

There are no accidents. There are no coincidences. There are no mistakes. No, not one. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has had His hand on the paths of our lives, the whole time. Proverbs 17:17 says, in part, that “A friend loves at all times.....” Cory Rhea was one such friend.

# Cory D. Rhea

August 08, 1963–November 14, 2024

Cory and I first met at a sportsmen’s show in Spokane, Washington, about 44 years ago. At the time, he was a teenager, and came by the falconry booth at the show. Over the course of the show, Cory kept coming back to the booth, and chatting with those who were displaying our hawks and falcons for the public. I am not the only one who remembers him saying, over and over, “I’m going to do that!”

In 1987, while living in Renton, WA, I was contacted by Cory, who by then was looking for a falconry sponsor. After meeting with him, I agreed to take him on as my very first falconry apprentice. Little did we know that this would turn into a life-long friendship. The Lord had His hand on the paths of our lives.

Cory was one of those apprentices who was a natural; he didn’t need a lot of help. We spent much time together hawking, trapping, and doing all sorts of things both in and out of falconry. A model apprentice, he caught game with his first hawk, and had no trouble hooding her (not a common thing for apprentices). Cory also became active in both the national and state falconry organizations, serving the Washington Falconers Association as our Southwest Director from 1999–2001, and maintaining his membership in the North American Falconers Association. NAFA director Phil Smith wrote, in 2002, that Cory was an “austringer extraordinaire.” Such true praise!

The many adventures we had together included late-night pigeon harvesting, many, many excursions looking for Goshawk nests in the Olympic mountains, hunting trips with friends, and a number of times, like the one in Amarillo, Texas where Cory was able to save his buddy from potential disaster from unruly rednecks. He was ever the peacemaker.

In 1993, Cory encouraged me to join a dating service. This is how my Wife Janna and I met. We were married in September 1995, with Cory as my Best Man. There are no accidents, no coincidences, no mistakes. At the time of this writing, Janna and I have celebrated nearly 30 years together.



Years later, we had mutual friends, through whom Cory was introduced to Laurie. It wasn’t long before they, too, wed. While Cory still flew birds, and did it better than many, he was also soon to become a dad to his two beautiful children, Lucas and Kendall. All the while, we kept in touch and maintained that friendship. There are no accidents, no coincidences, no mistakes. All of these life events are under the loving hand of Almighty God.

On August 20 2024, Janna and I were able to make the journey from Ellensburg to Edgewood, to visit Cory and the family. Janna brought her Red-tailed Hawk, Nellie; Cory’s eyes lit up, and we had a very nice time. As we departed, a Cooper’s Hawk flew in front of us. We took this as a message from the Lord that all will be according to His will, all subject to His Love. As this part of our journey here on Earth takes the next turn, I am reminded that there is nothing that can separate us from the Love of God, for it is written thus in Romans 8:38-39:

“<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I am thankful to have been a part of Cory’s journey here on this Earth. I am yet more thankful that we will meet again, in that place which Jesus has prepared.



# Eulogy to my best friend Cory Rhea

## By Troy Nicolls

Good afternoon and thank you all for being here.

I'd like to say how honored I am to speak on behalf of such a great man.

I'm Troy Nicolls and I'm a lifelong friend of Cory Rhea's

Cory was born to Dale and Deanna Rhea (Bristow) in Redding, California August 8, 1963. He is survived by his wife Laurie, son Lucas, daughter Kendall, mother Deanna and sisters Kelley and Tracy.

Cory attended Junction elementary in Palo Cedro, CA through 8th grade. He moved to Puyallup Washington in 9th grade but soon after, moved to eastern Washington where he graduated from Deer Park High in 1981.

After high school, he attended Spokane Community College, earning a vocational degree in Hydraulic and Pneumatic Automation.

Cory started his career in hydraulics working for Fluid Air Corporation in Tacoma. A few years later he started his own business, Preferred Hydraulics, where, besides contracting to Boeing, he provided technical design, products, service and consulting both locally and internationally.

In 2001 Cory met and Married Laurie Lucas in what I know was a pivotal moment in his life and an event for which I am forever grateful. They quickly started their family with Lucas born in 2002 and Kendall in 2003, both of whom have grown to be wonderful young adults...like their parents.

In 1998 Cory started working for Boeing labs as a contractor in the Seattle area. In 2008 he became a direct employee for Boeing as a hydraulic subject matter expert. I am told there is no title that could capture all the skills he had nor the ways he

contributed to the company. He worked on a number of high profile projects including the P-8A Poseidon Static and fatigue Test, B1 Bomber Wing and Fuselage Major Fatigue test, 777-9 static and fatigue major test, T-7 Red Hawk and MQ-25 Stingray as a hydraulic and pneumatic systems consultant and designer. Most recently Cory oversaw the hydraulic systems upgrade at the Huh-le-a-kala Observation Air force laboratory in Maui Hawaii.

And all this... from a guy with no academic degree. It's ironic Cory ended up working in the wing testing lab for Boeing, as I can remember him as a kid jumping off his roof in Redding holding what he called an ultralight wing he'd made from cardboard and 2x4's. It was his first wing test.

Cory had an intuitive knack and interest for all things mechanical. He always wanted to know how things worked. He was a hydraulics expert, metal fabricator, mechanic, photographer, wood worker, and general craftsman.

It's impossible to talk about Cory without mentioning falconry. Cory cared for a small falcon when he was young and his experience secured him a lifelong fascination with the art and practice of falconry. Although Cory cared for a couple more hawks in his youth, it was not until about 1988 that he found a master falconer to be his sponsor, passed the Washington state falconry exam and trapped and trained his first Red-tailed Hawk. This event, and the community of people involved, was the beginning of what I believe defined Cory. Falconry takes an incredible amount of time and dedication. Through the years, Cory flew a number of birds all over the west and became a well known and respected member of the falconry community.

Our friendship began when we were old enough to talk. Our families briefly lived next door in the outskirts of rural Redding, California.

Both our families moved shortly thereafter but our mothers became good friends and remain so to this day.

Cory and I attended different schools early on yet we still celebrated birthdays, played in the woods and at the local beach when our moms visited.

In third grade I moved to the country and was lucky enough to attend Cory's school. I was a shy kid and had trouble making friends. Cory was well liked, active, athletic and social and went out of his way to help me feel accepted...and he always has. Junction was a great school with a tight knit bunch of kids where Cory excelled at football, baseball, basketball and wrestling.



He and I actually attended a Junction school reunion about 10 years ago. Cory wasted no time flirting with our 7th Grade English teacher, Ms. Thompson, referring to her as the “hot” teacher. She was blushing amused. Cory had a way with people, and especially old friends.

Our friendship truly grew in junior high where dances were a big event and Cory was “A”, if not “THE” big man on campus. His interest in girls was lightyears ahead of mine and it might not be too far-fetched to assume that if not for Cory’s influence in my life...I might still be single!

Outside of school, we spent our summers at the beach, camping with our families and fishing in the local creeks and ponds. Our winters were spent hunting rabbits and squirrels with our air guns and riding motorcycles...we always rode motorcycles.

Our parents allowed us to camp alone at a young age which fortunately did not result in any frostbite, catastrophic fires, broken bones or loss of limbs. However, we did gain a few life hacks. We learned how to build shelters, hunt, cook and eat wild game and how to safely manage a campfire. And we learned through experience, if you want to stay warm at night...you’d better remember your sleeping bag. This was all before YouTube!

It was those early years in grade school, always in the boredom of a winter downpour or period of sweltering summer heat, one of us would proclaim, “You’re my best friend” then the other would say, “you’re my bestest bestest friend,” then finally the other would say, “you’re my bestest bestest infinity bestest friend.”

In 9th grade Cory and his family moved to Puyallup and my life changed forever. Despite the 500 miles distance between us, our friendship however, did not end!

Twice in high school, I made the 20 hour Greyhound bus trip to Cory’s house during Christmas Vacation and he in turn drove to Redding after getting his drivers license. We hunted, fished, trapped, gold mined, rode motorcycles, backpacked, made bombs and worked on various garage projects...just normal country boy stuff.

In 1982, Cory was the best man at my wedding.

In the years that followed, Cory made a huge impression on my kids with his hawks and mechanical knowledge. They always called him Uncle Cory. My son Blaine later became a falconer and biologist. My son Kyle became an engineer. Both in part through Cory’s influence. Conversely, my daughter Kari at the

age of 10 or so, had made fun of Cory for wasting money by staying in a motel at the halfway point on one trip to our house. Apparently she struck a nerve, as Cory called me the day he returned home to say that was the last time he’d take Kari’s advice. It was 18 degrees in the back of his truck that night.

Through Cory’s influence, I too made time for falconry. For 15 years of my life, Cory was my weekly mentor and sponsor, helping me through one of the most rewarding activities I would ever undertake. Through the weekly phone calls and interstate hawking trips, our bond strengthened.

When their kids were young, the Rhea family took an interest in off-road vehicles and camping with other families. So it was just a matter of time before Cory and I would ride again.

In 2015 we set out on our first dual sport motorcycle adventure. Over the next 8 years, dual sport riding would lead us on thousands of miles of pure adrenaline-coated adventure all over remote parts of Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and Northern California. These long distance dirt rides became the essence of our friendship culminating in our last trip totaling 7 nights and over 950 miles through three states. We rode through sand covered deserts, snow capped mountains, old growth forests and sage covered foothills, opening hundreds of gates and crossing dozens of creeks and rivers. We fueled up at the tiniest little outposts we could find and ate the best burgers in every state we rode. We camped where we wanted, sipped good whiskey, cooked over a campfire, ate like kings and slept like dogs. We explored cowboy line shacks, old mines and airplane crash sites. We sprained ankles, broke bones, pushed our bodies to the limit of our own endurance, and more than anything, relived the adventures of our youth.

Cory could be kind of quiet at times, but ask him a mechanical, engineering or falconry question, and he would immediately become “fully engaged.” In this regard, Cory was my personal consultant. I will miss calling him for advice on both technical matters, and life. There are a few phrases I’ll always remember him saying: “hold it hold it hold it,” indicating he had an idea which could not be overlooked. Or conversely, he’d say, “the beauty of that is”... indicating he agreed with your idea and was all in. Or if it were too late for any decisions, he’d say, “it is what it is.”

Although our adventures were typically just the two of us, it’s hard for me to showcase my friendship with Cory, when I know the driving force behind his existence was his family. Laurie, I don’t think there’s a woman in the world who could have been a better match for my friend. And I am so thankful that you, at that party many years ago quote unquote “went in for the kill.”

Since that time, I have witnessed all the changes that morphed Cory from a friend into a dedicated husband and father...the most important job he ever had. When on our little adventures, Cory would call Laurie every day we had service and talk to both kids. He ended every call with “I love you... lock the door.” His dedication to his family was obvious to me. Although we lived hundreds of miles apart, it seemed I never talked to Cory on a weekend when he was not at one of Kendall’s soccer games, working on something with Lucas in the shop, or dressing up for a party to appease his beloved Laurie.

He was smart, funny, loving, caring, gentle, and humble. He never bragged about anything he did, which is remarkable coming from a guy with so many talents and accomplishments.

He was the kind of guy who could fit in with any crowd, talk to a stranger like he knew them, and make everyone around feel included in the conversation.

He was a personal counselor, a man’s man to some, a ladies’ man to others, a family man always, and the best friend I will ever have. Cory changed my life and I know he will be greatly missed by all that knew him. The difference he made at work, with friendships and family will be forever remembered.

We love you Cory

