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The Many Rick's

I was so nervous to email Rick. Even though he's been part of my life since sixth grade, I didn't know him beyond our casual small talk. Rick is an old man from the rink who always skated laps, every Tuesday and Thursday at 11:30a.m. Every week I'd go there to practice for figure skating lessons around this older man who always kept his head down and gave quick smiles to the other old men of the rink.

Rick responded to my email a day or two later and we decided on coffee at Sooke's famous diner; Mom's Cafe. It's a strange feeling waiting on a role model who doesn't know they're a special role model; he was the reason I considered journalism. I had this image in my head of the role model I didn't really know: wise, observant and a family man who stayed connected with everyone in the community. He is all of those things but in a less romanticized way than I imagined.

"I thought long and hard about what I wanted to tell you, and I don't tell everyone about my life," Rick said as we sat down with our coffees. He's sweet in a funny way; he got the coffee because he "remembered what it's like on a college budget," that's just the kind of guy he is.

Catholic Rick

“I grew up in Montreal, very Catholic until about 13 or 14.” Rick said, starting the looping roadmap of his life story. He wanted to be a priest as a kid until he was assaulted by a brother from the Sacred Hearts. That ended the dreams of priesthood.

My jaw must have been on the warm coffeeshop floor when he told me that he considered being a priest. In my mind, Rick wasn't someone who would completely commit to any religion, much less want to preach for one. It might have been the way I viewed him on the ice, or in the diner where I served as a teen, always with his head down deep in thought. But he was a kid so the way his journey went in life could be partially from his Catholic childhood.

Hippie Rick

“I graduated high school in 1967 and made a clean break for it out of Montreal with my two best friends. We were weekend hippies, you know, acid, mescaline and mushrooms on the weekends kind of thing. But after Woodstock I really dived into the hippy lifestyle and moved in with six other guys into a hippy dippy house. Shortly after we moved to Wildwood New Jersey and worked as carnies on the boardwalk; the whole step up, take a spin and win a prize type of thing. My hair wasn't grey back then and hung long on my chest back then. *Love you till labour day* was our motto while working there 7 days a week, 10 - 12 hour shifts for 5 months of the year. If I could be candid, I had a sign from the pier over my bed saying ‘This ride is six tickets’, ” Rick said chuckling. That was back in the early 70's.

It's funny thinking of Rick as a hippy, living in a house covered in band posters and tables with Bob Marley rolling trays with six other young men. Much less a poster that sarcastic above his

bed in his 20's. In my mind Rick was someone who would've studied as hard as he could in some rundown affordable dorm or maybe with one roommate. I had always seen him in the *Sooke News Mirror* at his desk typing away or going from the rink from one interview to another. I knew him as a hard worker, and always assumed he'd been like that from the start.

Many Jobs Rick

“We moved out to B.C in 74' with the intention of saving up for a farm or a ski county on the Eastern townships. Back then loggers in B.C were paid better than Montreal so my friends and I decided we'd try logging for a couple years for the money. Three days into my logging career I fell 50 ft from a tree and broke my arm badly. Back then I didn't know what workers compensation was, so I collected the compensation and didn't work for five months. I did a lot of jobs through the years; trucking, installing gutters, and cooking. I was no good with tools, but that didn't stop me.”

As he was telling about his jobs it was interesting that writing wasn't something more meaningful throughout his life. I thought that he was always a writer in some way, but the closest he came to writing in his younger years was at an industrial steel company making business letters.

Parenthood Rick

“With my long hair I was a cook at Royal Roads Military College in my 30’s. During that job I met my first wife and had a kid, who was planned by the way. I wasn’t ready but she wanted a baby right away. A couple years went by and pot moved to freebasing cocaine, then everything went downhill. I lost my son and wife, then I decided that I had to get clean to see my son again. No rehab, it was internal. I can’t do this, it’ll kill me and I’ll never see Chris again. I’ve got to be a better dad for Chris.” That’s what Rick said made him recover.

Rick’s journey through these different places in his life made me appreciate his resilience even more. Such a four dimensional character that I never took the proper time to question *how* he’s gotten to his current self.

Journalism School Rick

“Now, this was back in 92’ when I started journalism school and at that time I didn’t know how to use a computer. The professor asked *has anyone ever used a computer*, and I’m the only person in class who raised their hand in a room of mostly 20 year olds.

I was finishing up at 42, starving for two years on a college budget and then my buddy wanted to set me up on a blind date. I said no at first and then he mentioned going out for beers for her birthday.

I’m like, you’ve been my friend for 15 years. It’s my birthday too, asshole,” Rick said, starting the love story of “destiny” between him and his wife Joan.

The Rick I imagined started college way before his forties and would have been settled by then. From the way I'd seen him typing on his laptop at the news office, I was *convinced* he was born with a laptop in his hands with how fast he wrote.

Rick With Joan

"I went to get a birthday card from Shoppers dug mart for a total stranger, or "perfect stranger". Found a card with a grey haired old lady teaching a sex ed class to like 10 year olds, and one kid has his hand raised asking 'does pubic hair turn grey'. I wanted to let her know what she was getting into," he said as we sat with our coffees chuckling.

"When I gave her the card she looked at it, gave me her number and we started dating. As soon as a reporter job was open though, I told her I was moving and one did in Medicine Hat. I got accepted and she started crying. Safe to say, I didn't leave for that job and stayed with her."

From everything he told me before, I was baffled he didn't take the job. The Rick I imagined was determined towards his goals, and he prioritized love? Instead of writing at the time, he took a cooking job at Pearson College while applying to freelance writing positions.

Sooke Rick

"Eventually Joan and I moved down to Sooke from Vancouver. Then I applied to the *Goldstream Gazette* and all they had at the time was minimum wage, council coverage. So I took that and listened to 40 people say the same thing over and over again. The editor called me from the *Gazette* saying "My reporter walked out, are you interested?" I was, so I had two weeks to whip up a couple stories with zero typing skills and if my typing didn't improve in those weeks I

didn't get the job. The decision was made on a funny day with no heads up. So the 30 year anniversary for the *Gazette* was the next day, so like any reasonable person I got roaring drunk the night before. Come to find out, we needed another column on the day that paper was to be published. So, hungover, I wrote something for him, he liked that it fit the paper space and didn't read it. "We've been going for 14 hours, he says. Wow, I'll take you for a beer. And I said, that's the last thing I want to do. We went to Darcy's pub and he told me I got the job. Later I wrote for a few of Black Press Media's community papers, Kevin from Sooke News Mirror offered me a part time job with the paper and that's where I am now."

So many things I imagined about him were not what I imagined, but in a way that made me relate to him better. On top of all of the qualities I imagined, he's an older man with grey scraggly hair. The smell of cigarettes is like cologne on his jacket and a quirky, at times crude, humored guy of experience. It's funny to think that everyone has ideas of what a person they know can be wildly different from the actual person. Maybe everyone creates their own ideas of a person, even if they don't fully know them.

Now he has an adorable grandson, is retired at 75, is married to Joan this year for 33 years and is as quirky as ever.

"You can stop the recording now," said Rick.

“Not yet. Where did you get that saying that good things happen to good people? You used to tell me that when I was skating or working at the diner a few times and it meant so much to me,” I asked him.

He was surprised I thought so highly of him or that I remembered that saying. Turns out he heard that as a young adult from a friend he smoked weed while telling him that *sarcastically*.

Turns out what I imagined Rick was wasn't entirely true. The real Rick is better.

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