

When Rich asked me to speak at his funeral he said he hoped the service would be light-hearted. That is probably the hardest thing he ever asked of his family and friends.

Nevertheless, he was right. It's better to celebrate life than to mourn it. And when we talk about Rich Martel's life, there was so much to celebrate.

I don't think I'm going to be able to achieve light-heartedness today. Instead, I'd like to focus on five things in Rich's life that I think are worth celebrating.

First of all, his sense of humor. That's probably what people remember most about him. He was tremendously funny. He didn't tell jokes. He didn't do physical comedy. He didn't make fun of people's disabilities. Instead, he made full use of his remarkable powers of observation and his clear-eyed view of the world. He could spot absurdity and pompousness a mile away and turn it into a hilarious story.

He never used humor as a weapon, however. I never saw him humiliate anyone. He rarely resorted to sarcasm or ridicule. The point of being funny was to make people feel better, not to make them feel worse.

Perhaps most remarkable of all, he kept his sense of humor until the end. Just last week, I told him he couldn't die until he found out who killed Laura Palmer and he said he was sure they got Twin Peaks in Heaven -- and maybe even in Hell.

The second thing I remember about Rich is his talent. Even as a kid he could draw like a dream. The visiting art teachers who came to our elementary school used to be ecstatic when they saw what he could do. They were always taking his water paint or India Ink creations and keeping them for themselves.

At first I was a little disappointed that he didn't pursue art as a career, but it soon became apparent that he had found an outlet for his creativity in advertising. He really loved BBDO and it showed in his work. The commercials he worked on were invariably stylish, exciting and fun. We probably all have our favorites but the two I like best are the Pepsi spot set in Russia and -- especially -- his last ad -- the GE commercial from Hungary, in which turning on light celebrates freedom in Eastern Europe.

Rich gave a lot to BBDO but BBDO gave back too, especially in these past few months when Rich was too sick to work regularly. The company rallied around him when he needed it most -- letting him work at his own pace, making sure that he didn't have any financial worries. I can't say how impressed I was at this display of decency. I know that it made his last days much easier.

The third thing I remember about Rich is his intellectual curiosity. He was smart -- no doubt about it. But he was more than intelligent -- he had an insatiable desire to know more. He was always reading -- even walking down the street he'd be reading a magazine. It's amazing he wasn't hit by a car. He especially loved politics and history -- I'm so glad he lived to see the fall of both the Berlin Wall and Donald Trump.

I think this curiosity was the reason he liked to travel so much. He loved to explore. Even as a kid back in Brockton he liked to hop on his bike and investigate the different neighborhoods. I remember pedaling with him from one end of Brockton to the other just to see what was there. For Rich, the worst thing in life was being bored -- not learning anything new.

My fourth point about Rich is his generosity. I'm not talking about material generosity -- although it's true that he was always giving something to somebody. What I mean is that he'd do anything to lend a helping hand. When I moved to New York he took it upon himself to find me an apartment. Those of you who live in New York know what a big favor this was. And I'm sure everyone here has a similar story.

Perhaps his greatest act of selflessness occurred when his roommate, Chris Hill, got sick last fall. Rich took time off from work to nurse him, even though his own health was beginning to deteriorate. It must have been agony for him to see Chris waste away but as far as I know, Rich never gave it a second thought. He was used to putting others first.

The final thing about Rich's life that I want to celebrate is something I didn't know about him until recently. And that is his courage. My wife says that a person's true colors don't show until they get sick and let down their defenses. Having seen how Rich acted these past few months I believe it.

Even now, I can't believe that for more than four years he lived with the knowledge that he had AIDS and was able to keep it to himself. Usually he had an transparent personality. If he was bored or moody, he always showed it. But in this case he never let on that he was dying. He told a few people that he was sick but kept the rest of us in the dark; he just didn't want anyone to treat him different. He wanted to live life to the fullest for as long as possible.

He never complained. He never cursed the unfairness of being struck down in his prime. He never gave up.

After Chris died, I was afraid he might become withdrawn and depressed. Instead, he plunged back into work and planned a trip to France. It was great to see how excited he was about showing Paris to Lisa and his brother Billy. And when he came back, he started talking about driving cross country with his brother David.

He never got to make that trip. But he led a full and meaningful life until the day he died. He touched us all deeply and brought out the best in us. I consider myself lucky to have been one of Rich's many friends.

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When I first met Rich Martel, he was a skinny little kid with a big head and a whiffle haircut. Of course that was first grade so we all looked kind of funny.

We soon became fast friends. We had a lot in common: comic books, the Man From Uncle, Field's Park, and what was then called World Affairs. We were probably the only two fourth graders in Brockton who debated the Constitutional fine points of whether Barry Goldwater was eligible to run for President because he had been born in Arizona before it became a state.

His tremendous talent was already evident. He was mixing his media before the rest of us had mastered crayons. And he loved that white paste the teachers handed out -- not because it tasted so good but because it meant art class was about to begin.

He was just bursting with creativity. As Philip pointed out, in the sixth grade he started a neighborhood newspaper called Rich Richie's Almanac. And no report on South America was complete without a dozen hand drawn maps featuring each of the major countries.

Even then he had a fairly sophisticated sense of humor. I remember when we were in fifth grade I tried to impress our teacher with my knowledge of geography by pointing out that the smallest country in the world -- and the Pope's home -- was a place called "Vacation City." Rich was beside himself in laughter. He never let me forget it. Vacation City became our code word for trying to appear smarter than you really are.

After elementary school, we were never in another class together. At West Junior High he was chosen to be in special program for advanced students called Ceilings Unlimited -- or C.U. He didn't let this go to his head, however. He took the classes seriously, but the inflated ego you were supposed to get by being in the program became a joke. Just last year, in fact, when the two of us were having trouble assembling a piece of furniture, he claimed that the directions were so difficult that even someone from C.U. couldn't figure them out.

Considering that he was in this special class, it's a bit of a surprise that we remained friends. But that was Rich. He was friends with everybody. He recognized no social hierarchy. In fact, he had a special affinity for the socially dispossessed -- the girls that no one else would dance with, or the quiet guys with the weird sense of humor. The only people he would not tolerate were the intentionally cruel and the willfully ignorant.

After high school, he went to Bowdoin College, where he spent what were probably the happiest four years of his life. He joined a fraternity, made a million friends, and had a blast. He never stopped talking wistfully about college.

But as much as he enjoyed Bowdoin, I think he really came into his own in New York. Soon after he graduated, he got a job at BBDO, the advertising agency, and began developing a new confidence in his abilities.

He even began to change physically. He started going to a gym and getting \$45 haircuts. When my wife met him she remarked afterwards how handsome he was. What? I said. Richie Martel handsome? The change had been so gradual that I didn't notice he was no longer the gawky teenager I'd known from high school.

He began to achieve real success at BBDO. With increasing frequency, his commercials began showing up on television. Funny ads, sexy ads, stylish ads. He travelled around the world shooting these commercials. You've probably seen most of them, including: the Pepsi ad in which Fred Savage writes a love letter to his girlfriend; the Michael J. Fox ad where he falls asleep at the opera; the Pepsi-free ad where a couple careens down a hill on a piano; the GE ad from Hungary; in fact most of those "We bring good things to light" ads.

As much as he loved his career, he never lost his other interests -- the films of Alfred Hitchcock, the novels of Robertson Davies, the history of Western Europe, the boulevards of Paris.

He especially never lost his interest in politics. Ever since I can remember, we'd had what you might call an ongoing dialogue on the merits and flaws of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, Spiro Agnew, Jimmy Carter, Edward Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. It wasn't until 1988 that we finally had a meeting of the minds. I'd worked in the Reagan White House and wasn't crazy about George Bush. He'd lived in Massachusetts and really wasn't crazy about Michael Dukakis.

The long and short of what I'm saying is that he had it all. Career satisfaction, a large circle of loyal friends, financial security and a mature loving relationship. All of us who knew him were proud to be his friend.

And then he got AIDS. The unfairness of it all must have seemed overwhelming, but he never complained. He didn't look for scapegoats. He simply faced it and fought it with great bravery.

He forced himself to live a normal life for as long as possible. Until he started to lose weight you'd never have known he was sick. And even then he pushed himself -- first to take care of his roommate Chris Hill, who was also dying -- and then to deal head-on with each new manifestation of the disease.

It took a great deal of courage to look death in the eye every day for five years and not give up. I think he drew a lot of that courage from his family. They were his rock. And he loved them more than anyone in the world.

The Martels showed that love may not conquer death but it can beat the evils that are associated with it -- fear, alienation and pain. The way they rallied to Rich's side was inspiring. His parents gave him the support he needed. His brothers made frequent visits to boost his spirits. And as for Lisa, when David Martel calls her a saint, he is being modest.

It wasn't just that she moved to New York to take care of Rich and Chris. It was the strength and good humor she brought with her. You'd go to visit Rich in the hospital and everybody would have a long face except Lisa. She'd be sitting there kidding with Rich, telling him light-hearted stories about the nurses -- even though underneath, she hurt the most.

I've known the Martels all my life, but I never really appreciated how wonderful they were until the last six months. It's really an honor to know them.

I take comfort from knowing that Rich is in a better place. But the world he leaves behind is less fun, less interesting, less special. Rich has left an emptiness inside of us that can never be filled. I believe the only way we can honor his memory is to live up to the high standards of decency, generosity and courage that he set for himself.