



Thomas E. Houllahan

October 15, 2018

Thomas E. Houllahan, 85, passed away Monday, October 15, 2018 embraced by the love of his immediate family, wife Bobbi, sons Rob and Michael, daughter Cary Ekelund, granddaughter Kyla , and niece Judy Donahue. Also keeping vigil were son-in-law Dana Ekelund and granddaughter Zoe Ekelund.

Tom was born July 23, 1933, the son of John Houllahan and Catherine (Cunningham) Houllahan. A series of terrible family tragedies occurred which resulted in Tom and his three siblings being placed in an orphanage, St. Aloysius Home, Greenville, Rhode Island.

As a nine-year old boy Tom sat in the chapel asking God, "Why am I here?" He found some answers in a room full of books, woods for making forts, ponds to skate on. After years of orphanage and foster "care," Tom chose to stay in Greenville while his siblings moved to Providence to live with his older sister. He had friends; a bicycle paper route, played sports, and was sent by the town to La Salle High School. Working factory jobs year- round, Tom worked his way through Providence College earning a BA in Letters in 1956.

In Korea in 1957 just after the fighting, PFC Tom was impressed by the resilience of a war-torn people and the beauty of Japan. His service stint resulted decades later in tremendous aid this year from the VA.

Tom found a job in District 5 of the Providence welfare department. RI sent him to Boston College to get his MSW in clinical social work in 1964. Often hitchhiking his first year, he "misspent" the next living and drinking on Beacon Street, turning in excellent papers, and making friends. During one rowdy party, police arrived with threats to call the BC dean. "Oh fine, he's right over there!" Buoying times for a shy guy who later became union president back in Providence

In April 1966 Tom met Bobbi, a set-up maneuvered by her mother and the Morans. He always claimed he, "Listened as Bobbi talked all night".

The second time they met months later, he said, "I'm going to marry you." She said, "OK!" Silly girl: a romantic evening for two the first year of marriage, Tom arrived late to candle stubs and cold pigeon. And this established the priorities they would live by for the next fifty-plus years doing what one could to make better the lives of others in need. Tom and Bobbi shared over five decades of love, laughter, sadness, anger, joy. Supportive of each other's passions and endeavors, they also shared unforgettable trips, opera, Brown orchestra, dancing after his two beers, three job losses each, and, finally, 2018 Red Sox. Tom never totally acquiesced to the "sticks and leaves" approach to nutrition foisted on him by a concerned spouse.

Tom had unconditional love for and pride in his family; he felt blessed and grateful to be a father and to have a real family after his years of deprivation. Tom's pride in his children and grandchildren was palpable; it shone from him like a beacon. He delighted in them, in each of their unique, individual talents and their remarkable strength to be themselves. A legacy of hardship from years of orphanage, fostering, loneliness miraculously gave Tom the resilience to become the compassionate person that he was, a stubborn Irishman, fighter for justice with an innate sense of ethics, loyalty, forbearance, and kindness: for Washington Oaks adjudicated youth; ACI inmates, training school to Maximum; hemophiliacs with HIV AIDS in the early 80's; Fall River elderly; kidney transplant patients; MSW clinical practice clients; and, retuning full circle to Olneyville counseling disabled children at CITE school; and of course, his family and friends.

Retiring in 2001 from the kidney transplant unit RI Hospital his supervisor said, "Tom truly treats his clients and pretty nearly everyone else with the utmost respect...an excellent psychotherapist who helps his clients find their own lost motivation and strength...who pitches in when the system is letting them down...stepping up to the plate when there's too many cases.

Tom was considered a "fall risk" with over 40 falls the past several years; he never wanted to give up. Learning to fall and several concussions from a lifetime of hockey may also have contributed to Parkinson's. At St. Aloysius Home, he hid his found skates and never stopped skating. With the Warwick Warriors, Tom made the first (only?) international goal in Montreal. At 60, he joined the Rhodie Oldies and, until 2011, served as treasurer for coffers never full enough to embezzle., He never stopped asking docs if he could skate again.

For the past seven months Tom endeared himself to the staff of Linn Health Care Center (LHCC) who cared for him with gentle compassion. Tom often consulted pro bono with LHCC social worker Richalie Cotter, sharing his extensive clinical social work experience

as well as developing a program for fellow dementia patients... a beautiful honoring of his life's work.

From Bobbi

They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life, beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion: beyond love. For they had lived together long enough to know that love was always love, anytime and anyplace, but it was more solid the closer it came to death.

Love in the Time of Cholera - Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Missing Tom always will be wife, Roberta (Lobbin) Houllahan, sons Rob Houllahan, Michael Houllahan; daughter and son-in-law Cary and Dana Ekelund; granddaughters Kyla Houllahan and Zoe Ekelund.

Also, sister Jean (Houllahan) Marino of Cape May Courthouse NJ and her family: Harry T. Hobbs, Patricia A. Fein, Guy T. Hobbs, Gay M. McGarrigle, Frank G. Marino, Jr.

Also, the family of pre-deceased sister Helen (Cunningham) Murphy: Judy (Murphy) Donahue and Karen (Murphy) Spooner.

Also, the family of pre-deceased brother John Houllahan: Sherry Houllahan, John Houllahan, Brenda Houllahan, Thomas Houllahan.

Also, the family of pre-deceased brother James Houllahan: James Houllahan, Joseph Houllahan, John Houllahan

...and his last dog, the beloved, beleaguered beagle, Lucy.

A dear friend Mirian from Salasaca wrote, "Tom went back to Mother Earth - Pachamama - the Creator will receive him."

A Celebration of Life will be held for Tom on

Saturday November 3, 2018

Park Place Congregational Church

71 Park Place, Pawtucket RI

10 AM: Family Reception for family and friends

11 AM: Service

A reception will be held immediately after the service.

Tom would want you to wear joyful colors.

Memorial donations in Tom's honor may be made to the American Parkinson Disease Association RI Chapter or Linn Health Care Center.

Directions:

From North

Rte 95 South, take Exit 27

Go right off the ramp to Park Place. Church is down the street on left.

From South

Rte 95 North, take Exit 27 Downtown/Pawtucket

Take Pine St and Main St to Park Place Church

Parking: Municipal parking lot behind the church.

Comments



“ I recall summers on the porch playing with Tom and both of the dogs. He would light up when my dog would go to him for an extra special petting. Dee Lovecky

Deirdre Lovecky - November 03, 2018 at 08:54 AM



“ Thank you, Dee.

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 05:53 PM



“ A sympathy card was purchased for the family of Thomas E. Houllahan.

November 02, 2018 at 07:04 PM



“ I was a counseling client of Tom's in my late teens and into my twenties, during a very difficult time in my life. Tom went above and beyond to help me navigate through it. He knew how to maintain his professional capacity as a counselor yet at the same time, he became like a mentor and friend. I'd periodically reconnect with him, but eventually life took us in our own directions. I'm sad to learn of his passing. He holds a special place in the story of my life. I'm blessed to have known him. My prayers and condolences to his family.

Barry Russo - October 29, 2018 at 09:05 PM



“ Thank you for your heartfelt words; Tom would have been so touched by them. Your music is still in our music collection.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 06:52 PM



“ I knew Tom when Michael was in Potter and again when I worked for the VNA. He was such a nice guy and ever the gentleman.
Janet OConnell

janet oconnell - October 29, 2018 at 08:02 PM



“ Thank you so much for your kind words.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Thomas E. Houllahan.



October 29, 2018 at 03:02 PM



“ Back in the early 70's, when an idealistic group of friends began to discuss establishing a group home for children ages 5 to 11, we asked Tom to share our vision, and he became the first President of the Tannerhill Board. I shall always remember him as a good listener, gentle coach and cheerleader and his dry humor was legendary. It seems he touched colleagues, friends, family and clients universally with his kindness and goodwill. I have never forgotten him though our paths have not crossed in 35 years.

Adrienne Cady - October 29, 2018 at 11:28 AM



“ My condolences to the family...I knew Tom when he worked for the RIDOC,a long time ago..A real gentleman and professional. May he rest in peace.

Paul Cardullo - October 29, 2018 at 09:46 AM



“ Thank you for your kind words; they mean so much.
Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 05:57 PM



“ I knew Tom when we both worked in the Social Work Department at RI Hospital. His quick wit was endearing and his willingness to do just about anything reassuring. One of my fondest memories was going out into the community with him to deliver Thanksgiving baskets to patients in need. It really provided a sense of the warmth of the season that year which I re- experienced in memory for many years thereafter. My condolences to the family. Carole Collins

Carole Collins - October 29, 2018 at 07:01 AM



“ Thank you so much for your remembrance of Tom and his work with you and such a dedicated staff.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 05:59 PM



“ I met and worked with Tom for several years at RI Hospital in the Clinical Social Work department and from the start he could be counted upon for his wry humor and “lets not take things too seriously” perspective on life. Yet dedicated his life and career in helping others. I am sorry to hear of his passing. Bill Kirkpatrick

Bill Kirkpatrick - October 28, 2018 at 06:16 PM



“ Thank you, Bill. You all worked so hard together to provide the very best for all the patients under your care.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 06:01 PM



“ My thoughts and prayers are are with Tom’ family from an old Warwick Warrior and friend.

David M. Powers - October 28, 2018 at 11:43 AM



“ Thank you, Dave for your kind thoughts. You Warwick Warriors were quite the group of hockey nuts. Tom was always proud of the fact that he made the first international goal in the Montreal game. Maybe the only one...

We are grateful for your remembrance.
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 07:05 PM



“ We were coworkers in, I can't remember which dialysis clinic (I'm elderly), and I gathered so much gentle wisdom from Tom. Not just the skill needed for dialysis patients , but for the way he treated every person as having special characteristics as an individual . May his family take joy in his life.

Judith Queen

Judith Queen - October 28, 2018 at 09:49 AM



“ Thank you, Ms. Queen, for you kind thoughts. We and many others have taken great joy in his life and will miss him forever.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 07:06 PM



“ I met Tom during my stay at Washington Oak though we didn't interact as much as I did with the house parents Ron and Dani Champlain the times we did meet were Memorable even after I left Tom always found me and reached out whether at his office in Washington Park or being invited by Tom and Roberta to their home what I especially remember was the sit down conversations with him and that no matter how bad I felt he would Not let me leave the conversation until I Felt better he had that way of making anyone Smile (and there Many times that I didn't want to but couldn't resist) RIP Tom

Sidney I Smith - October 28, 2018 at 09:12 AM



“ Dear Sidney,
Thank you for your remembrance of Tom and the impact that he had on your life. Bless you for your sharing.

Gratefully,
Bobbi Houllahan and family

Bobbi Houllahan - November 11, 2018 at 07:10 PM



“ Tom was a a true gentleman and a good friend. He was always interested in my children, remembering who they were, what they did and where they lived, always ready with an opinion.
Tom was the first to contact me after my life threatening incident. Said he had been there and knew how I was feeling. He came and picked me up, taking me to the Paw Sox game, giving us both license to have a dog and a beer, presumably unknown by Bobbi and Mary. I'll always be greatful for that.

Tom, you leave behind a lot of people who love you, miss you and will always remember you.

Always,
Warren

Warren McGoldrick - October 28, 2018 at 08:41 AM



“ Tom was the first friend I made at district five when I arrived as a newly minted social worker in August 1966. I had just completed four weeks of training and didn't know that I didn't know anything. Early on he was a generous source of support for me both professionally and personally. It was always great fun to be involved in serious

and non-serious discussions with him. He was very smart and very witty, but always with a gentle demeanor. Tom was well loved by those in our circle. I'll miss him. Jean and I send heartfelt condolences.

Lew Treistman

Lewis Treistman - October 26, 2018 at 08:09 PM