

By Marcia Glaze Wyatt  
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Eugene Cernan died today. For those of you who do not know who Gene Cernan was, he was an astronaut. Most notably, he walked on the moon. He was one of those select few who had that honor. And he was the last one to have done so. The year was 1972. It was during this final visit to the moon – the most protracted and probing of all lunar explorations - that he and geologist Harrison Schmitt collected lunar rocks, 240 pounds of them! They brought them back to earth. Clues of moon's birth and evolution are buried within these rocks.

During Cernan's time, the prevailing belief was that anything was possible. Given a dream and determination, no goal was unreachable. We were not smarter back then. Smart is not a trait unique to one generation or another. But what did distinguish us is that we were optimistic. We had faith. We had faith in a higher power and in ourselves. Intellect followed belief. A can-do spirit permeated the societal mindset. In turn, civilization's gains fostered humility and gratitude. Those who achieved the most were among the most modest. And with modesty, more gains were possible. Attention was paid to being grateful and being greater.

Interviews of Cernan over the last decade or so of his life revealed an unassuming man. Choking back emotion, he would declare his certainty of God's presence in nature's design. As a scientist, Cernan could explain features and phenomena; and he could offer hypotheses as to their evolution. But as a good scientist, devoid of hubris, Cernan knew his limitations. Never could he presume an ability to explain the perfection of it all. No one could. To study nature with no agenda is to know it is no accident, no mere lucky set of coincidences. There is no beginning; no end; no smallest; no largest. The more one looks, the more one finds. This is not to say there is a purpose or a destined plan. This is to say exactly this: it is no accident. It is too grand. We humans who think so much of our significance are a mere wink in time; a mere droplet in space. We are no more or no less a link in nature's tapestry than any other phenomenon or system. Amidst complexity, order emerges. Simplicity evolves from the clutter. All is necessary – the big and the small. All is intertwined and integrated – all connected to all. No reason is apparent. It just is. And that is its majesty. That majesty resides in the moon's soil, the star-scape beyond, a rock, a tree, where the ocean meets sand, and everywhere one looks. Where one sees it, reveals what resides within.

I will remember those years of faith and optimism. Awe punctuated time. With each space mission, life stood still. The earthbound effortlessly abandoned trivial pursuits for collective reflection. Feats of these pioneers filled our souls. This was my generation's defining epoch. And Cernan had been transformed by its essence. Through the lens of nature, Cernan had touched the hand of God...