

It was 1977 at a Utah falconers meet in Layton, Utah, where I was first introduced to Rick Guritzky. My first impression was a negative one. I was caught up in my own self-pride — “I’m the glorious falconer” — and I didn’t have time for a scruffy, curly-haired wannabe from California. I’m still eating crow for that, as a lot of people should be. After really getting to know Rick, which has been over fifty years now, he was someone you had to spend time with in order to understand his humor and sarcastic wit.

Richard “Rick” Jay Guritzky

1954–2025

By Bryce King

Rick began his falconry journey in California flying red-tails, kestrels, and Cooper’s hawks, even winning an award for the game his Cooper’s hawk caught. However, he had to leave California due to some youthful trouble with the law. When he arrived in Utah, he didn’t have much — just the shirt on his back, some falconry supplies, an old record player, and his VW Baja Bug. He found work at a tile company with an old-time Utah falconer, and since the tile company was a Who’s Who of falconers, it was perfect for a man who wanted to meet anyone who shared his passion for raptors.

We eventually got to talking at a falconry get-together and hit it right off. After that, Rick would come to my house, have something to eat, and then we’d go up to one of the Wasatch Front canyons looking for goshawks. It didn’t take long before we started finding them. After that, we caught the bug and began making weekly trips out to Utah’s deserts to look for prairie falcons. Rick was always good at getting information out of other falconers, and it was from the tile company owner where he learned how to trap birds. Getting to know the right people and learning as much as he could — from hunting methods to pigeon care — was a genuine gift of his.

That winter, Rick showed up at my house with his new Springer puppy. When it came to dogs, Rick was firm: “Springers were the best.” He named this little guy Mud, because he always got so muddy wherever they went. Rick’s way was to never baby his animals or help them too much during training — he believed that helped them learn. Mud soon became Rick’s best friend, and the best bird dog I ever had the pleasure of flying my birds over. Mud also had a tendency to get Rick into trouble at meets, running around and scaring birds not used to dogs. Even so, Rick didn’t believe his dogs should ever be on a leash. “Never tie a dog down,” he would say. “Put him in the car, but never tie a dog down.” Those



who allowed Mud into the field while they flew would almost always catch game, and it wasn't long before Utah falconers started bringing their own dogs to meets. I like to think Mud opened that door for the Utah boys.

Rick loved tiercels. In his opinion, a tiercel catches game for the falcon while she's on the nest, making him a more eager hunter — especially as spring approached. Rick was always thinking about things like that. Sometimes his ideas made sense, and sometimes his opinions rubbed people the wrong way, but there's nothing wrong with a good debate. Most of the time I trusted his ideas, and yes, they worked. He often used metaphors to explain them, so much so that he earned the nickname "The Metaphor King."

After a few years hunting near my parents' house, Rick tried his luck in northern Utah and then moved to Preston, Idaho, into a little farmhouse, working at a bakery. He felt the hours were perfect — a full-time job and still able to fly his birds. He hunted all around Cache Valley, always flying a passage prairie falcon, and became one of the best game hunters I knew, bagging over one hundred head a year — ducks, pheasants, huns, sharptail, and sage grouse — while I would usually get between forty and fifty.

During this time, we hacked some eyas prairie falcons together out of Preston. Rick always had confidence in the hack; I was always too cautious. The hack site was perfect — a great view overlooking the Bear River, miles of open fields, and two barns. I stayed to watch the birds while Rick worked his bakery shifts, leaving at three in the morning and returning by noon. If anyone knew Rick for long, they knew he was hard to live with — always teaching his philosophies, and if anything wasn't done the way he thought it should be, boy would he let you have it. He was my best friend, but boy was he hard to live with. Eventually I had enough, picked up my bird, and went home. As a result, Rick's tiercel flew off and was never recovered. I've always felt bad about that. But Rick just kept on plugging. He just loved and lived falconry.

He eventually got married and had four children: Misty, Philip (whom he adopted), Alan, and Ryan. He juggled flying birds, working, and raising a family — working grave shifts so his falconry wouldn't suffer. Rick's reputation had begun growing in falconry circles. His methods were rubbing off on anyone who flew birds with him, and his name and hunting techniques were even mentioned in the book *Romancing the Falcon*. At meets like the Utah Sky Trials, he would share his knowledge with anyone, new falconers and old-timers alike. Some falconers

get set in their ways and didn't always appreciate Rick's opinions, but if they had just given his ideas a try, they would have seen that he was on to something. It never stopped him. He knew what worked.

Rick always reminded me of a story from *The Bird of Jove*, about a meet in Germany for eagles. Everyone had their eagles trying to catch a bagged deer, but no one could. Then a scruffy-looking man in tattered clothes stepped up. He walked upwind, facing away from where the others had flown, and when he yelled "Release!" his eagle flew upwind and away from the running deer. The crowd laughed and jeered — "Your bird's going the wrong way!" Suddenly, the eagle turned with a wing-over stoop, and the deer was hit and held. The jeers turned to cheers. This story always reminded me of Rick — a little eccentric, a loner, but bursting with confidence. He was a falconer.

When I moved up to Logan, we became a team again. Peregrine falcons had been de-listed, and we each got one, flying game every day of the season. By now, Rick had become an expert in telemetry and GPS. He also started a peregrine breeding program, developing a tame hack method unlike anything I'd heard of before. He set up two chambers — one where the parents



hatched and raised the chicks, and a second next door where the young were transferred once old enough. A windowed wall with slats and ledges allowed the mother to still feed the babies while Rick could enter the young birds' side daily, simply making an appearance and giving them water with a spray bottle. The young birds became accustomed to him, making them far less frightened.

When ready, the hawk mews door was opened and the young birds practiced flying freely. Rick would e-chup — recreating the mother's call — to bring them back to eat, and close them in for the night. Eventually he'd go out into the field and throw a homing pigeon to get their attention, then toss a lure with meat. The birds learned to catch the lure with Rick and me standing nearby. Once hard-penned, Rick would manage their weight with expert precision — he always knew how much a bird weighed by how much it ate. When the birds were ready, we'd fly them, pick them up with food, hood them, and take them home. By the third day, we'd be flying them on game. His method worked for us for years.

During the 2025 hack, something went wrong. Rick's tiercel flew to a mountain near his home and didn't return for a full day. Rick tracked it and called me, and the next morning we went to search, bringing along his six-year-old granddaughter in flip-flops. The signal kept bouncing — pointing toward his house, then back up the mountain, then from a different direction entirely. I mentioned that I had once lost a bird where the telemetry behaved exactly the same way, the signal bouncing off a nearby rocky canyon. Rick said he'd never experienced that before, and I don't think he really believed me.

As we parted, he said he'd go back up after dropping his granddaughter off. I told him to be careful — the August grass was yellow, dry, and slick. He said he'd noticed. At around 4 p.m., he called to ask me to explain the bounce again. He believed his bird was probably dead and was going up to retrieve the transmitter. I told him to call me if he needed my ropes. He assured me he would be fine.

That night, while on the mountain, Rick fell to his death.

Rick contributed so much knowledge and understanding to the sport he loved, and I want the falconry world to know that he never received the acknowledgement and recognition he deserved while he was alive. He was always willing to help anyone who needed it, and while his manner wasn't always welcome, he was full of great ideas. He mastered flying a cast of peregrines, was the best game hawk I knew, a loving father, and caring to his fellow man. Rest in peace, Rick. You were the best. You are my best friend.





By Beth Myers

Richard “Rick” Guritzky lived the life of a true falconer. To those who knew him, falconry was never simply a hobby or sport. It was woven into the fabric of who he was. The rhythm of the seasons, the sound of wings cutting through cold autumn air, the loyalty of a good hunting dog, and the quiet understanding between falconer and hawk were the places where Rick felt most at home.

Born in California on October 21, 1954, Rick developed an early fascination with the natural world that would remain with him throughout his life. That fascination eventually became a lifelong devotion to falconry. For decades, he pursued the ancient art with passion, grit, patience, and deep respect for the birds he flew. Those closest to him knew that Rick was never happier than when standing beneath an open sky with a falcon overhead and dogs working the field ahead of him.

Rick’s style of falconry reflected the kind of man he was: independent, fearless, and authentic. He appreciated the

challenge and honesty of the hunt. He believed that the outdoors taught lessons that could not be learned anywhere else. Falconry, for Rick, was not about recognition or status. It was about connection. It was about trust earned over time between human, bird, dog, and wild country.

Fellow falconers remember Rick as someone who willingly shared his knowledge and experience. He enjoyed teaching others, offering advice, telling stories, and helping newer falconers understand not just the mechanics of flying birds, but the deeper respect required to practice the tradition correctly. His calm confidence and practical wisdom left a lasting impression on many people within the falconry community.

Outside of falconry, Rick lived fully and unapologetically. He loved fast cars, freedom, good conversations, and the people closest to him. Most of all, he loved his family. His children and grandchildren were a tremendous source of pride and joy in his life. Whether gathered around the family table or outdoors

sharing experiences together, Rick valued time spent with those he loved above everything else.

Rick passed away on August 15, 2025, while outdoors with his falcons and dogs, doing what he loved most. Though his passing left an immense void for his family and friends, it also reflected the life he chose to live: close to nature, close to his birds, and fully immersed in the pursuit that shaped him.

The legacy Rick leaves behind reaches far beyond the fields he hunted. It lives on in the falconers he mentored, the family he loved deeply, the memories shared around campfires and tailgates, and in every hawk flown by those who learned from him. His name now joins others remembered by The Archives of Falconry, honoring a life devoted to preserving and living the ancient tradition of falconry with authenticity, passion, and heart.