A Guy Named Tom

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Thomas Budzynski was well known for his creativity and achievements, but he was a friend to many who enjoyed his wit and humility. He was both a dedicated scholar and a sensitive human being who put the welfare of others before himself. Despite his widespread recognition as a pioneer, he was always just “a guy named Tom” who was loved and cherished by all who knew him. A tribute is offered to this part of him that endures in memory as much as his numerous contributions.

It would always start with a slight change in facial expression that featured a mischievous gleam in his eye. And then he would talk about a lecture he was giving, a hotel lobby he was in, or a meeting he was attending. Then he would say, “and there was this guy who…” or “this guy asked me if….” Over our 35 years of friendship, I learned that he was setting me up for a story that made having dinner with him a risky event. If I was taking a bite at the time, I could end up choking on my food. It was almost always something so incredible and funny it became a part of who he was—this guy named Tom.

Like so many others, I was deeply impressed and inspired by his restlessly inquisitive mind and creativity, but I was even more touched by his sense of humanity and sense of compassion. He was always thinking about others before himself and shunned the spotlight, which he could have owned at any time. His wit was such that he could have been the perfect prankster, but he was too sensitive about the welfare of others to cause embarrassment.

Writing about Tom’s achievements would be an easy, but lengthy, thing to do. However, commenting upon his journey through life is a challenge. I know that he went through many changes. Some of these included encounters with himself that led to deep personal transformation. One can only speculate about what led to this, but I think that a part of it was a realization that some directions he had chosen for himself were simply not working. I know that he had learned a lesson about his own mortality from an experience with bypass surgery. A further clue to what had happened came from the way he would talk about himself and his wife and partner, Helen: “This time I married for love,” he would say, and one was certain that he meant a joyous beginning of new life as well as the ending of a path of pain.

Who was the real Tom? It is not for me to say, except that he was multidimensional. There was the capacity to float around in twilight consciousness becoming what has been called a dilettante among ideas. At the same time, he could focus within a stream of productivity; researching, writing, and editing in the best tradition of true scholarship and science.

A major interest in the latter part of Tom’s life was investigating and contributing to the new field of aging and regeneration. There were early glimpses of this in the work he did with the Ponce De Leon Project and the “brain brightening program.” More recently, he and Helen were deeply involved in the ways that nanotechnology could be used to stimulate and revitalize the body. At the same time, he was working with a full schedule of clients at their clinic with much of his interest going toward brain injury. During one of the last conversations I had with Tom, he commented, “I just hope that we can get a couple of more years out of these old bodies.” Like so many others who have known and loved this guy, I wanted it to be more than just a couple. I know that I am speaking for a multitude of others in saying “thank you, Tom.” For us and countless students to follow, you have left a very rich legacy of accomplishment and creativity. The world doesn’t see the likes of you very often—this guy named Tom. Happy trails, friend, from us all.

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