

He was a rascal  
By Jesse Robison

Retired Pocatello City Attorney Kirk Bybee and I began playing poker with friends during law school. Our poker game has continued for over 43 years. We began practicing law in Pocatello, where I first met Mark Hiedeman 36 years ago at one of our games. Mark made an immediate impact with his quick wit and humor.

We had played for several hours during that first game when Mark started telling us about his military service in Viet Nam. He claimed to have been camouflaged in a field when an enemy patrol approached during a downpour. Mark said it would have been suicidal to open fire given the enemy's superior numbers. We listened raptly as he said a Viet Cong soldier stepped upon his hand while sloshing through muddy water. Our group was spellbound when Kelly Kumm exclaimed, "WAIT A MINUTE, you were in the Navy!"

Without batting an eye, Mark responded, "Whoops. Thanks for reminding me. I saw Platoon with Charlie Sheen, and I get things so confused." Before Kelly called B.S., Mark had us eating out of his supposedly flattened hand. We all laughed heartily, and I instantly liked the guy's moxie. Little did I realize then that he would become my dearest male friend, someone I could always count upon.

I'm a lucky man. I have a close circle of male and female friends that I treasure, and Mark has been the bullseye in that circle. He told his girlfriend I was his best friend. I don't know why he felt that way, but it is an honor because so many mutual friends considered him their best friend. Boys supposedly don't cry, but many men have told me they have cried a number of times over the loss of our friend.

Mark gave countless people a helping hand, and he did so without judgment. He lent money to anyone who needed it, and if you haven't paid him back, please see that it gets to his children.

We are all unique, but Mark brought a special energy to life's table. If you dealt with him, you know what I am talking about. He was cocky, but he was also humble. Sheriff Manu said it well speaking of his sniper like ability with words. Mark was quick on his feet, and if you decided to engage in a verbal jest you best come prepared. All of his close friends wanted to crack his noggin in verbal frustration on numerous occasions.

It would annoy Mark that I am writing something laudatory about him. He didn't even want people to acknowledge his birthdays. He said to me, "Big deal, my parents had sex. How does that make me special?" I sort of saw his point because I had assumed he was created during the "Big Bang" (what else could explain his nuclear energy?).

I have been overwhelmed by the sadness in people who have contacted me expressing their dismay at his death on October 28th. They all tell me they feel a terrible emptiness at his passing; a void that can't be filled. Just watching him sing Mac the Knife during a karaoke performance was a treat — he could have been a night club singer with his beautiful voice.

Don't get me wrong though, Mark wasn't an easy energy. He was cantankerous and enjoyed injecting competition into everything. We played golf for quarters, but you would think we were dropping thousands of dollars on the golf course given our, at times, churlish, Mark-fueled behavior.

All activities were played at a more intense level when Mark was around — his charismatic juice upped the ante. He loved making goofy bets with his employees when he ran the Prosecutor's Office and pulling practical jokes. Some of us were scheming to prank him back before he became ill. As usual, he one-upped us with his sudden departure.

Mark began as a Deputy Prosecutor in 1985, and he was elected Prosecutor five times starting in 1992. There is irony in his having become a career prosecutor. Mark had a wildness in him as a young man, and he was given the option of joining the military in lieu of spending time cooling his heels in a jail cell to contemplate the error of his ways; he chose wisely.

Attorneys that he mentored have gone on to have professional success as prosecutors, including one who became a judge.

Like his Viet Nam tale, you never could quite believe what Mark was saying — he liked it that way. From the stories I heard, he should have died multiple times before he attended law school. His colorful background gave him an empathy for those who crossed the criminal line. Mark held them accountable, but he also realized humans make mistakes and deserve chances at redemption.

Five years ago Mark told me that when he was in the Navy he swam out to sea and rescued a drowning woman. My response was, "Right, I'm not buying another outlandish story amigo." A week later my mailbox held a copy of the Honolulu newspaper story lauding Mark for having rescued that drowning woman. I shook my head and laughed while reading the description of his heroism. If I ever found myself in a foxhole, I would have wanted Mark covering my back.

Mark's crazy streak from youth never really left him. We were golfing at Blackfoot a few years ago on a hot day, and we came upon an impenetrable field of waist high stinging nettles and thistles. I jokingly said, "I'll give you ten dollars if you run through those thistles." Without hesitation and wearing shorts, he took off running through 100 feet of those hellish plants, and then seemed surprised that he was uncomfortable for the rest of the round. I would rather have walked on hot coals, but as Forest's mother would say in both instances, "Stupid is as..."

I loved Mark, but I never wanted to be him; I wouldn't look good sporting a gold tooth. However, I was jealous of his immediate family. His four children and passel of grandchildren are strikingly beautiful, handsome and engaging. They gathered frequently at his home for family functions and he loved those "home invasions," although he told me he needed serious recuperation time after they departed.

Mark's grandchildren were well-mannered and they adored their grandfather. He liked sending them \$1,000 in ten 100 dollar bills when they graduated from high school. I suggested it might be safer to send checks, and he responded, "Think how much fun that must be when they open the mail and all those bills spill out."

Family and friends were stunned and saddened at Mark's sudden departure. Being a center person, he was the kind of glue that holds people together, and some colorful bonding has left our lives.

I was recently traveling in Arizona and knew that Mark was critically ill. Loving rocks, I visited a fossil shop which had this gorgeous stone they called "rock-glass" from Hot Springs, Arkansas. I bought Mark's body weight in that multi-colored rock-glass to enhance my stone garden. Mark was a metaphor rock for many of us, but he was also colorful with sharp edges.

Some may say that Mark lived hard which brought him to an early end. There may be some truth to that as I shared some of that hard living with him, but, he lived life large and enjoyed every minute of the journey.

I played cupid (holding my breath as one should) in introducing Mark to Cynthia Billmeyer, his girlfriend for the past seven years. She kept him young and he enjoyed the activities and the social enrichment Cynthia brought into his life.

Mark often commented that you could buy golf and skiing passes for under \$1,000 in Pocatello providing year round entertainment. There were days last year where he skied in the morning, golfed in the afternoon, and then had dinner with Cynthia. He would say, "can it really get much better?"

Mark's final run for Prosecutor was hard fought and he was unfairly smeared in that campaign. We were celebrating at Mark's house when he was called to the election headquarters because he had won. Needing to make an acceptance speech, a friend drove him to the election center.

We all cringed when Mark was interviewed because it was obvious he had been drinking. I still muse about how he took the microphone and thanked the voters. Basically he slurred, "I want people to know I ain't no rascal."

His claim of not being a rascal was another tall Mark tale. He was absolutely a rascal, and I loved him dearly as did so many others for that trait, but also because he enriched our lives. Mark was no saint (saints can be boring), and he made his share of mistakes like we all do, but at the end of the day there was an integrity to Mark that offended him whenever his honesty was questioned.

Mark was a huge solid for his family and friends and nothing will ever feel the same without his Big Bang energy. He's not gone anywhere except deeper into our hearts, and until my last breath, I will cherish and honor my ride with Mark Hiedeman. He was a rascal, but he was one of the most genuine people I have ever known and he was our rascal. Rest in peace, brother.