

Talk for Greg Madsen's funeral ceremony, by Stan Christensen

We will all remember where we were when we got the news that Greg Madsen had passed away. He was such an exceptional force in the world.

I was in a Uganda When I received a text from Ella sharing the inevitable, yet still stunning news. I had just finished a hike with my teenage kids, a jungle hike similar to one Greg and I had done on a trip nearly 30 years ago in Thailand.

As many of you have experienced, a trip with Greg is never just a trip, it's always an Adventure. The Thailand hike was full of drama and excitement. While trekking in the Golden Triangle area, which was then the heroin capital of the world, we were held up by a group of drug traffickers. First, they rouged up our guide, then ransacked our backpacks to see if we were smuggling poppy seeds. They held us at gunpoint with hands in the air backed up against a tree. They were yelling at us in Laotian and I was scared to death, and absolutely frozen. Greg of course tried to talk to them, and "develop the relationship." Although I don't think they understood anything he said, his characteristic smile, backed up by his seemingly endless reservoir of confidence and positive energy seemed to calm them down, and they let us go unscathed.

My hike this week in Uganda was much less dramatic. We spent the day searching for chimpanzees, and there were lots of opportunities along the trail for the type of one-on-one parent/child conversations that teenagers try to avoid. At one point I ambushed my 17 year-old daughter who is heading to BYU this fall.

I gave her my list of criteria for the ideal man she should date. It was the usual unrealistic dad list. I told her he should be:

Smart-- it would be nice if he had ambitious career plans, but even more importantly, someone who didn't put making money before people and relationships.

He needed to have a lot of friends, and be consistent and authentic in the way he treats people.

He should be grounded spiritually, rock solid in his values, not vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of individual or institutional vagaries.

He should be adventurous, someone that would be a good travel companion.

He should be positive and fun to be around

She cut me off as she often does when I go into lengthy advice mode and said, "You mean someone like Greg Madsen." Yes, I replied, someone like Greg Madsen would be great. That night, we received Ella's text and made plans to come home for the funeral .

Not only is Greg the kind of person that fathers hope their daughters will date, he is the kind of friend that everyone should be lucky enough to have. We in this room represent a small subset of the Greg Madsen fan club. He traveled widely, and was a master at connecting with people wherever he went.

Just last Sunday I ran into one of his fans at church in Eastern Uganda. She noticed my "Team Mad Dog" bracelet and ran up to make the connection. She literally jumped up and down and said, "Greg Madsen is my favorite person in the whole world—do you really know Greg?" Her enthusiasm felt extreme, even for someone as amazing as Greg.

I replied, "Yes, yes, I know him. Is he really, your favorite person in the world?" Yes, she replied, I think he is in fact my favorite person in the whole world."

He is that person for many of us, and I've always admired his uncanny ability to connect deeply with so many people.

I remember meeting Greg for the first time at BYU. He walked up to me at a party, and out of the blue said, "Hi, I'm Greg, I heard you play tennis, want to hit sometime?" His confidence was striking, and he seemed like a person worth knowing-- which was probably my best insight in four years of college!

Greg is intensely competitive, but doesn't have the cockiness that most tennis players of our generation had. He was generous in victory and, in the rare cases when I prevailed, he would just smile and ask for a rematch.

At BYU Greg always seemed to have a lot of girls around. We were all interested in meeting girls, and endlessly compared notes about the best ways to meet them. Greg confided to a group of us one night that he had developed a failsafe method for meeting girls that worked every time. We were dying to know his secret--it seemed to be working. He told us that his sisters had taught him how to braid hair, and girls loved it when a guy would sit and talk with them while braiding their hair.

This from Greg who I thought of as the embodiment of the true man's man: rugged, adventurous, athletic and driven, and apparently good at braiding hair!

Over the years I came to see how growing up with three sisters had helped shaped him into being a man who is as sensitive as he is strong, as compassionate as he is competitive.

I feel lucky to have been one of the many to be on the receiving end of his compassion.

On another Greg Madsen adventure, this one in Nepal, we got into some trouble. We had planned a week-long ascent to a monastery in the Annapurna range, but by a stroke of good luck, we were offered two seats on a small plane that would get us to our destination in a matter of minutes. From there, we would have a lot of options of where to hike. We landed at 18,000 feet and were advised to spend a few days acclimatizing before ascending further.

Our youthful overconfidence trumped the advice, and we spent the afternoon hiking up several thousand feet to a remote village. As it got dark, we both started feeling a little dizzy and feverish, and things quickly got worse--especially for me. We assumed we were experiencing altitude sickness, but didn't know what to do about it. A snowstorm had come in as my symptoms escalated, and there was no way for us to get down the mountain until morning. After I started coughing up blood, and going in and out of consciousness, we said a prayer together and Greg gave me a priesthood blessing.

He said he felt inspired to keep me awake through the night. I fought him all night long as I desperately wanted to escape into sleep. He told annoying jokes and endless stories to keep us both awake. His sensitivity and care probably kept me alive. We later learned that just recently, several climbers showing the same symptoms had died in their sleep in that same village after taking that same plane ride.

Greg's steady support and legendary optimism make him a good friend to have at your side during a crisis.

We took our last trip together a few months ago. We spent a long weekend in Napa, reminiscing about the old days, comparing notes on experiences we had shared, talking about our families, and recording some of his stories and advice for Jan and the kids. As I listened to him, I was in awe of

how much he had packed into his 54 years, and honored to be one of the many friends in his ongoing story.

We will miss you Greg, and look forward to our reunion, and the next chapter.