

## Safety, Security, Love, Purpose A Meditation in Memory of Mark Eikland

Norman Easton

I first met Mark around 1994. I had met and done some work with his father, Charlie Sr., learning about the history of the borderlands. Charlie recommended I look up his son Mark, who was working with Kluane National Park at the time. And so we met and quickly became friends. As most of you know, he was an easy person to like, quick with a smile and laughter, witty and interesting in conversation, well-read and curious about all things, kind and gentle, a good listener.

We talked about his job with the park, which among other things required him to monitor and collect animal scat along the trails. He was conflicted about this. A part of him told himself not to do it, it was disrespectful and he found it hard to sleep in the cabin for fear someone was going to burst in and say “what are you doing with my stuff—and then bite my face. But there is a science and a reason that I understand why it is important to track the scat in the park—it allows us to monitor their health and keep visitors safe, so it’s good that I’m doing it because I know the country – but, I gotta say, I don’t want my face bit.”

Now, some of you know exactly what I’m talking about, and some of you know something of what I am talking about, and all of you can understand a metaphor without the details. Our friend Mark lived a life betwixt and between his Upper Tanana *Dineh* heritage and the modernity of the imported Western European Capitalism and Nation State that encapsulated him, that encapsulates all of us. And, like all of us, in our own ways, Mark struggled to live with that fact.

And what is it we struggle for? I think it is simple in the end. We seek safety, security, love, and purpose. At least that is what Mark and I had narrowed it down to.

Mark lived with me in Whitehorse for a while during his comings and goings to law school. He brought along a paisley green couch, already a little worse for wear. I didn't have a couch and we agreed it was a cool couch—in a retrograde stylish way—and it was undeniably comfortable to lie into and talk the evenings away about the state of the world, music, our fears and regrets, hopes and dreams.

One of our dreams was that Mark get a law degree. The Law, we agreed, was the soft belly of colonialism. Mastery of the Law was the means towards equality, compensation, justice. The Law turns the hypocrisy of the State back on itself. The Law forces the State to live up to its principles of equality and fairness for all citizens. He realized the Law was a tool by which he might redress, and perhaps contribute to heal, the afflictions of his people.

His people. Who were his people? His mother, Inga, an immigrant from Germany, his father, Charlie Sr., himself the son of an Upper Tanana *Dineh* matron and a Norwegian gold rush itinerant. Mark himself lived in Burwash, Whitehorse, Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Kamloops, travelled to his ancestral homes in Scandinavia, Germany, and the Yukon-Alaska borderlands. Given his cosmopolitan, dare I say, globalized origins and orientation, Mark struggled with a fundamental existential question: Who *am* I? Who are my people? Where do I belong? Where can I find safety, security, love, and purpose?

This is the challenge of all our lives; in our hearts we know this. Some of you here, like me, were privileged to struggle over this question with Mark, discuss the pros and cons, the this, and that, and tell each other “well, at least with me you are safe, secured, loved,” allowing us to get out into the world with purpose.

And he did. Despite the many challenges, Mark passed the bar, entered the echelon of influence that lawyers have, and proceeded to change the world with argument, precedent, logic, and a passion for justice.

Mark and I were fellow travellers, hounded by the black dogs of our nights. Our recognition of ourselves in each other in this regard allowed us to establish a relationship of safety, security, love, and purpose. We could not heal the other's wounds, the source of our depressions—that job remains each to ourselves alone—but we could acknowledge them, accept them as real, care for each other as we could, and encourage each other to

strive forward towards a sense of purpose and meaning-fullness. I know that Mark's passion and pursuit of justice through the Law was based in some sense that if he could bring solace to the afflicted than perhaps solace would come to him. And I know that he found that solace in the company of many of you here as well, because he told me so.

All of us, to greater and lesser degrees, are fellow travellers. We all have suffered; we all have pursued safety, security, love, and purpose through our lives. And here's the good news—that pursuit, the struggle, that tenacity, is what allows us to bring, in fits and starts, here and there, goodness to this world.

Anyway, I've said enough. It's time to move on—isn't that what we are always advised after a loss? Move on? Get over it?

Which brings me back to that couch.

It's near twenty years now that the couch crouched its way into my house. It has suffered during the intervening years and springs are broke, it sags here and there, and by most accounts I should replace it; indeed the last few times Mark visited he thought so too—I should buy a new couch, upgrade, move on, he said. And yet I haven't. I think it is because despite its many flaws that everyone can see and I can't deny, when I sit on that couch, lie back into its long history of embracing us, I feel safe, secure, recall Mark's love for me, and discover purpose for my life when I awake. Some things, it seems, are worth holding on to.

Thanks for allowing me to share these thoughts with you. Hold on to your own good memories of Mark and, as you can, in your own ways, extend to each other safety, security, love, and purpose.

Blessings on you all. *Tsin'ii Choh*

Norman Easton – *Ts'oogot Gaiy*  
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