



A Tribute to Inspiring Lives and Great Friendships

BY ROSS C. "ROCKY" ANDERSON

Rocky, Luke & Ralph in Peru, 2002.

I recently traveled to Peru and trekked along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. (See *Catalyst*, September 2002, "Postcard from Peru.") It was so good for my mind, body and soul to hike, at more than 14,000 feet, over places with such poetic names as Dead Woman's Pass... and to do it with great friends.

Joining my son and me for this adventure was Ralph, a truly remarkable person — and extraordinary friend. Ralph and his wife, Barbara, residents of Washington, D.C., have been my great friends since I met them in 1976. I house-sat for them one summer while they traveled out West for several weeks, then rented the basement in their row house near Dupont Circle for the next two years while I finished law school.

From the beginning, they were caring friends — the sort who become family. They often refer to me as their fourth son. (They have three sons, all of whom are Ph.D.s from either Princeton or Harvard, widely published in such diverse fields as art history, literary criticism, archeology, and the natural sciences.) We call and check in on each other often. I stay with them during many of my trips to Washington, D.C. — and sometimes join Ralph for a day at the cabin their family built in the Blue Ridge Mountains. They have traveled to Salt Lake City to join me for important occasions in my life, including my inauguration as mayor. They are the kind of friends and "family" that make life sweet and rich. I speak about them with such admiration and awe, a friend once quipped that she could hardly wait to meet the stars of the Ralph-and-Barbara lectures.

Ralph is 86 years old. He and Barbara attend operas, Shakespeare performances, Brookings Institute lectures, presentations at the Freer and Sackler Gallery (where everyone who works there seems to know them), and many other cultural, arts, and literary offerings in the D.C. area. Both are retired foreign service officers. They raised their sons in such places as Indonesia, Taiwan, Nepal, Istanbul and Cyprus. Their home is a veritable museum, filled with art and rugs from many nations and cultures — with books lining the walls of almost every room.

Last year, Ralph traveled around Iran for three weeks, alone except for the driver and guide he hired. That Ralph took such a trip did not

surprise anyone who knew him. He and Barbara have always traveled widely. They read voraciously about culture, geography, politics, history, and literature. And they love good fiction, especially mysteries set in different cultures.

Ralph and his wife have always been vibrant and thoroughly alive

everywhere; and of being able to share all of it together, and with their many admiring friends.

Ralph and I go on summer adventures every other year or so. One of our first adventures was an exciting river trip down the Colorado River, through the Grand Canyon. After several days on the river, during which Ralph would ride the white-water rapids on the front of the raft, waving one arm and yelling out as

if he were on a bucking bronco, we hiked nine and a half miles from Phantom Ranch to the South Rim — full backpacks and all. Ralph was 72 years young at the time.

Later, Ralph, one of his sons, and I rented some horses and took a pack trip into the Absaroka Wilderness Area (the locals pronounce it "The Abzorcas"), where Ralph caught almost all the trout for our meals. He, my son Luke, and I took a beautiful river trip down the Snake River, starting at Hell's Canyon. Two years ago, Ralph and I rented a couple of llamas in Pinedale, Wyoming and hiked almost 10 miles into the Wind Rivers Wilderness. Ralph lives an exceedingly abundant life, full of charm, excitement, and vigor. I am so grateful he and Barbara are in my life.

Ralph and Barbara — two remarkable friends; an extraordinary marriage (they just celebrated 50 years together); astounding minds, hearts, and lives. Their investment in keeping in good physical condition through briskly walking long distances every single day has paid enormous dividends in maintaining the physical strength and stamina that allows them to experience so much of the world. Similarly, their investment in a lifetime of education and in being such great friends to so many continues to grow into inspiring, deeply profound, compassionate, stimulating lives.

As always, I look forward to visiting the book-filled room upstairs at their home, toasting Ralph and Barbara as we settle in for their daily routine of watching the BBC News, and animatedly discussing the state of the world over delicacies prepared by Ralph. Those are the times I know I am one of the luckiest people in the world. Those are the times, and these are the friendships, that make life so absolutely wonderful. ♦

(Note: Characteristically humble and desirous of preserving their privacy, my friends reluctantly consented to the publishing of this piece on the conditions that Barbara's real first name, as well as their last name, would not be used.)

Rocky Anderson is the mayor of Salt Lake City.



Rocky & Ralph post river run & hike up from Phantom Ranch, 1988.

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— physically, intellectually, and soulfully. Their vitality is built on a foundation of a lifetime of walking, reading, and traveling to places with fascinating cultures; of enriching, uplifting conversations over single-malt Scotches or gin-and-tonics; of seeking to quench insatiable intellectual curiosities; of hundreds of dinners (Ralph is a magnificent cook!) with bright, engaging, diverse friends; of always being a part of their community and of the world by knowing at all times, and discussing, what is going on just about