



John E. Tower

July 6, 1933 - December 25, 2020

Our beloved John "Papa" Elliott Tower left us on his terms and from home in Huntington Woods on December 25, 2020, at the age of 87. We are grateful that he graced our lives with his humor, compassion, intelligence, and wit.

John is survived by his beloved wife (aka "the woman he lives with") Susan, children Ben Tower and Sarah (Andy) Fairman, grandchildren Elizabeth and Jack Fairman, sister Susan (Robert) Conklin, and numerous loving friends and family. John was preceded in death by his parents, uncle and aunt George and Anna Lyle Sherman, and sister, Mary Marling.

On July 6, 1933, John was born in Highland Park, Michigan, to Lewis and Virginia (Spain) Tower. He attended Grosse Pointe High School, MIT, and graduated from the University of Michigan with a joint BS and MA in engineering and business. John's distinct nose came from a specific run-in with the floor as a baby and a stop sign that he hit trying to impress a girl while running down the street as a teenager. John's most notorious childhood accomplishment was riding his bike from Grosse Pointe to Ann Arbor to meet his parents at a Michigan football game post-party. This trek terrified his babysitter and, one can imagine, annoyed his parents. John did always have a sense of adventure and a sly sense of humor.

Experiences with his "buddy Skip" and his family deepened his joy of adventure. Skip's family took him to Otsego, Mount Assiniboine, and numerous canoe trips. As a father, John shared his love of camping and travel, especially with his VW Camper painted with anti-war slogans and a

mushroom cloud with "the end" on the back. To make the camper "fit in" to the more conservative HW, John painted it happy face yellow and turned the front into a smiley face complete with eyelashes over the headlights. Once empty nesters, John and Sue traveled extensively and spent wonderful trips with Jim and Kate Reed, Alice and Arthur Marotti, Marilyn and Mark Sutton, and Blythe and David Doane. Once the grandkids came along, the adventures included Utah's national parks, Canadian Rockies, Upper Peninsula and Mackinac Island, Colorado Rockies, Boston and New England, and Italy for the grand finale. On a smaller scale, there were many "mystery trips" with the grandkids, including a surprise cruise!

During John's "journey years" after college, he served in the army as an efficiency engineer and, more importantly, played left tackle on the base football team - with his claim to fame playing against Rosie Greer. John traveling across Europe (forever captured by a tattoo from one wild night) and brought home a Fiat for his parents on the QEII. This trip also began his love of opera. He then worked at Columbia University in the building department and became involved with and inspired by the civil rights movement.

The March on Washington in 1963 is a defining moment in John's life. As he was getting on the bus from NYC to DC, he met Susie Drumm, a bus leader, recent graduate of Syracuse, and an "up-state" girl. He put a plan in motion. (John was known for his detailed plans or "shed-yools".) In 1964, he achieved his objective by courting and marrying his Susie in 5 months, and they began great their adventure that has lasted 57 years.

This adventure included two children, Ben Tower and Sarah (Andy) Fairman, and the light of their lives (drumroll) ... the grandchildren Elizabeth and Jack Fairman. John and Susie first lived in Buffalo, where John earned his Ph.D. in economics, and then Highland Park, Michigan. In 1975, the family moved to Huntington Woods, a community that has embraced, supported, and celebrated John and Sue. A yearly highlight for John was the HW Fourth of July Parade. With the first big parade for the 1976 Bicentennial, John helped build the float (it was about the Boston tea party - not the current version) and

was established as Drill Master the Hart Street Drill team. This "team" marched with actual drills and, in keeping with John's humor, drills such as "dentist drill", "do-see-do" drill, and other drill puns. In later years, the blue PT convertible was a fixture in the parade.

John was a tinkerer and early adapter of technology. He said his greatest regret was selling his Model T for a TRS-80 computer from Radio Shack. This tinkering in technology led to intensive training and study in the emerging field of information technology and the inclusion of this field in the coursework at Oakland University.

John was an educator and mentor at Oakland University in the School of Business Administration for over 40 years. He served as professor, associate dean, and interim dean during his tenure. As children, we remember his stories of lining up chalkboard erasers at the edge of the lecture and sending them off towards students dozing off. Ben and Sarah were paid by the page to help check exams in the days before scantron exams. Sarah especially enjoyed visiting her Dad at OU and going to The Main Event at the Silverdome for lunch. Colleague David Doane stated, "For decades, it is correct to say that John Tower WAS the school of business in the eyes of most students. John was simply always THERE. He always stood up to our collective tasks without seeking reward or recognition." We are all grateful to the OU community for reaching out to John in his final days and letting him know the positive impact of his words, actions, and deeds during his tenure. John ended his working career with the New to You store at St. John's and the Kingston Avenue Zoo. His ever-growing menagerie of animals would be on the corner for neighborhood children to play with and feed. He was delighted when all of his animals found new, loving homes upon his retirement. At New To You, John was known as a friendly greeter, a wonderful co-worker, and a source of light humor on his shifts. New To You treasures also made it into the Tower and Fairman households including colorful sweaters, a silver spoon collection for a budding collector, as well as numerous puzzles and toys.

John worked tirelessly to always do better for others. John's civil rights activism was formed while serving in the Army and continued throughout his life. In his earlier years, he was active in both the civil rights movement and the economic recovery of Detroit after the 1967 rebellion, specifically with his work with Karl Gregory and ICBIF - Inter-City Business Improvement Forum <https://riseupdetroit.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Pamphlet-Inner-City-Business-Improvement-Forum.pdf?iframe=true&width=10025&height=10025>; ICBIF established the First National Independence Bank, the first black-owned bank in Detroit, and it just celebrated its 50th year in operation. Joining St. John's Royal Oak allowed John to actively help others through the Open Arms Pantry and New to You ministries. Politically, John hoped with Obama, "felt the Bern", had a plan with Warren, and was ridin' with Biden. If you weren't sure of his political leanings, all you needed to do was read the bumper stickers on his PT Cruiser that covered all of his "hoopla" moments that may have dented a fender, or door, or hood.

St. John's also offered John the ability to establish and deepen two important relationships. Working as a Stephens Minister, the family began to hear "my buddy Joe" stories. John and Joe Bassett became fast friends and would dine out every Tuesday. The Franklin Grill fell in love with these two and made their food to order, off-menu, with take-home creme brulee. Other adventures included John getting hit by a car (literally as he was walking through the parking lot) and a young nurse drove John and Joe to the hospital. Joe was a mentor to my father on aging and experiencing all life had to offer. When Joe passed, John and Steve Fairman began the Tuesday lunch ritual. While Steve and John have known each other for 40 years and shared grandchildren, these lunches provided John with a peer, mentor, friend, and companion. He cherished his buddies Skip, Joe, and Steve.

With all of his accomplishments, John was most proud to be remembered for the fun he had with life. John had a love of cars from his Model T, to the infamous VW Camper, then the unmistakable blue convertible PT Cruiser with fake bullet holes and numerous bumper stickers to hide "scratches", always

seen with the top down (unless there was rain). No one could miss him riding about town with his crazy hats, including a Viking helmet complete with horns or his family of emperor penguins that always wore their seat belts in sub 20-degree weather. John was the king of the pick-up at Cranbrook Schools for many years! He was quick with a bad pun, or a dry, witty comment said with a twinkle in his eyes and a small dimple in his cheek.

John's greatest joy was his family. His beloved Sue, his adventurous Ben, his mighty Sarah, chef Andy, darling girl Elizabeth and inquisitive Jack. He and Sue found a way to bring excitement to everyday events, such as school pick-up with fun hats, trips to Le Petit Prince, and "mystery trips". The grandkids remember his stories, the information he passed on while driving them to one of their numerous practices or games, and the fact that he was always their #1 fan. With herculean effort by Sue, John made it to innumerable games, concerts, swim meets, and school events. He was a fixture in the stands with his unique spirit wear. John enjoyed sharing these events with fellow grandparents-in-law Steve and Mary Fairman and Marilyn and Mark Sutton. We will miss his humor, his unique "bah-ba-bah-ba" as he walked through the house, saying "tilt" or "hoopla" when tripping or dropping something, and the "mmm-mmmm-MMMM" when you made something he REALLY enjoyed. In all his kindness, a meal that wasn't great was "interesting". Andy always had "shrimpys" on hand and loved to make crab cakes for John. As many have said, what we will miss most of all is his friendly banter. He appreciated the pun, turn of phrase, double entendre and would attempt to engage anyone and everyone in his humor.

John's chariot swung low on December 25, 2020, and carried him home. We picture him enjoying a wonderful meal with his buddy Joe Bassett, watching Michigan football with Mark Sutton, discussing world economic events with Alice Gorlin, and sharing a bourbon with Annie and George. We believe that John would want you to honor him by following the words of Maya Angelou: "My wish for you is that you continue. Continue to be who and how you are, to astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness. Continue to allow humor to

lighten the burden of your tender heart."

A funeral service will be held on December 30, 2020, at 3:00 <https://zoom.us/j/93202839734>>; PM at St. John's Episcopal Church. Due to COVID restrictions, you are invited to attend via Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/93202839734>>;. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that a memorial gift be made to 'St. Johns Episcopal Church, Royal Oak <https://onrealm.org/StJohnsEpiscopalRoyalOak/-/give/now>>;.

Cemetery Details

Great Lakes National Cemetery

4200 Belford Road
Holly, MI 48442

Previous Events

Memorial Service

DEC 30. 3:00 PM (ET)

St. John's Episcopal Church
26998 Woodward Avenue
Royal Oak, MI 48067

Tribute Wall

SF

“ Dear Sue, Ben, Sara, Elizabeth and Jack,

John Tower was one of the first people I became acquainted with when I was hired at OU-SBA in 1987, John was always one of my favorite OU-SBA people.

He was devoted to the SBA and was a driving force when the SBA received their first accreditation, it was an exciting time to be part of the SBA.

We did work hard but there was always some fun and mischief to be had. I will always remember the day we had a filing cabinet delivered. The box was slit down the side and sat in the corridor waiting to be disposed of. John hid in the box and when people walked by he would say "let me out". John made us laugh and enjoy the day!

Sue, I will always remember how kind you and John were when my beloved Lab, named Chester, had to be put down. You sent me a copy of "All Dogs go to Heaven". I still have the book, and think of you and John when I pick it up.

I was able to attend, via Zoom, John's Celebration of Life! It was truly a labor of love to a beloved husband, father, father-in-law, and grandfather. I pray that these happy memories bring a smile to your face and heal your heart as you move on.

Most sincerely,

Sandy Fick

Sandra Fick - January 02, 2021 at 12:27 PM

BB

“ Gary and I had the good fortune to know John through the B school at Oakland. He was the advisor to the SBA alumni board when we served on it, and that is how we met each other, 35 years ago. He always gave us interesting updates on how the B school was "perking right along." We were very proud and happy to nominate John for the honorary alumnus award at Oakland in 2005. One of the last times we gathered with him and Sue was for an event at Meadow Brook Hall, and of course he was driving around in the PT Cruiser, top down, Santa hat on. In the snow. One very fond memory: we crashed a class he was teaching in Varner once, back in the late 80s. We snuck into the upper entrance to the lecture hall and sat there in our suits with our sunglasses on. He asked, very seriously, are you two registered for this class? Um, no... He was so witty, SO caring, and SO big-hearted. And very devoted to Oakland. And with his passing, nothing will ever be "perking right along" quite the same way for us again. Safe journey, John, to your destination...save some seats for us.

Beth Benson & Gary Brancaleone

Beth Denise Benson - December 30, 2020 at 05:55 PM

DY

“ You had one of the great Dad's, Grandfathers and Husbands. He was a GREAT soul.

*Love and Peace
David Y.*

David Youngblood - December 30, 2020 at 04:06 PM

SK

“ I met John when I attended my freshman orientation in August of 1978. Little did I know that this man would change my life. As a student employee, John became my supervisor when he was appointed to direct the General Studies and Evening and Extension Office. John was always supportive and encouraged my progress as I moved from student employee, to casual employee, to the administrative professional position of Coordinator of Evening and Extension Programs. Later in my career I was again honored to work with John when I joined the SBA as the Assistant Dean. I can honestly say that without John my life would be so different. We worked on so many projects together including reaccreditation of the SBA, the building of Elliott Hall and the establishment an off campus center at Groves High School in Birmingham. Each project allowed me to learn from John's years of experience. When I was awarded the Outstanding Administrative Professional Award I dedicated it to John. He taught me how to be a successful, caring, and ethical professional and I will be forever grateful. Thank you John for being a mentor to me and to so many others that have benefited from knowing you.

My sincere condolences to Sue and the family. Please take comfort in knowing that John's spirit will always be present in those whose lives he touched.

Sheryl Clark Klemanski - December 30, 2020 at 01:56 PM

TF

“ The Ertell Family purchased the Dreams From the Heart Bouquet for the family of John E. Tower.



The Ertell Family - December 29, 2020 at 04:10 PM

EH

“ John was a kind man, friendly face and a fun jokester. He was an incredibly positive influence in all of my encounters with him during my time at Oakland. Rest in Peace John.

Eileen Hilliard - December 29, 2020 at 02:41 PM

JS

“ John Tower was a unique wonderful person. I remember him as a joyful, gracious, always optimistic colleague and friend. He loved all things Michigan, his convertible PT cruiser -especially in winter, the SBA, his grandchildren, family, and especially Sue. John did fail to convert me to embrace the Woodward Dream Cruise, an event he thoroughly enjoyed. He was of enormous help to me in adapting to Detroit with insightful recommendations on many life decisions such as the best way to commute to OU and a body shop. His council as my Associate Dean was important to me. Whenever I talked with John after his retirement his first question was always how is the SBA doing.

My sincere condolences to Sue and his family.

Jonathan Silberman

Jonathan Silberman - December 28, 2020 at 05:38 AM

PR

“ Peg and Phil Rees have many fond memories of John and Sue. At one point in their New York City days, John was Phil's apartment-mate and Sue was mine. We love them both and have been recalling fond memories, especially with the VW bus. Peace and love.

Peg Rees - December 27, 2020 at 05:21 PM

BT

“ John Tower was a pillar, a rock, and inspiration, a humble servant, a thoughtful leader, a kind friend. We love him so very much at St. John's. He will be missed and remembered and treasured! Love and prayers to Sue and to all his family!

Rev. Beth Taylor, St. John's Episcopal Church (Royal Oak)

Beth Taylor - December 27, 2020 at 02:39 PM

LB

“ John was one of the first people I met when interviewing for a faculty job at OU. Throughout the years we shared many experiences such as initial AACSB accreditation, Executive Committee and the SBA Outpost in SEB (now MAT). Because there was not enough room in Varner Hall, several of us volunteered to move to the 6th floor of SEB...John included (this meant moving twice in about a 2 year period as EH was coming online). We were surprised when a refrigerator and microwave showed up (John bought them for the group). John also made sure we had our own copying machine and printer so we could work efficiently and effectively!

My deepest condolences to the Tower family.

Lizabeth Barclay

Lizabeth A Barclay - December 27, 2020 at 02:24 PM

JG

“ A wonderful man. I enjoyed his humor and admired his dedication to OU. My sincere condolences to Sue and family.

John Gardner - December 27, 2020 at 12:04 PM

AF

“ Auger/Dawson Family purchased the Heavenly and Harmony for the family of John E. Tower.



Auger/Dawson Family - December 27, 2020 at 09:18 AM

EK

“ I did not know John, but I do scan the obituaries regularly. I was interested to read that his aunt and uncle were George and Annie Sherman. The Shermans were friends of my parents, Bob and Eleanor Eskola, and my dad also worked at Wayne State. Growing up, we shared the boat watching hobby with them. We also attended St. John's from the early 60s to the early 90s, but I don't recognize your name. My sympathies to you for the loss of a most interesting and accomplished man.

Ellen Eskola Kehoe - December 27, 2020 at 01:43 AM

BC

“ John was a colleague at Oakland University for many years. He was in our bargaining teams, he taught me visiCalc, and he held several senior level administrative posts. He was a friend friend

Bill connellan - December 26, 2020 at 07:00 PM

AC

*I remember the day that the chair I had sat in for several years broke! John bought me what I call my "John Tower" chair (the one in which I currently sit). Another memory is whenever I walk past (or through) OU's "Elliott Tower," I think of adding John's name to it!!! John was the *best* administrator with whom I've worked at Oakland University. I often sent him emails between midnight and 2 a.m., to which he would promptly respond. I wondered if he slept!*

Rest eternal grant him, O Lord, and may light perpetual shine upon him.

Addington Coppin - December 26, 2020 at 11:11 PM