

Michael “Mike” Pfaffinger died December 6, 2021, surrounded by loved ones at his home, after a challenging two-year journey with cancer. During this entire journey, Mike demonstrated incredible courage and grace, and maintained his sense of humor, calm and caring for others throughout it all. To the very end, he was more focused on living than dying.



Mike was born in Blue Earth, Minnesota, and raised on the family farm, where he assisted with the farming operation throughout his youth. He graduated in 1980 from Blue Earth High School, where he was a member of the wrestling team. Mike attended college at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall before transferring to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering. Mike spent his entire career working in the Twin Cities medical device industry and was passionate about helping to create products that improved people’s lives and health outcomes. His work history included ev3, Covidien, and most recently, Medtronic Inc., where he served as a principal reliability engineer.

In his 20s and 30s, Mike was passionate about playing competitive ultimate frisbee, where he made long and lasting friendships. In recent years, Mike became passionate about mountain biking, and loved nothing better than getting out on the trails in places near (Theodore Wirth, Elm Creek, Duluth) and far (Sedona and Costa Rica) with his wife, Gail, his friends, and his sons. Mike said he enjoyed mountain biking because it got you off the beaten path and fully immersed you in the most beautiful surroundings. Because you didn’t just arrive at a place; you experienced it more deeply. Communing with nature was sacred to him. He loved good music and left behind many special memories for those who saw live concerts with him (the Radiators, Jackson Browne, U2, and Fleetwood Mac, to name just a few). He paid close attention to the news and national and world events, often reading articles beyond the headlines. He leaned strongly into fairness and social justice.

Mike was dedicated, loyal, kind, and compassionate. To be loved by Mike was to know love that was constant and deep. His love for his sons, Jack and Joe, and his wife, Gail, knew no bounds. This circle of love extended to Gail’s son, Jack; Mike’s siblings and their spouses; his extended family; his former wife, J; and his many dear friends.

The core of Mike’s spirituality was the belief in and appreciation for connection — that we are all connected with each other, with this Earth, and with something much larger. The spiritual practice that was most meaningful to him, even and especially when he was suffering, was gratitude — for the beauty and wonder in this world, for the special moments in life, and most of all for the people who were near and dear to him, including the doctors, nurses and others who cared for him with such compassion during his cancer journey.

Memorials in Mike’s name can be made to Habitat for Humanity or the Life Raft Group (liferaftgroup.org), which supports research into GIST cancer, or please donate blood to the American Red Cross, to help Mike’s family “give back” for the many transfusions that kept him alive these past few precious years.

In Memoriam



Mike Pfaffinger

June 18, 1962 - December 6, 2021

Memorial Service for Mike Pfaffinger
Tuesday, December 21, 2021 • 2:00 p.m.

GATHERING MUSIC

Ahmed Anzaldúa, piano

TOLLING OF THE BELL

PRELUDE

Holy Now by Peter Mayer
Tony Kukich

OPENING WORDS AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Rev. Leslie Mills

WORDS ON GRIEF AND PRAYER

Rev. Leslie Mills

RESPONSIVE READING

We Need One Another by George E. Odell

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.

We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for someone to share our triumphs.

We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.

All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

SILENCE

MUSIC

If I Should Fall Behind by Bruce Springsteen
Tony Kukich
Jess Focht-Perlberg

READING

Instructions by Arnold Crompton
Robert Pfaffinger

COLLAGE OF VOICES

Rev. Leslie Mills

REMEMBRANCES

Mary Focht
Gail O'Kane

MUSIC

The Only Child by Jackson Brown

READING

Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye
Kate Pfaffinger

EULOGY

Rev. Leslie Mills

MUSIC

Deep Peace by Sara Thomsen
Jess Focht-Perlberg
Jenny OMalley

BENEDICTION

Rev. Leslie Mills

POSTLUDE

Peace Train by Cat Stevens/Playing For Change