

From Rick Weid -

Just over a week ago I received a note telling me that Mike Nolan was gravely ill in Miamisburg, Ohio. On February 20, 2012, Mike passed away. He had inoperable cancer, only recently discovered.

I did not know Mike in high school, but we met because of my work with our 50th Reunion Committee. He came up from Ohio to our July event two years ago. He was quite a guy. Mike wore a ten-gallon hat and cowboy-style clothes, and he was fun to talk to. I learned he was a horse expert, a blacksmith, and a farrier, shoeing horses in Washington State. He had recently lost his wife. He told me he'd been pals with our classmate, Mike Gillingham, ever since high school and serving in the U.S. Navy. That was all I knew about Mike then.

Some months ago, after visiting his old high school and Navy buddy in Arizona, I got a call from him. Mike had a Ann Arbor High directory he wanted me to have. The two Mikes had been talking about the class reunion and how the Reunion Committee was trying to track down every member of the Class of '63. He was excited to help and wanted us to have his directory.

He could have mailed it. But the next Saturday Mike drove all the way up from Miamisburg to deliver it in person. My wife, Barb (Burd), and I spent several hours with him — and we enjoyed every second. Mike Nolan was a fascinating man.

It seems he went to vet school but didn't care for it, and he shifted to shoeing horses and blacksmithing. One day about 20 years ago out West, a logger came to him and asked Mike to look at his horses. They had been throwing shoes and cracking their hooves in the rough terrain — something that can result in excruciating pain and a debilitating condition in horses called "founder." The logger had tried other farriers, but none had been able to help his animals. So Mike examined the horses, thought for a while, went into town, and came back with a good supply of Plumber's Tape. He went about creating a snug covering that fit over the tops of the horses' hooves and secured the shoes on the bottom. Problem solved!

Mike kept checking on those horses, and noticed that the damaged hooves were rapidly healing. He suspected that his fix had relieved some kind of circulation problem. Mike began experimenting with his "shoe fix" and gradually developed an invention that would revolutionize the medical treatment of founder in horses. He called it the "Nolan Hoof Plate," and within a few years, Mike held several design and medical patents on his invention. Today, Nolan Hoof Health, the business that Mike established, is going strong. And the Nolan Hoof Plate has saved thousands of horses around the world, not only from founder but from a number of other equine foot and hoof circulation troubles.

A few years ago, Mike began looking for adventure in an additional career — as a member of a Pacific Northwest Crab Boat crew during the annual Alaskan crab-fishing seasons. It was incredibly tough and dangerous work, and he loved it. If you ever watched "The Deadliest Catch" on television, that was the second career Mike was doing until his death. He had just rejoined his boat for the new season when he fell ill and had to return to Ohio.

The many horse and fishing stories that he told Barb and me at our house last year were amazing. Mike was a fine and interesting man.

Being on this Reunion Committee and re-connecting with people like Mike Nolan is the joy. And a loss like Mike is the sorrow.