

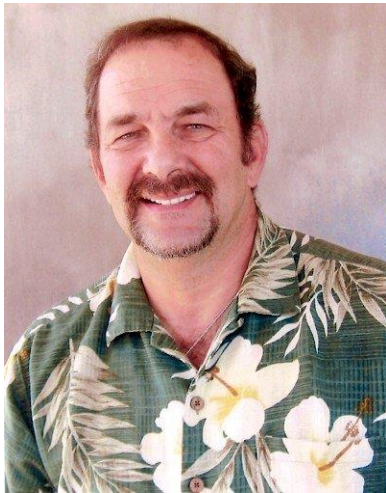
MARTY BLAKE'S EULOGY AND OBITUARY

By Richard Anderson - July 30, 2022

Marty saw life as a battle against mendacity, hypocrisy and tyranny. He always swam upstream against the current. He would have made a good crew member of Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery in 1803. He would have shunned the eddies of the Missouri. He would have fought the main current in the middle of its channel.

On the flip side, he had a very soft spot for the underdog, for the downtrodden, for the mistreated or misunderstood. He was beloved by students and parents of the charter school where he taught for fifteen years. He was loath to retire, to leave his students in the lurch. Even though he finally put in for retirement at 77, he agonized about the decision. Unfortunately, he never received a monthly retirement check for all of his contributions over the years. That monthly retirement pension was equal to pay for fifteen students. He kept those fifteen students and was honored as teacher of the year twice.

He was fond of rant and rage against any target. Israeli Zionists killing Palestinian children, Hillary Clinton's supposed political murders, a Sonora mayor's Nazi bullying, Sonora Walmart's movement of goods within the store so he couldn't find toilet paper—the list goes on and on. He often said his rants were one reason he couldn't find a mate that would tolerate him long enough to knock off his rough edges. The other reason was his continual penury.



He lived paycheck to paycheck, spending what little money he had on cheap Walmart frames used to memorialize his beloved Stanislaus River archives, work of decades from his first days in Tuolumne County. Two rental sheds behind the new Dollar Store in Sonora (another rant) and one full house and half of his own home is dedicated to those archives. The damming of the Stanislaus River was a monstrous act perpetrated by a federal bureaucracy that was unaccountable to the people. He became another Don Quixote tilting against windmills, forever defeated, forever enraged.

He also memorialized his relationships with his friends, sometimes several times over. Collages—big collages— held within those flimsy Walmart frames, he gave to those friends throughout his lifetime. He even made one for the St Charles Saloon in Columbia, featuring all the regulars that frequented that local watering hole.

He loved the drama of the moment, and quickly memorialized those moments he felt remarkable. Bob Dylan was his archangel and the ballads Dylan sang were anthems to Marty. If he could have sung, he would have been Sonora's Woody Guthrie. As it was, he was Sonora's raging crackpot, to others their best friend, and to still others an enigma, a needle in the haystack never to be found.

Those mementoes and treasures you see around you here today are yours for the taking. Please help yourself to a memory of Marty. He would have wanted you to have them. He didn't want to die alone. He wanted to be with his friends in the end. He would have been so pleased to see all of you here today. Although he could only focus on one obsession at a time, sooner or later his laser vision would come to you, and you would come into focus, and you would be honored with his absolute devotion.

Martin Stephen Blake—environmentalist, teacher, documentarian, museum archivist, ping pong champion, good friend and honorable opponent of mendacity, deceit, and pomposity—we'll be looking to greet you in whatever form you take on the next go-around among the blackness of the stars above us.

Might your example of the rejection of safety, of pragmatism, of riches and fame be a light into that darkness we are surrounded with today. Might your good humor, your rejection of common sense, plodding dullness, and the meekness of the moment be rewarded somewhere in the universe and recognized for what is truly is: remarkable character; unambiguous fidelity to friendship; unstinting care for the dispossessed and disregarded, and the sounding of the everlasting chords of memory that might still be heard in river canons everywhere.

Long live the iconoclast, long live the unorthodox, and long live true American character!

REMARKS AT THE SCATTERING OF MARTY'S ASHES

It is altogether fitting and proper that now we are assembled here on the banks of this remaining Stanislaus River in order to honor one of its true champions. Martin Stephen Blake might be an unknown to contemporary history, but to this river, to these friends gathered here, he is an unforgettable presence.

He valued this river for its history and its remarkable winding through thousands of years, through many cultures, through many tribulations of time and weather.

Native Miwuks lived beside this river with few lasting traces for millennia. American and foreign miners and business corporations ravaged its bed for gold and dug enormous adits and tunnels into its hillsides for decades. Recreationists and river rafters plied its currents and soft summer nights for years, until dam-builders, coveting its potential for energy, stopped its flow forever.

Marty's compassion for this river brings us here today to scatter his cremains into these gentle currents and unforgettable history.

May his efforts to memorialize this river's history and his efforts to never forget its demise bring peace to those of us here now for the rest of our lives. And may his devotion to cause embolden us and lead us to action toward those many injustices remaining before us. May we feel compelled to righteous action and good works.



(Scatter the cremains)

Go in peace old friend. Your burdens are laid down now in this river. Let it accept you in its gentle embrace, and take you to its heart . . .

Obituary for Martin Samuel Blake

April 15, 1945—May 15, 2022

by Richard Emil Anderson

(see also: https://www.uniondemocrat.com/news/article_6251470a-dd20-11ec-a73c-57345779829c.html)

A deep late Spring frost has burned big rhododendron buds and oak leaves that looked so promising here after an earlier warm spell, and a full eclipse of the “blood moon” has ended one month after Easter. At the end of that eclipse—eleven o’clock at night, Sunday May 15, the oldest friend I had in my life passed away.

Martin Samuel Blake had just recently celebrated his 77th birthday, some 54 years after I first met him in Los Angeles. He had butted in line ahead of me then at a registration queue in film school. He was a recent Phi Beta Kappa from Rutgers, and I was an unknown creative writing major with a Masters degree from the midwest. We became friends immediately.

He drove a huge black Chevy convertible, big as a tank. I drove a white Mustang coupe my dad bought to celebrate my earlier graduation from college—the first in my family on both my mother’s and father’s side. Marty and I shared big plans for Hollywood— Tinseltown hadn’t seen anything yet.

We shared classes together, watched innumerable films together in an antiquated screening room in the barracks-like cinema department of the University of Southern California. George Lucas had just graduated a year earlier, and Francis Coppola had just fled to UCLA where there was more freedom to create with better equipment.

Such heady days! The late 60’s—Patty Hearst and the SLA, the Tate-Bianca murders, Malcom X, Martin Luther King in Birmingham, the Viet Nam War, your worst nightmare Charles Manson living in an abandoned movie set in the hills behind us, the LA Times with front page headlines three inches high, LA cops murdering Cinque and his gang with both gunfire and incendiary bombs.

We were so young and filled with grand ideas for films and Hollywood fame. We had come to overturn the old Hollywood of post-war straight narrative lines and small screen black and white movies that looked backward. Bonnie and Clyde and Easy Rider were in the act of liberating all of us into a bright future of acknowledgement and fortune.

A few years later, after graduation for me from film school with only a substitute teaching position in a high school near the Watts riots and for Marty a poor series of dead-end jobs outside of film, we tuned in to Country Joe and the Fish and thought about “moving to the country.”

We gave Hollywood a good shot, however, Marty and I. We founded a short-lived education film company—Third Generation Productions—and peddled one film to the market. The market wanted 90% of sales, if any. “First Day Out” featured Marty as a new teacher at my inner city high school facing his first day in class. We shot it surreptitiously on weekends in Compton and recruited one of my Negro students to encounter Marty. They bonded by playing hoops and not keeping score. During production we were lucky not to be mugged by curious low rider gangs cruising by.

Marty traded in the black tank for a red Sprite that had engine trouble. He accidentally dropped a cigarette between his legs one morning driving that Sprite. The weird wire and faux leather air-flow seat insert he was sitting on caught fire, and without a second thought he threw it out ablaze onto Figueroa Street, in the middle of heavy traffic, and kept driving. In retrospect, that could be a metaphor for both of our times in LA—small fire, no response.

I once saw Marty in that forsaken Sprite laboring up steep Mulholland Drive, a line of cars behind him on the narrow two lane, honking horns and waving fists. He was hunkered down over the steering wheel, his foot to the floor urging those four exhausted cylinders uphill.

His romantic endeavors turned out much like that Sprite—warm sincere relationships rent apart by his frequent rants against the system and his inability to multi-task personal affairs with the poor chance of opportunities of Hollywood fame.

Margie and Marlo came and went, and with them the promise of marital bliss and intimate personal growth. Always his ferocity and outrage against perceived inequities of anything from elitist subjugations to fear and loathing of the same prevented him from fruitful relationships with the fairer sex.

Along the way he loved and mentored two children dying of cystic fibrosis, and fell in love with their mother. Both were true saints in the smog and burning times of LA. Both have kept in touch for fifty years, and love each other still. They were in touch repeatedly as Marty lay dying in Hospice in Stockton.

Marty believed that his life was subdued by a lack of funding and bad decisions. He had many regrets. He should have stayed in LA, sought a job with USC Cinema, married his soulmate, helped lay her children to rest, and lived in relative obscurity among palm trees and bright lights.

Instead, he came alone and without support to the Stanislaus River and found penury and solace of sorts among brethren like himself—fiercely loyal to his tribe, outrageously honest and obstreperously insistent in calling out hypocrisy, deceit, and unfairness. He brought along his skills as a filmmaker and documentarian however, and has left us with an archive of immense value in questionable times.

Those of us left behind have been blessed that he made the decision, however flawed, to live among us and celebrate our times together on the riverside. His humor and Phi Beta Kappa intelligence will be greatly missed here in our backwater populist miasma, as will his gracious, generous feelings for honest friends like yourselves.

May his spirit and lack of guile guide us all in his wake, and may his memory live in our hearts as a true beacon of what can be accomplished with little support and much foreboding. May he finally rest in peace among his many friends and beside his beloved river not to be forgotten but rather to be revered.

Marty Blake Tribute

There were many of us who felt deeply about losing the Stanislaus River Canyon to a dam that never should have been built, but while most of us scattered to the four winds and mostly tried to forget about an event that broke our hearts, Marty Blake stayed and made sure that no one could forget.



His unceasing efforts not just documented the fight to save the Stan, but also made sure that no one could ignore it, by establishing a storefront museum on main street in Sonora. No one else did this. Marty did it. He did it by living hand-to-mouth and soliciting donations, and by whatever means he could scrape together. He was one of a kind, and those of us who knew him will never forget him.

Meanwhile, his collection now lives on – not just at the Columbia College Library, but also online and elsewhere. Those of us who share in the history of this place will make sure to carry on his legacy of making sure that no one forgets. We certainly won't.

There is of course much more to Marty Blake than this, but I think he would agree that it was his biggest lifetime accomplishment, and certainly one that those of us here – in person, virtually, and in spirit – can agree has been, and will continue to be, tremendously impactful for those of us continuing the fight to save the Stan well into the 21st century. Please join us in this endeavor at RestoringTheStanislaus.org, something that Marty would have been happy to support, should we all have been gifted more time with him.

Roy Tennant

June 18, 2022