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R.I.P. Rich Martin
1953 -2020

The Tie Dye Party family is heartbroken to say that our host, our friend, our brother, Rich Martin, passed away at home this week. The outpouring of love has been incredible, but the loss is sharp and the memories continue to overwhelm.

With a lifetime of service to others during his career in the public schools Rich touched the lives of countless students who were blessed to know a teacher with so much generosity and compassion. Through his annual birthday party he left an unforgettable, musical and colorfully psychedelic mark on the

lives of hundreds and hundreds of friends, strangers, music lovers and musicians who came together every May in Ramah to kick off festival season with a weekend celebration built around community and live music.

The Tie Dye Party began in 1994, when Rich invited some friends over on his birthday to make tie dye t-shirts. Later, when he moved to his place outside Ramah, folks came with tents and instruments, camped out for the weekend, established a tradition of campground pickin' and continued making tie dyes. In 2003, for his 50th birthday and the 10th anniversary of the Tie Dye Party, a generous friend hired Grammy award winning bluegrass artist, Tim O'Brien, to perform on what became known as the Front Porch Stage. After some scrambling, a few local bands were found who could bring a PA and open for Tim. The following year Abigail Washburn and the old-time string band Uncle Earl graced the stage, supported by several New Mexico acts who again volunteered sound equipment and played for nothing, just to be there. About 100 people showed up those first few years and admission was free.

In 2006, for the second appearance by Tim O'Brien, a hat was passed to defray the cost. About \$3000 was raised, and with that a budget was established. But attendance was growing and the 2-seater outhouse was filling up fast.

In the summer of 2006, just a few weeks after Tim's second visit to Ramah, Rich asked "How do we follow that!?" and a plan was hatched for 2007. With a general idea of attendance and a loose budget, the goal was to feature the best folk, bluegrass and Americana bands from the Southwest and focus on throwing the best party ever for the lowest possible cost. The Handsome Family played the Front Porch Stage in 2007, joined by The Saltine Ramblers, The Rivet Gang and The Squash Blossom Boys, acts who would go on to define the musical vibe at Rich's with their nearly annual appearances, their members contributing to spinoffs and collaborations too numerous to mention. By 2009 a serious PA was required, something more than Christmas lights were needed to light the porch, and actual porta-jons had to be found, because as the years went on that outhouse wasn't something you'd want to get near on Sunday morning. And in 2009, when The Withdrawals took the stage on a Friday night and performances spanned two days for the first time, it seemed that an actual music festival was born.

Somewhere along the way, children who were growing up coming to Rich's every May asked if they could sing a song before the first band played on Saturday. Those ambitious kids organically kick-started the Kids' Open Mic that became a Saturday morning tradition so cute it moved professional songwriters to tears. One spring Kevin and Cory asked if they could play a 'tweener on the side porch, which wasn't even 4-feet wide at the time, and the Saturday afternoon side stage lineup was born. The crew from Phoenix came with 10 gallons of Bloody Marys to pass around the campground on Saturday mornings. A photographer arrived and offered to document everything she could. Tapers brought their mics and decks and recorded every note. Jams of Enchantment volunteers made hundreds of free breakfast burritos and handled merchandise and wristband sales. A hot air balloonist called and said "I've got this trippy looking balloon I'd like to bring." A yoga instructor volunteered to lead a Saturday morning yoga session. And one day an actual tie dye artist volunteered to help with the dye, making everyone's tie dye projects brighter and better. Campground jams became legendary, and folks in the know knew better than to camp anywhere near the Ramblers or 10 Drink Minimum if they wanted to sleep. Podcasts were recorded. Songs were sung. Traditions were established. Tie dyes were made. Everyone camped in the same spot every year. And the bands got better all the time, with the motto for each party becoming "best lineup ever."

Along the way, winners of the Telluride Bluegrass Festival band contest came to Rich's. Big names from all over made the trek, musicians like Boulder Acoustic Society, Coral Creek, Tony Furtado, Sharon Gilchrist and Jon Stickely Trio. Bands came from New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Texas, California, Oregon, the midwest, and the Brown Chicken Brown Cow boys even came from Hawaii. Poor Man's Whiskey, who joked that the drive out to Rich's had them wondering if they'd been pranked, pulled out an unplanned mind-blowing bluegrass tribute to *Dark Side of the Moon* as a full moon rose over the mesa. Old timers like Bill Hearne crossed paths with both new talents and acts like Jeff Scroggins & Colorado, RapidGrass and others who now appear on festival bills everywhere. Joe West and Boris McCutcheon alternated years, each of them bringing a different magic every time. Alex and Greg from Wildewood and Dave Payne from the Ramblers came with so many different arrangements and sat in with so many bands they became Tie Dye Party MVPs. Pherkad was cosmically born to play Rich's. And The Porter Draw tried several times to rock the Front Porch Stage off the house. Over the last few years the number of bands reaching out wanting to play left Rich thinking we could add a couple of days to the event and still not accommodate all the amazing musicians who wanted to be part of his birthday.

And with each party, with no advertising beyond a few names on an email list, through word of mouth, and with the location intentionally undisclosed, the community swelled, with many music festival veterans proclaiming that Road to Rich's was their favorite event of the year. Because it was like your own private festival. And you knew everyone there almost. No security, no fence, no rush to get a wristband, and very few rules. It was an annual reunion like no other that had everyone's festival aura turned up to 11. No one got hurt, no one got angry, the cops never showed up, and no one ever fell into the bonfire, despite a few close calls. And it was all because of Rich Martin, a man whose web of friends wove together old timers from Grateful Dead tour with country and bluegrass fans, Festivarians, and kids and neighbors who had never seen a jam band or a bluegrass set before they came to Rich's.

We will never forget Rich Martin. Just like we will never forget that psychedelic hot air balloon rising over the house beside a full moon, or the weekend it rained and snowed like crazy, or that favorite set of music we couldn't believe we were lucky enough to witness through the dust rising in the yard. Or that one year we may have heard the entire *Frozen* soundtrack during the Kid's Open Mic, with the southwest's best amateur MC, John Martin, patiently introducing each kid. Or those Bloody Marys that appeared out of nowhere. Or that weird tripping dude who sat by the bonfire one year screaming all night. Or the sound of banjos and mandolins pickin' in the distance 'til the sun came up. And one day when we can all get together again, smile, dance and hug one another, celebrate our favorite bands, make plans for the next festival, and stay up all night listening to a campground jam, we'll toast Rich Martin together, and remember how, without even trying, Rich created the most legendary birthday party that ever was, and be grateful that we were lucky enough to be part of it.

Goodbye, Rich. May the four winds blow you safely home.





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