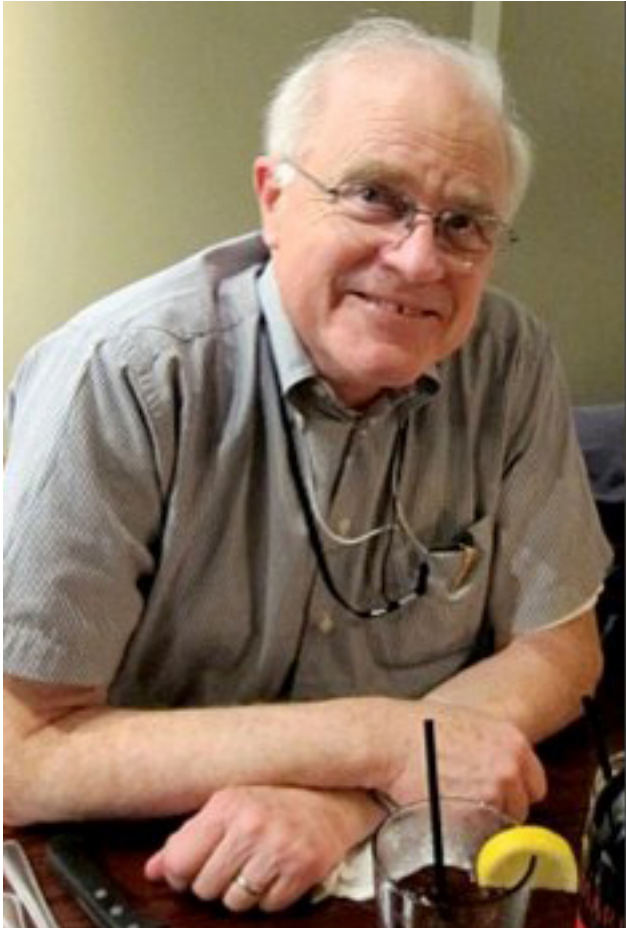


Leo Hickey Eulogy

By Geoffrey Hickey



My father traveled in time. He broke open the Earth with a small hammer, turned its stony pages and read its story. It was the story of life, baroque, branching; surrounded by eddies, loops, and recapitulations. Time flowed through it, eroding and depositing, erasing and rebuilding. It was an unexpectedly grand story, considering the way it was left carelessly lying around the planet.

Like all readers, he was transported to places non-readers cannot see. He stood on the packed dust of the desert and looked out on an ancient forest, teeming with life; on the ocean that preceded it; on the desert again before that. He did this often enough that it became effortless, almost automatic. He could always stand in a garden, no matter where he went.

Montana, Panama, the Florida Keys, the Dreaming Arctic. Australia, Czechoslovakia, Upstate New York. So many places.

He brought back surprising things. Not just what you would expect: some fossils, a sunburn, and a good story. Somehow he also found out there a whole life, with friends, family, philosophy, scholarship, and most strangely of all, joy. He found all of us, and brought us together. He gave us glimpses of what had gone before, of what was possible. Of great beasts striding through the canopies of long-vanished forests. Of asteroids not crashing, and then crashing, into the planet and putting an end to all that striding. Of seas rising and falling.

Interlude I:

It is 1982. I am twelve, my father is forty-two. We are camped outside an abandoned cabin between rolling hills in Wyoming. The skeleton of a Model A Ford rises from the grasses nearby, next to the remains of a wire fence. The sun sets; the light turns golden-red. A herd of wild horses crests the nearest hill, flowing like the wind through the grass. I walk out among them.

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There is no escaping our origins; we carry them with us no matter how far we travel. Some losses are irretrievable. The death of his mother when he was very young, and the disintegration of his father's household that followed, was the stone that Leo could never quite put down. He never stopped reminding his children, though we knew it well, how lucky we were. It was a cruel irony that his own success made him an outsider to the stable family he had built; he was the only one of us who grew up without a mother; the only one whose father failed him.

But it is the way of things that loss is also a source of strength. Having lost his parents at such a young age, he was forced to become his own fiercest defender, and to chart his own course through life. He gained a strength of will, or perhaps a willful stubbornness, that never left him.

And here was also the wellspring of one of the gifts he gave most freely, to his family, his students, his friends. He taught us all to chart our own course, not to follow the well-trodden path. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

Interlude II:

It is Tax Day, sometime in the late 1980s, and I am riding in my father's car to the New Haven Post office to mail his tax forms on the last possible day. I notice a police car in the lot. On the side it says, "Postal Police". I wonder aloud, "What do the postal police *do*?" My father, ever wise in these matters, answers:

"They stamp out crime."

III

He was a curator not just of natural history. When his sons had moved out of his house he wrapped and labeled the artifacts of our childhoods, packing them into boxes and storing them away. I think of him now in those lonely moments, surrounded by these reminders that for us, time moves only forward; that our yesterdays can only be remembered, never relived. He saved everything.

In the river of time, not even the stones endure. What hope have we? As his own time went by his light narrowed, burning bright still in the center but not so wide. He focused; he covered less ground. In

1987, the wine he made won first prize in the New Haven Italian Festival. In the following couple of years, he brewed beer. It was a high water mark, and he receded from it, though all three of his sons took it up in later years.

He stopped taking photographs. He stopped going west for field seasons. He lost Jasmine, his Siberian

Husky.

But still where he shone his light, the music played. The Cretaceous Garden, his last exhibit, lit up the imaginations of those who built it, and through them, the visitors who walk alongside a dinosaur, through a garden brought forward in time to the present.

Interlude III

Once upon a time, a tree fell in the woods behind our house, and began to bloom. Slime molds grew upon it. Insects colonized it. Squirrels raced across its top. Gradually it fell to the forest floor and disappeared.

He has gone now, into the West. We will see him no more.