this May to French Glen and Summer Lake, and he took another with brother Bob that month as well.

Mark became more and more dependent on others; how very difficult that must have been for someone who had such a congenital IN-dependent streak. He was too strong-willed to complain. Just matter of fact.

Mark knew well the order of ALS progression. First one side of the body, then the other gives out. Then the voice starts to disappear, saliva output becomes severe. Finally choking to death becomes a concern when the chest muscles become too weak to spit out the mucus.

He fought SO hard. He was always doing exercises to maintain whatever muscle tone that remained. He ate tons of vegetables and only healthy foods (except when I'd bring him a cheeseburger or taco !). He took a daily overdose of vitamin supplements including Tru Niagen. Tru Niagen was supposed to promote cell health and longevity, and somehow Mark convinced the Tru Niagen company to send him an unlimited supply of their little blue bottles. The recommended dose was 2 a day. I think he took 10 times that. Maybe Mark was onto something because his hair turned from gray back to brown. But good for him, even if the pills were placebos, they were HOPE in a bottle. When you are confined to a bed and can't move, hope is in short supply.

Controlling his environment became so hard, McGyvering everything, feeding fish with a back scratcher, tuning the TV with tin foil and drinking by flipping a plastic milk jug upside down with 2 fingers on his right hand. It must have been so frustrating...unlike us, he couldn't in the end get up to fix a problem. He couldn't even make a phone call or send a text without help. He survived 116-degree heat without an air conditioner, but he couldn't remain in his apartment any longer without daily help. So Mark moved to a senior care facility several months ago.

There is no facility that specializes in ALS, but there should be.

Mark NEVER complained. Not once. And he never quit fighting. He would even fight with his caregivers and nurses. Their job was to manage him and his physical challenges. Mark, however, saw it as his job to manage them. Sometimes to the point of tears. Some of the caretakers would call ME to complain. But you know what, Mark was right. To survive he needed meds, food, suction, cleaning and body adjustments at exact times. He had to train every new person on his care team. After a few challenging days with Mark, the best caregivers came to understand Mark, empathize with him, and become his friend. They would come to recognize his intelligence, the severity of his predicaments, and the need to do things his way. It was quite something to watch these caregivers, who were initially so frustrated, eventually respect and even love, Mark.

A month ago, the only part of Mark's body that functioned was one finger on his right side. He could push, barely, the button that controlled his bed and the TV remote. His case was simply overwhelming to the staff at his care facility.

On August 17 he wrote me this text, edited for brevity:

Hello Richard, just wanted you to know I go into hospice tomorrow and die in 4 weeks. This is very painful now and a bit of morphine will do me good. Going into another care facility they will not be able

to handle me... I can see that I am too complicated. The pain is not worth it and I am ready to die. Love, Mark.

We helped move him to the Ray Hickey Hospice House that is operated by PeaceHealth where Patty serves on their foundation board. I told Mark that this was the best facility in Clark County for him and his situation. With the input of their expertise, he could decide for himself whether to move yet again to another care facility, or instead end his life there.

My last time with Mark was a Sunday. We were intermittently watching the finals of the Cincinnati tennis tournament, Djokovic vs. Alcaraz, marveling at their awesome shot-making. Mark would take any break in the tennis action to add to the list of things he wanted me to do for him that day. My final tasks were going back to his last care facility to find his medical boots, source some rigid straws and smuggle in some illegal medicines and vitamins. All in a days work !

When I left him to attend a family funeral in Wisconsin, it seemed that Mark still had the will to press on with his struggle and find some purpose in another 6 months of life.

I was in the Chicago airport when I got the call from Beth, the hospice nurse, informing me that my doubles partner was gone. When she arrived that morning Mark was especially pale and was spitting up blood. She told Mark that kind of event was usually terminal. She said Mark didn't want to bother anyone, he just wanted to be placed on his side for his final minutes. After being on his back for so long, that must have felt like a luxury. Beth stayed with him until his last breath.

Mark was very aware of his impending fate. He took on ALS as a challenge not to overcome, but to work around. He always loved a challenge. Mark was grateful for any help he received to the point of tears. Grateful to many of you here today, but especially to Nakeeta and Katie, his favorite caregivers, personal assistants and confidants.

It has been an honor for me to be Mark's friend. We had an understanding: He could give me shit and I could give him shit, with laughter and no ruffling of feathers. I'd call that a well-balanced relationship ! I always learned something from every interaction with Mark; I always looked forward to coming back for more.

Your father loved you Falco, but he didn't know how to show it often enough. He was so excited to bring you to Africa with us, and so excited again when he was able to bring you to America to become a citizen. All he wanted was for you to receive a good education, find a good job and otherwise just be PERFECT all the time. That last part was too difficult for both of you. Please remember that he was on your side; he just wanted to help you in any way he could, even if it was difficult to hear.

Bob he loved you too, and talked frequently of trips with you and the beautiful property you share with Sondra in California that attracts so many birds and other creatures. And Sondra, Mark was fond of bragging that Bob landed himself a hotshot Stanford-trained lawyer as a wife. Mark wouldn't show that love very often, but it was there. I heard it many times with my own ears.

We all had our tipping points with Marksmith, you know, when you can't take 1 more suggestion, or maybe he wanted you in the van by 8, but you wanted to be in the van at 830 after a little coffee. There were times when he could really piss a person off. But we were always learning because Mark wanted to provide you the best possible experience on his tours. Mark's schedule was really nature's schedule –

not yours. If you think about it, the teachers you remember later in life are the same ones who pushed you beyond what you thought you could do, who pissed you off initially and for whom you are so grateful years later. We will ALL remember Mark Smith.

There is a term for people who behave like this: It's called a DUTCH UNCLE. Or in Mark's case, DUTCH FATHER, Or DUTCH BROTHER, and yes, DUTCH friend. There is NO DOUBT that Mark was born in Holland!

And Mark, as for me, I can't thank you enough for all the indelible memories you have made possible for Patty, me and our boys. You are just as unforgettable... as the adventures you created for us.

Finally, one of my fondest hopes was to play competitive doubles again with Mark as my partner. ALS cost us that opportunity. From now on, Mark, I'll be playing for the both of us.

And Mark, if you are paying attention, I would like to make a court reservation for us whenever I graduate; I am counting on you to be my doubles partner, and tour guide, ALL OVER AGAIN. I wouldn't want it any other way.

God speed, Marksmith. WHAT A LIFE !!

By Richard Keller

CLOSING THOUGHTS:

Thanks very much for coming out to support Mark. His was, beyond any doubt, a life well-lived. How wonderful that all of us in this room were able to witness that amazing life, alongside him.