

# **The Eulogy for Richard H. Emmons**

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**Karlo and Sons Funeral Home  
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by

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From his father, Harry H. Emmons, Dick inherited an appreciation for that first great American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, I think, must have been his father's passion the way astronomy was for Dick. Leafing through a collection of Emerson's quotable thoughts I came across this one that caught my eye...

"Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee, and do not try to make the universe a blind alley."

Be an opener of doors! Probably each of you here today could testify to the ways Dick Emmons, consciously or not, took that counsel to heart. As an engineer and scientist he was about the task of discovery and understanding. As a teacher his delight was in finding ways to be generous in sharing those things. It started when he was just a teenager writing little pieces on astronomy for the Canton paper and even for the local radio station. And as all of you know, it continued one way or other all his life. In his last few weeks, though clouded by pain and medication, his mind and heart were still with young people. What new lesson could he prepare, if there was something to help the children he urgently wanted to do it. One more door to open for such as come after.

I didn't know it until I think it was at his birthday party in May, some of you were there I think. I didn't know it, but Dick it turns out also enjoyed opening doors for the squirrel that frequented the backyard! He'd patiently feed the little critter on the back porch, talk to it I guess, win its confidence and little by little coax it over the threshold of that sliding door until I'm led to believe the little bugger felt right at home there in the dining room!

I and my friend Dave Gill share an appreciation for another sometimes student of Emerson's, the naturalist Loren Eisley, and if you've read anything of his you'd recognize that meeting a squirrel in your dining room is nothing less than a moment of revelation. What must that creature born for grass and trees have made of Dick's world of carpet and telescopes! The squirrel had been endowed by nature, which is to say it had evolved, enough of the attribute of "cuteness" to make the human an easy mark. I'm thinking the squirrel played Dick like a fiddle!

**But, in Dick's world there's something called the Copernican revolution, geosynchronous satellites, glass pushing and averted vision- an angle of vision peculiar to astronomers and something Eisley would have intuitively understood. There could be no point coaxing the squirrel to cross this other threshold. But, the universe is not a blind alley! Over an immense journey we who were once creatures born for grass and trees crossed through an opened door, or rather myriads of doors, to awake to what? Today especially, this hour especially, we ask- to a world, a universe that is a blind alley? Let me read a passage by Emerson from an essay called "Circles".**

**"The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary picture is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world. St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere and its circumference nowhere. We are all our lifetime reading the copious sense of this first of forms. One moral we have already deduced in considering the circular or compensatory character of every human action. Another analogy we shall now trace, that every action admits of being outdone. Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens."**

**Amidst our doubts and fears, caught between respect for science and suspicion of the supernatural, how speak of heaven or of God? Save for this revelation, an invitation to that learned ignorance taught to us by squirrels and starlight nights when we confess how mind alone is unable to grasp the All, but how the heart coaxes us toward that other threshold. Dick was still opening doors, all kinds of door, to the end of his life...**

**Dick would sometimes say to me how much he enjoyed this or that article I would write for our club newsletter, the Horizon. I'm not much of an observer so I didn't think I'd have much to offer him, but he seemed to genuinely enjoy my poking around among various myths and symbols for the ways the heavens have contributed to our cultural imagination. I remember writing a while back on that much misused and maligned book in the Bible, The Revelation. It surprised me to rediscover with some contemporary scholars how much astronomical imagery is there that has long been forgotten and overlooked.**

**"After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here... Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this." Rev. 4:1**

**This seer John goes on to tell of twenty four thrones and seven flaming torches and the four living creatures- one like a lion, one and ox, one a man, another like an eagle. In the church they are the tellers of the Good News, emblems for the evangelists. But, all of it is symbolism drawn from the heavens available to stargazers and aiming at capturing a faint glimmer of that All, that completeness that evades our grasp, that larger circle, that deeper down, that ending that is a new beginning.**