I am a Distinguished Professor of Biogeochemistry at the University of California, Riverside, and director of a new team within the NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI). I mention the latter because my former student, Noah Planavsky, now an Assistant Professor in Geology and Geophysics at Yale, is the institutional director of the substantial Yale arm of this new NAI team. I think Bob loved the idea of his growing academic family—from the first generation to his academic grandchildren and beyond.

I was at Yale from the mid-80s to the earliest 90s, working on my PhD with Bob as my primary advisor. I remember so well the delight I felt when I learned of my opportunity to attend Yale and work with him. This was really the only option I pursued for a PhD, such was the respect and interest I already had for his work.

Already then Bob was famous for so many different lines of research. It sounds corny, but I've described him as the Picasso of low-temperature geochemistry. He would dominate or, more often, create a fundamentally new area of research and then blaze another path, often in a very different area of research, for others to follow. His impact runs so deep and in so many directions that it's impossible to quantify. I was particularly drawn to his passion for using elegant and, at times, relatively simple approaches to address Earth history—specifically the evolution of life and its environment.

Bob was always drawn to the important question rather than the slickest new technique, unless needed for the questions at hand. This fostered a constant sense for the big picture—the why and when. And it belied his brilliant and nuanced understanding of the most complex aspects of any problem. He cut right to the chase. Through it all, he remained one of the most geo-centric geochemists the field has ever seen and in the process helped make Yale THE place for sedimentary geochemistry—in a way that has never been matched anywhere else. This legacy, carried on through his students and post-docs, is unequalled in the field.

The good fortune I felt being accepted to work with Bob continued once I arrived at Yale. Early in my time there he walked into my office and asked if I would like to study the Black Sea for my thesis project. He had an offer for precious lab space on an upcoming research cruise. His cachet within the field was such that special opportunities like this came along often. As students, we thrived in his shadow. I jumped at the chance to sail in the Black Sea, and that decision set the stage for the rest of my career.

My experience with Bob has been a guiding light and a badge I wear proudly. I learned that one can think critically without criticizing. I learned that a research group can be driven by passion rather than pettiness, and so friendships and the sense of extended family and loyalty felt during my time in New Haven stand strong today. In all my experience, Bob exemplified the concept that well-motivated, competitive researchers discuss science not scientists. His heart was as big as his brain, and all his charming outside interests and eccentricities—from wine to music to sport—are the stuff of legend. He showed us the value of finding the right balance between the personal and professional parts of our lives. For all his charms, though, spotting his wonderful wife Betty across a room was every bit the delight. Betty and Bob allowed us into their lives in such genuine ways.

Like so many others privileged to work with Bob, I have remained unfalteringly loyal and grateful for my Yale years, and my hope has always been that my own students will experience a little bit of the magic Bob brought into our lives. He was the best possible mentor for science but also a role model for how to be a demanding but modest and positive mentor—and friend. We've lost someone very special.

Tim Lyons