

## **Kerry Michael Elkin**

April 14, 1951 – August 22, 2009

By Maeve (Elkin) Hickok

Kerry Michael Elkin, formerly of Chilmark and West Tisbury, Massachusetts, died in Paonia, Colorado on August 22 of complications from multiple sclerosis. He was 58.

Kerry was a son David Elkin of New Bedford, formerly of Middleborough, and the late Dorothea Elkin; brother of Maeve Hickok and Jim Mortenson of New Bedford and Robin Elkin and Kathleen Gygi of Seattle; uncle of Conrad Hickok and Colette Bennett of New Bedford, Daniel Hickok of Westfield, Evan Hickok of Pittsfield; nephew of Marilyn Hunt of Lakeville and Gertrude Elkin of New York City, and cousin to five first cousins.

Kerry was born in New York City and grew up in Middleborough. He graduated from Middleborough High School (1969), where he lettered in football, and from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, with a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology. He also attended Rutgers University, where he majored in engineering, and played football and rugby.

Kerry spent his early career at the Manomet Bird Observatory (now the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences) in Manomet. Kathleen S. Anderson, who was founding director of MBO at the time, said Kerry, as an intern in 1973 and 1974, banded birds for research and was involved with recording the shore bird census. He also participated in the Ships-to-Opportunity program and went to Georges Bank as a researcher, and guest, on two Russian fishing vessels for the purpose of observing sea birds in their habitat. She remembers Kerry as “so warm and friendly, so cheerful and likeable, but also such a reliable, hard worker. And with his rural background, he was also useful in another way that did not always apply to some of the urban interns...he knew how to fix things and make things work. He also had biological knowledge that many interns acquired...they didn't always bring it with them.”

He later worked in a soil sampling carbon testing project at the Marine Biological Laboratory Ecosystem Center in Woods Hole from 1980-1982.

Always deeply interested in wildlife and the natural world, he found his true vocations as a farmer and a musician.

As a farmer, he was principally involved with cranberries, as a bog manager for Beaton Cranberries, Inc. in Wareham in 1984-1992, and as a grower who built his own bog in Rochester and farmed it from 1985-1995.

Peter Beaton, the owner, describes Kerry as a “great guy” who always found time for his music and for animals. Two of his stories about Kerry stand out. The first involved a dying dog. He said his employees keep a diary of their hours-on-task in order to get paid. When he was

reviewing Kerry's diary, he noted that Kerry had put down 6 hours on a day he knew Kerry had worked 10, so he asked him to come in and explain himself. He said Kerry told him he had come across a dog that had been hit by a car and was dying by the side of the road. Kerry stayed with him until he died, a total of 3 ½ hours. Then he spent another ½ hour searching out the dog's owner and digging the grave. Hence, he felt honor-bound to only charge Beaton for the six hours he'd spent on cranberries.

His second story was set on a long frigid night that Kerry worked keeping frost off the berries in a Middleborough bog. Peter Beaton said he had commiserated with Kerry over his long bone-chilling night when he saw him at around 5 a.m. that morning. Kerry told him it had been great, actually, because he had seen some geese land on the bog, and been inspired to name his first band, "Geese in the Bog."

His younger brother Robin recalls, "Through his life's work, Kerry was an active patron and participant in the revival of cultural traditions in farming, arts, crafts and music as social movements. At his Herring Brook Farm on Snipatuit Pond in Rochester, Kerry and his former wife Ruth Richards created a contemporary expression of a traditional farmstead. The home they built together supported the revival of timber frame construction and the planted landscapes, gardens and cranberry bog reflected their desire for a life close to nature. Kerry was an accomplished artist, woodworker, carpenter, and wooden boat builder. On Martha's Vineyard, he apprenticed as a boat builder and worked on some of the most significant wood vessels built recently. At his Stone Fiddle Farm on Chilmark, Kerry grew heirloom tomatoes and other produce and planned a new timber frame home and bird decoy carving workshop."

But it was as a musician that he drew his most satisfaction and acclaim. Kerry was an accomplished traditional dance fiddler, who performed at dances, dance camps and festivals across the United States, in Canada, and in Belgium, Ireland and France. His bands, Geese in the Bog and Fresh Fish, performed at monthly dances in Rochester and Rehoboth granges, and drew on the large community of contra dancers in New England. His bands recorded cassettes and CDs, and he was invited to perform on the recordings of other musicians. He was the proud owner of and performer on a custom Bob Childs fiddle, and a member of the band Childsplay.

Bob Childs said, "Having gotten to know Kerry not only through making a violin for him but also through years of playing music alongside him for dances and with Childsplay, I was always struck with the intense focus he brought to his music, which over time made me realize what an unusual man he was. He was never overly concerned with commercial success but he was consumed by artistic expression and a love of traditional fiddle music that poured through his violin when he was playing it. Over the years thousands of people listened, danced and enjoyed the driving pulsing music of his unique and ageless fiddling style. The world is a sadder place without him in it."

Taylor Funeral Service and Crematory of Paonia, Colorado handled the arrangements. A memorial is planned for the fall in Martha's Vineyard. Support for MS research is welcomed.

His nephew Daniel Hickok is riding in the 50-mile Hike & Ride the Berkshires Sept. 26 sponsored by the National MS Society:

[http://main.nationalmssociety.org/site/TR/Bike/MAMBikeEvents?px=5396033&pg=personal&fr\\_id=11950](http://main.nationalmssociety.org/site/TR/Bike/MAMBikeEvents?px=5396033&pg=personal&fr_id=11950)



Kerry M. Elkin, second from right, in West Tisbury with his family (l-r): his late mother Dorothea Elkin, brother Robin Elkin, sister Maeve (Elkin) Hickok, and father David Elkin.