

Remembering Tom Howard

Harry Strachan, October 15, 2020

To His Family

Dear Lovelace, Charles, and Gallie,

I just heard (thanks to Beth and Clare) that Tom passed away last night with you to see him safely off.

I know the last years were tough on him. I know he will leave a big hole in your lives. I know you all know how lucky you were to have him as a husband and Dad. And I know how much he loved each of you and how proud he was of you.

He will also leave a hole in my life and that of many of his good friends. You, Lovelace, and Jim encouraged me to call and talk to Tom, even as he was having memory problems. I'm so glad I did. In our last conversation his wonderful humor and zest came through the fog he was struggling with. I thought afterwards, "Tom can so vividly describe the disasters of old age that it is not only hilarious, but makes life, in spite of all that can go wrong, seem a wonderful adventure. How does he do it?"

You all know how special Tom was in my life, but I'd also like you to know how special the Howards have been to the Strachans. I hope to write up some memories to send you later. If you decide to have a memorial service for him, please let us know.

Sandy and I send you a big abrazo from Costa Rica, Harry

To Our Extended Families

Harry Strachan, October 16, 2020

One of the big gifts of my life is to have had Tom as a friend. Tom was deeply embedded in the Howard family, with its weekly letters. I am embedded in the Strachan family which revered the Howard family, so my memories of Tom are intertwined with the history of our two families and my relations with his brothers and sisters.

It is safe to say that while the Howards loomed large for us Strachan sibs, the reverse was not true, as they were all older and successfully established while we were still crowded in our nest.

Tom's uncle Charles Trumbull (I think Tom has Trumbull in his name) was the famous editor of the Sunday School Times. I don't know if he was an early friend of my Scottish Grandfather Harry Strachan, who came to the United States for the first time around 1919 with a vision to evangelize all of Latin America and found a new Mission Society.



Phil, Dave, Betty, Ginny, Tom and Jim Howard

I do know that years later when my Dad was expelled in the last semester of his senior year at Wheaton for playing bridge in a tournament, he found sanctuary in Phillip Howard's home on his way back to Costa Rica. Dr. Phillip Howard was, I understand, Charles Trumbull's brother-in-law and also his successor at the Sunday School Times.

Mrs. Howard, Tom's mother, was my mother's ideal a Christian mother of six. Dave Howard, the precocious Howard who became a LAM missionary, was the youngest General Director in the LAM. He, of all the missionaries, was the one Mother encouraged me to take as a role model.

The stories we were told of the Howard children, from Phil to Jim, were mythic. They were all brilliant students, good Christians, artistically and musically talented. And all of them were using these talents to serve the Lord in far off lands.

The three oldest of us Strachans, (me, Cathy, and Robert) were sent to H.D.A. in hopes that some of that might rub off on us. Mother was thrilled that one of my first roommates at H.D.A. was Jim, the youngest, a year ahead of me.

Tom I'm sure I met while still a boy. I vaguely remember that he visited Costa Rica, probably Dave his older brother. I'm pretty sure that he along with Betty and Dave came through H.D.A. as guest speakers, already famous on account of the Auca Indians, while we were still there. They were certainly chapel illustrations!

However, my first personal memories of brilliant conversations with Tom, were when he visited his brother Jim at 338 Jefferson Ave in Wheaton. In our two basement rooms Tom and Jim regaled us three roommates with humorous sketches and long memorized poems of Robert Service. Tom, as I recall, recommended books by C.S. Lewis, all of which I read.

Our paths continued to cross after Wheaton during my years at Law School when I visited John and Anita Nelson in NY City and the summer I was studying for the bar exam. Tom and Lovelace were living there, I think, finishing up his doctorate. We'd get together and always had great conversations. I'd share my journey out of faith, Tom it seemed to me grasping his own more tightly. Tom's brilliant conversational style, which comes across in many of his books, was both extravagant, precise and convincing. It was clear he had read and thought far more deeply than I. He was a fierce defender of his faith against what he deemed ignorant or sloppy arguments, but amazingly kind in doing so to someone like myself groping to find his way.

Tom and Lovelace became my major link to the Howard family when we returned to live in Boston in 1976. Even when I moved back to Costa Rica in 1993, when we visited Boston for business and family (two or three times a year), Sandy and I would often go up to the North Shore to visit Tom and Lovelace. The custom we developed was for him and I to take a walk before the meal, then join the larger family in a nice restaurant.

When I spent two weeks in Manchester by the Sea recuperating from a hip replacement in 1998, he would accompany me in walks on the road along the coast, me on crutches and Tom walking leisurely so I could keep up. I might describe my latest reading in liberal theology or Buddhism and he'd defend his increasingly conservative faith. We teased each other that every year I was trying to take my faith into a future century while he was going backwards for wisdom past the 15th Century and into the 12th.

Tom kept me abreast of his family and I consider it one of the blessing of my own adult life over the years to have been able to develop a distinct but close relation with so many of those mythic Howards.

“Uncle” Dave, the close colleague of my father, had me over several times for dinner during the summer of 1965 in San Jose, when I researched for Dad’s biography. I read to his young children while Phyllis was preparing the food. Over the years he has given me great advice, perhaps the most memorable, “The Lord’s will is like a rudder. It only works on a boat that is moving. Your job is to keep your boat moving!” He was one of the early readers I asked for feedback when I wrote my memoir *Finding a Path* and he gave me a great blurb for the published version.

Betty, the most fearsome of the brood, was the recipient of my summer research when Mother and the Mission asked her to write Dad’s biography. During my third year in Law School she invited me for a weekend in Franconia to discuss what I had collected and share my own memories. I remember during a break playing in the back yard with her young daughter, Valerie, though I suspect Valorie has forgotten it.

Jim was the first Howard I got to know well, my roommate at both H.D.A. and Wheaton. He was one of my closest friends. We served together on the Foreign Mission Fellowship, double dated with Joyce who became his wife. We tended to drift apart as he went to the Northwest and I back to Central America. Only recently have we gotten back in touch.

Brilliant talented Ginny, I didn’t know until we lived in Boston. She became an unexpected good friend when she returned divorced from the Philippines. Tom asked me to help her get a better paying job, as on her resume she had no college degree and only the work experience of a linguist of an obscure dialect. We did some career planning exercises and together, as I recall, developed a bold negotiating strategy with her boss that would permit her to showcase her considerable talents and negotiate a commensurate salary. My memory is that it worked and she more than doubled her income in a year. To my surprise, when I asked her what she really wanted, she answered, “A husband so I can pursue other things.” Almost as a joke we discussed a strategy for finding Mr. Right who turned out to be Mr. Sohn. Tom and I on our walks, if near their beautiful home, would stop in a for a short visit.

I feel a loss for Tom, for Ginny, and Betty, but also a sadness that our generation in both families is coming to an end. I am thankful, however, that Tom has at least left me with a special friendship with Charles of the next generation and that Charles has gotten to know

Ken my son. One of the unexpected pleasures of my niece Lisa Frist's wedding, was meeting the grownup Beth Howard Miller and finding an immediate connection. I'd love to see more strands between and among the following generations.

Tom and all his Howard sibs really are / were special people. They did a lot for the world. They leave the next generation of Howards a wonderful heritage. And they influenced and enriched many lives, particularly mine.