

A Tribute to HHT Member & Volunteer Tom Kurtz *A Bright & Shining Star*

Jane Silk, HHT Foundation Member and Past President

If a “picture is worth a thousand words,” then one can honestly say that Tom Kurtz was a man who lived life to the fullest. Relaxing on his boat in the waters of Mexico, Tom is described by those who knew him as “larger than life.”

When I was President of the HHT Foundation, I met Tom Kurtz, developed a relationship, and in 2000 he started to volunteer for our Foundation helping out with our Patient and Family Conferences. He always had a “can do” attitude and we will miss him. When asked to write this article, I was in touch with Tom’s wife, Tisha, and his grown daughters, Julie and Ellen plus some of his closest friends. I feel that much of what they told me will give you a very good idea of just who this fun-loving man was—and so below, I’ve jotted down their thoughts in an extemporaneous way.

THE KING OF SAN FELIPE

Tom had a brilliant smile and great infectious laughter. A good looking man, he enjoyed living life to the max and having a good time. He was the “organizer” of many fun trips with family and friends. Starting in 1968 he started to organize trips to San Felipe, Mexico, where he would return over and over again through the years. His friends lovingly named him and Tisha, the King and Queen of San Felipe! Their trips to Mexico were spent surfing, scuba diving, fishing and riding motorcycles and dune buggies, cooking out on the beach, exploring volcanoes, turquoise mines and delivering clothes, toys and food to the poor. His energy was boundless. He was outgoing, the “cool” dad that every teenage boy wanted to be and that all adults admired... and at the same time, his standards and expectations of people were high. He was brilliant and his interests knew no bounds. He loved the opera, symphony, rock and roll. He could tie dye, cook with gusto, build things and fix cars. When his children were young, he would sit on their beds and sing and play the guitar. He and his daughters spent many days at the beach – playing in the water and

making sandcastles. In 1978, the Kurtz’s bought a condo in Mammoth, California, well known as a ski area. The idea came to fruition because a bunch of friends, all named “Tom”, returned there during many snow seasons. Tom and Tisha’s house in San Diego was always a place that people enjoyed being in and everyone felt welcome...be it the neighbors, local friends or those that they made on their travels all over the world. He was a wonderful and loving grandfather to Julie’s 16 year old daughter, Millie.



Tom relaxing on his boat in the waters of Mexico

A HOOSIER GOES WEST

Tom and Tisha, met as lifeguards in high school in Indianapolis, IN. When an offer came to move to San Diego in 1959 to work as an engineer for a division of General Dynamics known as Convair, a US aerospace development and manufacturing complex, he was thrilled – knowing he could pursue his love of everything that had to do with the ocean and the great outdoors, including skiing. To quote one friend, “never did a Hoosier turn so absolutely into a Californian as did TK.”

While working at Convair he was on the first test flight to monitor the effects of gravity before John Glenn’s historic ascent into space. Tom later went to work for Cubic, a company which designs instrumented range systems for fighter aircraft, armored vehicle and infantry force-on-force live training.

After a time at Cubic, he was offered a job as General Manager for Wavetek, a company that develops and markets general and special purpose electronic test and measurement instruments world wide. His position there enabled him to make many trips to Europe. After 23 years, Tom retired, hoping to spend as much time as possible continuing to enjoy his family, friends and travel.

MISSED BY FAMILY AND ALL THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

Sadly, Tom’s HHT got in the way. In addition to massive nosebleeds, there were many complications later in life with his heart, lungs and brain. Invasive infections and loss of balance were part of his daily life. Though well taken care of by the HHT Center in San Diego and Dr. Frank Miller, in the last year of his life, Tom ran fevers of 106 beckoning paramedics at least 5 times. The night before he died, he had another massive nosebleed, requiring 2 pints of blood. When he arrived at the emergency room, no one on duty knew about HHT. Returning home, Tom died the next day of heart failure. It was, coincidentally, his 70th birthday.

When Tom made a friend, that person was a friend for life. One of his close friends had this to say about him: “Tom Kurtz had been my friend since 1972. He always seemed bigger than life to me and it is difficult to imagine he is gone. My favorite memories of Tom are all the trips we made to San Felipe, Mexico and the time we spent on the beach at sunset. He would have Nights in White Satin by the Moody Blues playing as the moon rose over the water. It always seemed like he was actually orchestrating the rising of the moon itself.”

From the descriptions above of this man who loved life, his fellow man, and all creatures of the land and sea, everyone with whom I had contact expressed how much they missed having Tom in their lives. He continuously filled them with spirit and enrichment.

Thank you, Tom, for adding sunshine to so many people’s lives.