

Remembering Dustin J. Geeraert (1983–2024)



Sketch of Dustin by Christopher Crocker.

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR

It is with profound sadness that we remember Dustin J. Geeraert who passed away suddenly at his home in Winnipeg on October 15, 2024, at the age of 41. Though gone too soon, Dustin left behind a legacy as a scholar, teacher, artist, and long-distance cyclist whose brilliance and spirit touched everyone who knew him.

A Brilliant and Complex Mind

Those who knew Dustin remember him as one of the most intelligent people they had ever met. His knowledge stretched wide and deep, and he could argue a point with such persistence that few could keep up with him. Dustin was firmly traditional in some of views and decidedly radical in others. He resisted modern technology—famously refusing to use a smartphone—and thrived on vigorous discussion. Although in some ways he was uncompromising, this was also part of what made him unforgettable: passionate, original, and unafraid to think differently.

Scholar and Teacher

Dustin studied English and Icelandic literature at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Manitoba, completing his PhD in 2016 on medievalism and modern reinterpretations of Norse mythology. His great scholarly love was the figure of Loki, the trickster of Norse legend, whose shifting reputation across centuries mirrored Dustin's fascination with how myth and culture change in times of upheaval.

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At the University of Manitoba, he became a devoted instructor in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature. His courses on Norse mythology, Icelandic sagas, and folklore were remembered for their intellectual depth, humour, and creativity. Students praised him as approachable, detailed in his lectures, and deeply committed to their success.

He brought creativity into teaching—organizing trips to New Iceland, inviting guest speakers, encouraging imaginative projects, and even securing a city permit for a bonfire framed as a religious and cultural event, though he passed away before it could be held.

Endurance, Creativity, and Play

Dustin's talents were many. He was a naturally gifted artist, sketching and drawing with humour and sensitivity. In this respect, he took some inspiration from another of his scholarly loves, William Morris. Dustin was also a gifted and published fiction writer. One such work was included in a volume he co-edited titled *The Shadow Over Portage & Main*, an emblematic book of the deep relationship Dustin developed with Winnipeg. In addition, he had a love for endurance challenges, most famously bicycling across Canada. Friends and family recall his ability to combine playfulness with seriousness, silliness with brilliance. He could be uncompromising and stubborn, but he was also endlessly creative, patient, and generous.

Community and Connection

Dustin had a special relationship with Iceland and Icelandic scholars, working closely with colleagues abroad and contributing to the Icelandic-Canadian community through writing, teaching, and public engagement. His article “Valhalla in Manitoba: An Icelandic Department Trip to New Iceland” was published in the 2024 volume of *Icelandic Connection*. Dustin travelled several times to Iceland, at one point acting as tour guide for his family and friends to the saga-steeds of the country.

Following his passing, the Consulate General of Iceland in Winnipeg hosted a memorial reception. Around 60 people attended—family, colleagues, students, and friends—sharing stories that caused both laughter and tears. Though the occasion was sorrowful, it was also a celebration of his spirit, leaving attendees with warmth in their hearts.

A Brother, Uncle, and Son

For Dustin's family, the loss is immeasurable. His sister Lindsay reflected: “We still feel the emptiness of his absence so strongly it is unbearable at times, but carrying on Dustin's widespread interests will be a lifelong task for his loved ones. With this, I hope to keep Dustin forever living within my heart.”

His sister-in-law Erin wrote to her daughter Norah, who never had the chance to meet him: “Your Uncle Dustin was playful with no self-consciousness, with incredible endurance and enthusiasm, with patience, and with creativity. He was a naturally gifted artist who would have taken whatever ideas you had and brought them to life in cartoons, just for you. He was irreplaceable, and we are sad you never got the chance to meet, but confident he would have made your life better.”

His brother Bryce shared: “Losing a brother has left a big hole in my heart and in our family. Dustin was passionate, brilliant, challenging, silly, ambitious, humble, and generous to his loved ones all at once. Dustin built community wherever he went. When I sing Radiohead or Pink Floyd to my daughter as she falls asleep, I know my brother is still with me, and that’s never going to go away.”

Voices of His Students

Perhaps Dustin’s most enduring legacy is in the words of his students, who remember him not just as a professor, but as a guide and friend. But you need not take my word for it. I refer you to three of his students on this matter.

This professor is one of the most down-to-earth and caring I’ve had. His lectures are detailed, but his tangents were fascinating and his support was always there when I needed it. A true gem of a human.

Probably the best professor I have ever had. Attend lectures and you will be golden. His excitement about sharing his passion was contagious.

Dustin is amazing. He has a very approachable, encouraging demeanor and clearly excited about teaching. His classes were full of humour, guest speakers, and community events—one of my favourite courses in my degree.

Carrying His Memory Forward

Dustin is survived by his father, Allen of Saskatoon; his sister Lindsay and her children Emery and Declan; his brothers Coleman and Bryce (Erin) and their daughter Norah; his grandparents George and Wilma LaRose; and a wide circle of aunts, uncles, cousins, colleagues, and friends. He was predeceased by his mother Linda, grandparents Margaret and Henry Geeraert, and several aunts and uncles.

Though his life ended far too soon, Dustin’s memory will endure in the family who loved him, the students he inspired, the communities he strengthened, and the countless conversations and debates that will echo long into the future. He will be remembered as a brilliant thinker, a stubborn but generous debater, a creative spirit, and above all, a beloved son, brother, uncle, teacher, and friend.

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