

Al Walker was my favorite savant, providing me and others with expansive and elucidating discourses on the “nature of nature.” Our respective senses of humor were comfortably juxtaposed, his being one imbued with a sardonic, yet tactful character, especially as he lampooned the corporate misbehavior that resulted in the toxic insults that they’ve imposed upon the natural world and the human communities struggling to inhabit this native sanctuary called Earth. My contribution to this porridge of conversational angst was, to Al’s delight, an occasional profane Latin diatribe, because Al readily encouraged me to discharge my politically frustrated congestion in a nano-minute, only to be cleverly punctuated with an Al Walker after thought.

Ironically, Al succumbed to those adversaries of the natural community when he contracted liver cancer. He rightfully suspected that his illness was rooted where he was once a graduate student working with substances now known to be carcinogenic. Al approached me in May 2008, while I was conducting an Ag workshop, telling me that the real reason he was there was to ask for some direction, because I had beat cancer 9 years before.

Al was indescribably rational and selfless through his ordeal, knowing how serious his illness was, while realizing he needed to do his best in his attempt to prevail. But his primary concern was the welfare of his “significant other,” Connie Wenger, to insure, as much as possible, her ability to carry on after him, physically and emotionally.

Al was both a “big picture” kind of guy, as well as a deep thinking authority on many subjects: botany, geology, biology and chemistry as well as the artisan talents of cheese making and animal husbandry. I’ll never forget when he enlightened me about “Jewelweed” a wild impatiens plant, the anti-dote to poison ivy. Some of the flower petals are orange, some of them a creamy yellow. Al pointed out that the orange ones were growing on calcium-poor soils; the yellow ones on calcium-rich soils. All along my streamside bank was orange petaled Jewelweed, except at one location. Upon a deeper investigation, the yellow ones were growing around an old, buried concrete foundation-calcium! Evidence of weeds being soil indicators. Now I refer to Jewelweed as “Walker’s Weed.”

Renaissance men like Al appear rarely, diamonds in the rough they say. But Al’s vision was to see more of the members of our culture be those diamonds, by encouraging the growth and outreach of sea-change organizations such as PCO and PASA, of which he was both involved with (PCO Board Member) and fervently supportive of. Having no children of their own, he and Connie also supported the academic interests of college students in need of fiscal assistance via housing or their farm, because Connie was a similar beneficiary of generous benefactors while she attended college.

We cannot replace those of us that have passed this way like Al. What we can and must do is to keep their visions both alive and enlivened. Their memories and mission are most sanctified in the work that we continue to do in their honor, while we honor ourselves and one another. Al, you can rest and be assured that your vision is in good hands.