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Craig Burross (1962-2024) - A Celebration of his Life & Legacy

Craig Burross – legend of the professional entertainment lighting industry – sadly passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on 23rd May 2024.

Known and loved across North America and much further worldwide, his numerous achievements include a fantastic 33-year career working in sales and management with some of the leading and pioneering moving light technology brands.

He was a devoted family man with a huge heart, an innate sense of kindness, and an infectious smile who loved life, lived it to the max, and always pushed the boundaries of experience.

He was passionate about learning from and sharing knowledge and experience with others, and a huge inspiration to the many he touched in both his personal and professional lives, from aspiring young lighting designers to his family and the numerous friends and colleagues to whom he brought vibrance, energy and the power of positive thinking.

Craig is survived by his wife and love of his life Kat Burross, sons Caden Burross, Chase Anderson and Matt Anderson; daughter Paige Anderson, two grandchildren Josephine and Fiona and brothers Steve, Terry, and Kevin Burross, plus his many industry buddies, cohorts, and companions.

Cool Kid

Craig was born on August 6th, 1962, and raised in Wichita Falls, Texas, USA, one of four siblings – all boys! He had a happy childhood, attended the S.H. Rider High School and it was obvious from early on that he was always going to be a complete individual and an exceptional person.

His teenage dream at this time was to become a professional musician, so huge enthusiasm went into playing drums – he had a natural sense of rhythm – and occasionally guitar – in several local and college bands. He was the archetypal high school cool kid ... and killer handsome to boot!

Craig then studied studio audio engineering in Irving, Dallas, Texas ... still with a music career in mind, and after gaining his degree, one of his bands, Blitzkrieg – yes, naturally a metal band – was successful enough to hit the road and engage in nationwide touring.

Five indestructible lads on a wild and wacky adventure gigging around the US in a van after the elusive rock 'n' roll dream, by all accounts having serious fun!

In spite of some near brushes with success – numerous anecdotes like fuelling their van post-show at the same gas station in LA as the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, also refilling after a gig and completely unknown at the time – the young Craig realised he needed a bit more stability and – more importantly – some proper income in his life!

Rocking Up!

He returned to Texas and was working at cinema company Victor Duncan in Dallas selling gels, tapes, and other expendables, when he was 'discovered' by production designer / author Richard Cadena who was then working at a manufacturing company in Austin, Texas, called High End Systems.

High End was building its first entertainment moving mirror /scanner lights at the time, they were right at the cutting edge of this nascent technology and business was booming. They needed to build a serious sales force ... and Craig rocked up!

Richard recalls the moment Craig first walked into High End in 1991. He was super sharply dressed – he always had a strong sense of 'visuality' and impeccable dress sense – with his matinee idol looks.

The place came to a standstill as jaws dropped and everyone marvelled at the celestial-like figure in front of them!

Apart from that, they immediately picked up on his great affability, warmth, communication skills, his beaming smile, wicked sense of humour, together with his zest for being a team player and enthusiasm for being part of this new and exciting technology.

Bob Schacherl, then president of HES, hired him immediately as northeast sales manager, and he stayed there for the next 10 years, operating as a super-salesman building professional and personal relationships and networks, many of which would last for the rest of his life.

By 2001, Bob Schacherl had moved to Vari*Lite in Dallas and head-hunted Craig to be on his sales team there, so he relocated to New Jersey to do this, but in 2004 returned to Austin and Barco / High End, where he remained until 2014.

Wanting new challenges and horizons, Craig then joined Robe's rapidly expanding North America operation where Bob was also now the CEO.

As always, he excelled, and at Robe worked his magic as part of a fabulous team including then CFO/COO and now CEO Lorienn Cochenour. The Robe years culminated with him becoming Chief Sales Officer for North America and part of Robe's vibrant international team.

Passion

For 33 years, Craig thrived at the forefront of the entertainment lighting industry, moving-and-grooving, attending shows, concerts, and festivals, encouraging, and appreciating people's creative and technical achievements first-hand.

He built numerous lasting and meaningful friendships and mutually respectful long-term working relationships whilst selling some of the most cutting-edge products on the market, spreading and sharing his incredible zest for life everywhere he went.

He was extremely passionate about the lighting community, he loved the industry camaraderie and relationships, and building viable, genuine, and sustainable support systems was an important goal and central to his world.

It wasn't a job for him, it was simply what he absolutely loved doing!

His vast network of colleagues, acquaintances, and friends – even those working for competitor companies – all echo these same thoughts and reflections and remember him as a beacon of positive energy, someone who is strong and resolute even in the toughest moments.

Positivity

His friendship with Robert Mokry of LightParts Inc., dates from the early High End days.

"Craig had one of the most consistently positive attitudes of anyone I've ever met," states Robert. "Honestly, I don't know how he did it sometimes! Even when he was fighting Stage 4 cancer (diagnosed 2017 and in remission from 2021), never once did he have any victim pity for himself. It was just a relentless 'I'm gonna beat this' and he would say it really matter of factly, and guess what, he beat it! His example spoke volumes. He could either be a victim or a survivor, and Craig was gonna be a survivor!"

Three Amigos

Another very strong bond developed with lighting designer Stephen Lieberman who he initially met in 1995 – in a lounge / restaurant called "Match" in SoHo, New York City – mused Stephen recalling the

details. Stephen was together with Tony Perez – now International Business Development Manager for Robe Maritime – and some other friends at the time.

Stephen noted that Craig “influenced all aspects of my life”, and while initially united through their chosen profession, Craig’s influence and warmth extended to Stephen’s wife Michele and their children Jack and Sophia to whom he was like an older brother and uncle.

“Craig left an indelible mark on everyone with whom he had a relationship, even if it was casual, he just had an uncanny ability to make you feel comfortable! His impact on our industry has been remarkable!”

In the early 1990s, Tony Perez was living and working in New York City, building nightclubs and special production events and Craig was High End’s NE sales manager living in Austin, and frequently travelling. He was visiting some clubs that Tony and his team were building at that time and the two men “immediately hit it off,” explained Tony.

Tony reckons Craig's biggest influence on his life was when he convinced him to work on cruise ships. “Trusting him turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. Because of Craig, I met my wife, Cass, and we have two beautiful girls!” declared Tony.

Asked about his fondest memories of time spent with Craig, Tony recalls those times he, Stephen and Craig would get together when Craig was in town or when the ‘Three Amigos’ were at a trade show or a gig! “We spent countless nights listening and dancing to the best house music in the most amazing clubs or music festivals, all hanging out at Steve's lighting booth!

“I would give anything to be able to spend one more night together with Craig and Steve,” says Tony, vowing that he and Stephen “will continue to carry Craig's torch of brightness and keep his memories alive!”

Love of his Life

Craig will be remembered for many things, but Stephen is adamant he would most want to be remembered as a loving husband and the patriarch of his family.

“This truly meant everything to him... he spoke about Kat with such love – it was profoundly evident that they were meant to be together,” states Stephen.

Craig and Kat go back to the S.H. Rider High School in Wichita Falls ... proving that sometimes the patch of true love takes a bit of time and a few twists!

Craig was a couple of years above Kat, so while she was aware of who he was – being one of the cool kids who all the girls fancied – their paths didn't cross so much back then. However, she does distinctly remember one time when he gave her a ride home in his car as she'd missed her regular lift. Kat giggles while recalling that she was actually flirting with another guy at the time ... and naturally Craig was the perfect gentleman.

Fast forward to 2009, Kat received a Facebook 'you might know this person' pop up! She was slightly reticent initially but also intrigued, so tentatively connected and asked if he remembered her, to which the reply was "Hell yes!" in true Craig fashion!

Some regular online interaction ensued, then a few months later, May 15th, 2009, there was a High School reunion in Wichita Falls which they both attended ... and in fact, Craig cancelled a business trip to be there!

When they met in person, it was instant fireworks Kat remembers. From there, a deep and lasting bond of affection and a dynamic friendship developed ... as if it was always meant to be.

On April 1st, 2013, they were married. "So many people thought it was an April Fool's joke, so we even carried the marriage certificate around with us for a while!" she explained.

"He took me on a complete adventure," says Kat, starting with their honeymoon in Hawaii, where they rented a motorbike and blissfully cruised between beaches, bars, ocean views and sunsets.

Eye Opener

Kat would frequently accompany Craig on his business trips, and they also travelled extensively for their own leisure. There were never any dull moments!

Craig's incredible energy, enthusiasm for life and experience took Kat to many new and exciting places, "He opened my eyes to so much, and I always felt totally safe with him, even when he sometimes decided to explore the edgier parts of a location!" she recalls.

"I certainly got a Ferrari there," she says referring to the speed and appetite with which he consumed life. "He was irrepressible – none of us could keep up, even my sons who were half his age!" she quips.

Their deep commitment to one another and desire and willingness to share everything ensured their families blended seamlessly into one.

Craig's intelligence and wit were also unstoppable, "He was always joking and laughing, sometimes his comments could be a little raw and unfiltered, but it was so much part of his persona," Kat confirms.

In Kat, he found his rock, his soul mate, the love of his life.

When Kat stayed at home and Craig was away, she would be working on the projects including the house and there would usually be some new aspect of the property - a patio, feature wall or part of the garden - to surprise him when he returned.

They also enjoyed gardening and cooking together. "He loved all the details," she recalls, "Even if we were cooking something straightforward like burgers, we would go through this whole mission of procuring the right ingredients and a full preparation routine - it was a complete creative process!"

Music

Music played and remained a major part of Craig's life even when his career switched to production technology.

He had an impressive collection of vintage guitars which he loved to play... as well as some keyboards, and a selection of drum kits - including a wonderful and rare set of 1970s 'blue sparkle' Ludwigs, actually donated to the Burross household by Robert Mokry when he bought another kit!

These were proudly set up in the recording studio that Craig built at his and Kat's home in Austin.

He was also a keen - and competitive - golfer and enjoyed the intellectual rigor of playing chess, together with making A LOT of noise playing music in the home studio. Often, he would invite friends around to join him. "It got loud!" notes Kat.

Faith

Like many others, Kat believes that the bedrock of Craig's strength of character, his steely resolve, his loyalty and ultimate humanity and love of people was informed by his strong faith.

As Robert Mokry puts it, he was "an honest, compassionate, decent man of faith who loved and cared for his family, friends, and business associates very well. He lived 'The Golden Rule', not just talked about it, and thus he simply treated others as he would like to be treated.

"His belief in God and Christian values informed the honourable way he lived his life and conducted his business."

Family Business

In addition to the dedication, technical expertise, and hard work that Craig put into his roles at Robe North America, Kat underlines how he was happy to be working for a company that is also known for its 'family' vibes and decent and responsible attitude to business. It was an invigorating international enterprise, a place where he felt a valued part of the team and comfortable among his friends and colleagues.

Work-wise, no one will feel the gap left by his untimely passing more than the Robe Family.

Tony Perez notes that he and Lori frequently spoke about "how lucky we were to have Craig in our lives!", and when Craig finally convinced Tony to return to Robe Lighting as IBDM for the Maritime division and under his auspices four and a half years ago, he jumped at the opportunity.

Craig 4 Ever

Robe North America CEO Lori acknowledges the difference he made. "His industry knowledge, expertise, and experience were instrumental to our success throughout North America and around the world. He was a dear friend, a wonderful partner, and a beautiful human being."

"We spent many long hours together and his passing has left an undeniable hole in my heart. While he will be missed greatly from a business perspective, it is even more so as my close, personal friend," she speaks.

Robe Lighting CEO and co-founder Josef Valchar states, "Craig was truly a special person, ultimately respected by the lighting industry and anyone who had the chance and privilege to work or engage with him.

He was a good friend and one of the nicest people I've ever met - always very helpful and kind.

His passing is a big loss for our industry. He will be missed by everyone - his family, all his Robe colleagues, numerous friends and of course the entire professional lighting community.

May his soul rest in peace. His light will continue to shine in all of us!"

And the last words in this short profile are from the two remaining Amigos ...

Tony Perez writes that he is "so honored to have been able to spend these past 32 years working and sharing my life with Craig! We have lost our brother and will miss Craig's laughter, joy, and unconditional love. Until we see each other again!"

Stephen Lieberman comments, "Craig - I am so grateful for our friendship and so heartbroken that you are gone. You will be forever a part of my life! Little sayings that were quintessentially "CB" have become part of my vernacular - long before you passed. I will miss you ... I love you. Rest in peace brother."

The Craig Burross spirit and legacy will keep rocking this planet!

