



Rich Marshall

October 12, 1947 - September 20, 2024

Award-winning journalist and editor, beloved husband, devoted father, brother, uncle and host father to dozens of foreign exchange students from 15 countries on four continents, Richard “Rich” Ray Marshall died Friday, Sept. 20, 2024 after a long illness. He was 76.

A celebration of Rich’s Life will be held at 11 a.m. Nov.15 in Second Space Theater in Fresno. Rich was born Oct. 12, 1947, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to John and Helen Marshall. He grew up with his younger siblings, James and Carolyn.

Given his long and successful career, you almost would think Rich was born with ink in his blood and a nose for a great story. But he thought he wanted to be a forest ranger until his high school English teacher persuaded him to follow his talents and pointed him toward journalism at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls. He excelled, double majoring in journalism and political science, and was named editor of the college newspaper.

After graduation in 1969, Rich worked as a reporter and editor for the Red Wing (Minn.) Republican Eagle, the Milwaukee Sentinel, the Anchorage Daily News and The Fresno Bee. He retired from The Bee after more than 30 years, having served as sports copy editor, metro copy editor, sports editor, assistant managing editor and senior editor.

He was quickly recruited by California State University, Fresno to be general manager of The Collegian, the student newspaper. He retired last September, after 10 years.

While at The Bee, his reporting teams won many awards for their work. He was proud to have been on the editorial team that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for the coverage of the 6.7 Coalinga earthquake of May 2, 1983. He was on the newsroom management team when The Bee won the first place award for general excellence two years in a row.

It was in the Fresno Bee newsroom, more than 44 years ago, that he met features reporter Gail Miller, the love of his life. On March 13, 1982, they married in Fresno's Evangelical Free Church and Rich became a husband -- and also a father to Gail's 8-year-old son, Scott. Friends saw them as committed, sweet partners who always had each other's back.

"The first word that comes to me when describing Rich is heart," says his widow, Gail Marshall. She also worked decades as a Fresno Bee journalist and editor. "Outwardly, he was a big and burly barrel-chested Midwesterner. He was six feet tall and 225 lbs. when I first met him, I thought he looked like a handsome lumberjack with his bushy beard and flannel shirts."

Gail thought he was "cute" but perhaps a typical jock, since he was taking the position as sports copy editor, so she passed on getting to know him better.

Her interest was piqued when she found out he left a Midwest editing job for a change of scenery in California and overheard him adeptly talking politics. She wasn't disappointed. Rich's lumberjack persona hid a teddy bear of a sentimentalist and a romantic with a sharp wit. "His big heart made him such a great boyfriend and husband," Gail said. "He never forgot an anniversary or

birthday, always gave the sweetest most sentimental gifts."

In the news business, he was cool on deadline, organized, precise and an eagle-eyed editor. Young reporters and interns at The Bee would come to appreciate Rich's kind, calm demeanor when explaining how a story needed to be trimmed or why he was making changes.

He was very intelligent and well informed, loved to play serious games of fantasy football and baseball and kept up with politics. He'd get teary-eyed watching a film, or hearing a touching news story. He never raised his voice at work, but when watching sports or hearing a story that involves injustice, he would roar.

In his private life, Rich was an avid fan of the Green Bay Packers, the Milwaukee Bucks and Milwaukee Brewers. When he moved to Fresno, he adopted the Fresno State Bulldogs, San Francisco Giants and the 49ers. Checking out the sports games on TV was his first order of business each day.

Besides Gail, his life's passion was being Scott's dad and father figure in many forms to the children, teens and young adults who called the Marshall house their second home for months at a time. "First it was the incredible friends of our son through the years, then the transplanted foreign students primarily from AFS-USA who lived in the guest bedrooms and their friends," said Gail. "His nicknames were Host Daddy and Big Daddy, and he wore them proudly on T-shirts."

The Marshall home's hallway is lined with family photos of these students along with a street sign proclaiming it as "Big Daddy Boulevard"; a gift from one of the exchange students. The neighborhood, where he and Gail lived for

42 years, always knew where the students in residence were from that year, as Rich made sure to fly their home country flags out front.

“With the exchange students, he was such a soft touch,” said Gail. “Rich and I come from very affectionate families, but hugging is cultural, so we let them express welcome, thanks etc. however they wanted. Rich was so big and huggable, the students invariably, were hugging him and burying their faces in his big chest.”

Rich saw his role in the family as provider. Not only as a breadwinner, but everything at home. “The standing joke was we would suddenly look around and Rich was missing,” Gail said. “My first question was always, ‘Where's Rich? Did someone say they wanted something?’ If someone mentioned they wanted something, he would quietly slip in the car and get it. This could be a new candy bar being advertised on a TV ad or a calculator for math class.” He attended all their games and performances when his workday allowed.

Rich never ever forgot a birthday or anniversary -- and there were no last-minute gifts or gift cards. But when others tried to return the favor, Rich would shrug and say he had everything he wanted. The challenge was to find something new and different — usually a trip somewhere fun. Gail counts a recent memorable gift to him as a train ride in the mountains near Santa Cruz, a stay at their favorite hotel, the Dream Inn and a weekend at the beach.

Another meaningful gift was a second wedding ring from Gail a few years ago, done in a simpler style than the original, which “he felt had too many diamonds and made him self-conscious.”

Said Gail: “Rich chose one with simple stones and wore it happily until the day he passed on. Now I wear it as a necklace every day.”

Besides his devotion to his global ever-shifting family, Rich also was a big fan of live theater, attending plays and concerts in Berlin, Fresno, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York at every opportunity. He delighted in the local community theater productions, especially the Good Company Players .

When he could, Rich loved to travel. Hawaii was a favorite -- since he honeymooned with Gail on a cruise through the Hawaiian Islands. He made a point to visit some of the places the Marshalls' foreign exchange students called home. A sailor at heart, he took many cruises throughout the Caribbean and both coasts of Mexico. He also saw England, Scotland, Slovakia, Austria, France and Germany.

A man of faith, Rich attended Evangelical Free Church and sang in the choirs at Faith United Methodist Church and Northpointe Community Church in Fresno.

Rich is survived by his wife of 42 years, Gail, mother-in-law Shirley Mook Sargent, sister Carolyn and her husband Lee Eden of Shannon, Ill., and brother James Marshall of Sussex, Wisc. He will be missed by three brothers-in-law and their spouses, Dr. Tom Mook and his partner Ruth Townsend of Fresno, Bob Mook and wife Chris of Clovis, and Steve Sargent and his wife JoAnne of Fresno.

Rich also leaves behind his nieces Elizabeth Sitrick and husband Mike of Lombard, Ill., Dr. Catherine Eden and husband James Breithaupt of Rockford, Ill., Tina Ulam and Samantha Grizz of Fresno, and Donell Lebow and husband Wayne of Coarsegold; and his nephews Charlie Mook of San Diego, Jimmy Mook of Dublin, CA., Brian Sargent of Fresno, and Kevin Sargent of San Diego.

His loving legacy leaves a lasting mark on his godchildren Erin Koht and husband Matt of Rescue, their sons Michael and Bryan, and Corey Taylor and wife Adelina of Clovis, and twin daughters Shiann and Savanna, and his international host children.

Memorial tributes can be sent to AFS-USA to support scholarships for local students' cultural exchanges like those that enriched the Marshalls' home for so many years. Checks can be made out to AFS Inc./Sierra San Joaquin Area Team and mailed c/o Nancy Howard, AT chair, 1016 Stanton Place; Modesto CA 95355. Reference Line: Rich Marshall memorial.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV 15. 11:00 AM (PT)

2nd Space Theatre
928 E. Olive Avenue
Fresno, CA 93728