

News Release

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A Musician, a Community, a Fight for Life

-- By Pat Case

It was no April Fools' Day joke when on April 1, 2009 the doctor told Rick Hulett that he had a rare form of cancer that was "uniformly fatal."

This was certainly not what Rick was expecting to hear. He had only gone to the doctor for what he thought was some sort of chronic indigestion. How could this have happened so suddenly...without any prior clue? Could it be real?

But the doctor didn't mince words. He told Rick that he had a rare form of appendix cancer, and that the tumors had already spread throughout his abdomen. He also gave Rick the somber prediction that chemotherapy would have less than a 10% chance of having any effect.

Stunned and still in a daze, Rick was advised of his two bleak options. He could elect hospice care, and when the time came, he could exercise his rights under the Oregon Right to Die Law... if that was what he wanted.

But he was also offered a small glimmer of hope. The doctor said he knew of a surgery and a form of post-surgical treatment that some people had tried, but he cautioned Rick about it. He said that it was still very experimental, and so far as he knew, if the surgery were successful, it might only give Rick two more years of life at the most.

At first, Rick dismissed the option. All he really wanted to do was to live as well as he could for however long he had left. Surgery, he thought, would only make him and his family miserable, and offered very little hope.

Plus, Rick knew about hospice care. He worked part time for Hospice of the Gorge as their network technician. He knew the kind of care they provided, and he knew it was the best care that anyone could hope to receive. He wasn't afraid.

"Sure, I cried at first...and I felt really sorry for myself. Who wouldn't? But then I realized that feeling sorry for myself wasn't going to do me or anyone else any good, so I decided to get on with living.

"For a while I thought about going someplace...about traveling. I always liked to travel, and there are a lot of places and things in this world that I really wanted to see.

"But then I realized that I already had it all. I love living in Hood River, I love my family, and I love playing music. I realized that I've been living the life I've wanted to live right along, so I thought, why change now? So I just decided to keep doing more of the same...and to play as much music as I could.

"Actually, I think that music is in my blood. I just can't ever seem to get enough of it. I've been playing since I was a kid...and it probably has something to do with being born and raised in Lubbock Texas, and frequent visits to Austin, the singer / songwriter capital of the world."

"I tried to quit for a while...at one point it was like a disease taking over my life...but I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't quit!"

The Pines Provides a Supportive Network

Now armed with his decision to play music for the love of it, Rick started to play at The Pines Tasting Room in Hood River, with his best friend of 17 years, Kerry Williams. Kerry had what started out to be a solo gig there every Thursday evening. But soon after he started playing, other musicians just started showing up to play with him.

"It turned into a real phenomenon. As a musician, it reminds me of the Buena Vista Social Club, which Ry Cooder organized in Cuba. They were a bunch of independent jazz musicians—all great musicians in their own right—who came together from time to time to play with one another just for the fun of it. Well, we've got a kind of social club going on here at The Pines, only I call it the 'Bohemian Social Club'."

Kerry's wife, Cindy William's, adds: "It's really an amazing thing. Musicians and their wives or husbands all come along, as much to socialize with one another as to listen to the music. It seems like family...it's a place where people can connect with other people. And you don't need to be a musician. Anyone can come. You just need to love music, want to have a good time, and want to feel like you're part of a real community."

Linda Wright, part owner of The Pines Tasting room agrees.

"We never planned to have so much space, and we really struggled with what to do with it when we ended up having to take it over. But we always had a dream of creating a place where people could come and mingle, forget their cares, and just feel good about things. For us it's

always been more about building community, than about building a business. We need to make money, of course, but we feel that the money will follow in its own time.”

Linda adds: “And since Rick started playing here with Kerry, there’s been an amazing outpouring of love. What Rick has taught me is that you don’t need to wait to do things for a special day...or hold off for that special moment. Everyday can be that special moment.

“We’re so sad about Rick, but we’re so lucky at the same time...to have him here with us, sharing his love of music, and of life.”

Rick says he’s never had so much fun. “One night, there were 19 people there, all jamming together. We had a bunch of guitars, a bass, several horns, a harmonica, and some amazing singers. We even had musicians showing up that night from Portland!

“It’s great fun, but at the same time, when you’ve got that many people playing together who may have never even played together before, it’s like you’re on the verge of a train wreck at every moment.”

Despite his years as a musician, Rick still feels he needs to concentrate on what he’s doing, especially when there are that many people involved.

“Playing music the way I like play, has a physical part, a mental part, an emotional part, and a spiritual part. I really have to concentrate on getting all of those parts to work together in order to play well...and I love it! For me, it sometimes means tuning the audience out. I love the audience because they give you the energy and the encouragement to play, but I need to tune them out to be at one with the music and with the other players.”

A Change of Heart

Recently, Rick changed his mind about the surgery. He found a doctor in Washington D.C. who does the kind of procedure and follow-up therapy that was mentioned by his doctor in Hood River. It’s called cytoreduction and hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy.

So far, the doctor in D.C., Dr. Sugarbaker, has worked on 900 people. Of these, 67% are still alive after 10 years.

A Magical Journey

On his website, Rick says it might sound strange, but that he feels like he’s on “some kind of magical journey.”

“I’m simultaneously preparing to die and preparing for war. I’m gathering my resources and training everyday for the battle to come. There is no going back and no giving up. I’ve been changed forever by what’s happened to me and I don’t think the changes are finished and whatever happens I’m going in with my eyes wide open.

“I’ve learned that we should all live as if we’re about to die. I’ve learned that the only way we can help ourselves is to help each other. I’ve learned that I have more friends than anyone could ever expect to have and that that is the most valuable thing in the world.

“I’m still learning.”

Rick says he knows it's still considered "experimental" surgery, but he figures that with those odds, his chances are good. His surgery is scheduled to take place on his birthday, July 9, 2009. Until then, he says he wants to play more music.

And what happens after that?

According to Rick, it's: "More music."

From Lubbock to Bingen

Rick started playing music as a kid growing up in the Austin and Lubbock areas of Texas, and he's been playing music ever since. He came to the Gorge for a windsurfing vacation in 1986, and never went home. He continued playing music with anyone he could play with, and has come to be great friends with musicians throughout the Gorge.

Over the last few years Rick has been playing guitar with Django's Cadillac and The Wasco Brothers, as well as with the Hapa Hillbillies. He's still playing with those groups, as well as with Kerry Williams, and in a variety of other gigs around town. He has also been instrumental in establishing a music recording studio in Bingen, WA, which is open to both seasoned musicians as well as those just starting out.

How You Can Help

Rick's friends are raising money to help his family with their expenses. You can help by buying buy a "Bigfoot" T-Shirt for \$15 or a sticker for \$2.

The Bigfoot T-Shirt has a picture of a Bigfoot and a guitar on one side, and the words "More Music, Less BS on the other." Alternatively, you can choose the more family friendly words "More Music, Bigfoot Style."

Items are available at The Pines Tasting Room on the corner of 2nd and State Street, downtown Hood River, or through Cindy Williams by logging onto <http://www.bigfootupdates.com>.

Special Musical Fundraiser

Django's Cadillac will be performing at The Pines Tasting Room in Hood River on First Friday, July 3rd. Donations are requested to help Rick and his family. Also stop by on Thursday evenings starting at 6, for the Kerry Williams and Friends jam session...where you just might find Rick playing.

Images

NOTE: All images courtesy Datnoff.com. Thumbnails with captions follow.



Kerry Williams, Char Mayer, and Rick Hulett (L to R)



Rick Hulett (left) jamming at the Pines with other musicians



Musicians and audience converge as one

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