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Friends remember 'Will Call Dave'

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David Paige, a box office man, nature photographer and student of aliens, left a 14-year trail in Greenville when he died at 46 on his kitchen floor, his arteries filled with plaque.

Paige, born when his sisters were already teens, was "an extension of me," says his mother Ruth, of Boston. All green eyes and dimples, an honors graduate of the Boston Latin School, Paige tried an astonishing gamut of jobs including a stint at the IRS, a ticket-taking gig for the Boston Red Sox and a run at traveling as a DJ.

Anything that brought pleasure and made him pennies would do, Ruth said. In the end, he was "Will Call Dave" at the Greenville Drive stadium and a photographer of downtown tableaus that now hang in City Hall, the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport and the U.S. ambassador's residence in Ottawa, Canada.

Once he settled here for good, Paige's genial presence in the Drive box office would have brought him in contact with thousands of local residents. His photos, an artifact of his life, remain in contact with thousands more.

He was "my most reliable ticket worker," said Paul Ortenzo, the ticket operations manager for the Drive. Though it was a seasonal job, he knew the staff extremely well, would talk at length about photography and the Red Sox.

Talk to Ortenzo, or his mother, and it becomes clear that Paige was less concerned about a course of work than about strolling through a different experience, whatever suited him.

In Boston, he laminated ginko leaves for natural jewelry. He tried DJ school and Web design. He hated working at the IRS, where he had to inform "little old ladies like his mother" that they had to come up with some money or get kicked out of their homes, Ruth said.

He moved to Greenville at a friend's invitation and lived for a time in a caretaker's cottage in Travelers Rest. An alien devotee, he spent a year in Roswell, N.M., seeing all the famous alien sites, watching an alien play that he loved, driving 150 miles per day to make \$8 an hour just so he could stay through Alien Week.

Ultimately, he was lonely there, Ruth said. He returned to the green of South Carolina's kudzu. His Web site devoted to aliens developed into a quirky homage to "the great Lask Albohe," who, according to Paige, has visited earth and adores doughnuts.

City Manager Jim Bourey said he met Paige at a Drive game and had a conversation at the Will Call window, where he learned about Paige's photography. When he later saw the scenes of Falls Park, Bourey said he was impressed and the city paid to print and frame two of them, with officials taking one to Greenville native and U.S. ambassador to Canada David Wilkins as a gift.

Paige had taken up photography when a Web client paid him with a camera, Ruth said.

At the end of October, just before Ruth was scheduled for brain surgery, she noticed that her son hadn't placed his usual daily call. Neither had he shown up for work at his off-season job at the Peace

Center. Neighbors were called, they looked in the windows of the house his mother had bought him and saw him on the kitchen floor.

He'd never been to the doctor, Ruth said. Her surgery went well, but it won't bring him back.

She'll now travel to the places he loved and spread his ashes.

"I would never put David in the ground," she said. "It's not where he belongs."

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