



Thomas S. Richards

October 11, 1941 - January 6, 2023

Thomas Stephen Richards (Tom) was born October 11, 1941, in Dearborn, Michigan. He was the son of Ada Johnson Richards and Donald Richards. He loved his older brother Don and older sister Betty. Although they were almost out of the house when Tom was born, they were very present in his life. Because of this age difference, Tom grew up as an only child at home. He was doted on by his mom and dad, who loved him very much, and Daisy, his special dog, who was a perfect companion.

He was a presence among the neighborhood kids and spent hours on his bike, creating adventures with his friends, including his lifelong friend Doug Mercatante. In addition, he was a truly gifted athlete. He was the quarterback on his junior high school football team. With his leadership, they won the city-wide championship (a record of 5-0-1). In high school, he turned his pursuits to baseball. He was an all-star pitcher, and his team won the championship, allowing him to pitch a game at Tigers Stadium. His all-time highlight, however, was pitching a no-hitter. Beyond sports, Tom was also an amazing musician. He played the clarinet and was the first chair in the Edsel Ford High School band. (Interestingly, both Tom's son Paul and grandsons Ben and Dominic play baseball, and his granddaughter Libby plays the clarinet.)

During this time, Tom was also blessed to be an uncle to his sister Betty and brother Don's children (Ann, Mary, Jim, John, and Amy). They were nearer in

age to Tom and provided him a close connection to his family growing up and then later in life after the deaths of his parents and siblings.

After graduating from high school, Tom headed to the University of Michigan. He chose to attend UM because it was close to home, had great academics, and had even better sports! During his time at UM, Tom pledged the Theta Delta Chi fraternity and made some of his closest lifelong friends. The fraternity created a home-away-from-home and brought the antics one might expect, late-night Blimpy Burger feasts, and, most importantly, the deep connections of friendships. A strong math student, Tom eventually chose economics as his major (although he used to tell the story that he did this by flipping through the course catalog, randomly landing on economics, and saying, "I can do this.")

Post-graduation, Tom continued to live and spend time with his fraternity brothers, cementing these friendships for life. He became a math teacher at Austin Catholic Prep while he pursued law school at night. He once told us that he pursued law school after a bet with his friend Terry to see who could do better on graduate school entrance tests. After he scored well on the LSAT, he decided this could be an option for a career. However, there was another motive underlying his decision for law school: his new girlfriend Libby's dad was a lawyer.

Tom and Libby met at a party on Seventh Street in Ann Arbor (ironically just down the street from where their daughter Katie and her family currently live). He described being "too nervous" to talk to her all evening. However, when she "dropped her beer," he knew it was his chance, and from there, it was history. They dated through Libby's graduate school at UM and teaching in Ann Arbor. A highlight moment was a trip Tom and Libby took with many of their friends to travel in Europe. Surrounded by friends and family, Tom and Libby were married at St. Mary's in Ann Arbor on June 17, 1967.

During the early years of marriage, Tom finished law school at Detroit College of Law. He had been unanimously accepted to all the schools he applied to (Wayne State and U of D), but DCL didn't have classes on Wednesday night, which was his bowling night. DCL it was! After graduating, Tom took a position with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office. This would be his life-long career, one of the first employees ever to retire from the Prosecutor's Office. He preferred researching and focusing on appeals more than the animation of trial law. He made incredible friends at the Prosecutor's Office, which served as a home away from home for him during the workday. He was quite accomplished as an appellate prosecutor and regularly argued in front of the Michigan Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. He even worked on four cases that were heard by the US Supreme Court.

Tom's and Libby's lives were forever changed for the better with the birth of their son Paul in 1970. Tom and Paul were two peas in a pod enjoying sports, especially baseball. Tom was a t-ball and little league coach for his son's early teams. As Paul branched out to other sports, such as basketball, golf, and soccer, Tom became one of his biggest cheerleaders. Tom's daughter Katie was born in 1973. His love for Katie involved accommodating her imaginative play, almost all of which centered around some sort of store. They would go on ventures to office supply stores to find triplicate forms for use in these 'shops' and spent hours every weekend with Tom "shopping" for record albums at "Melody Cottage" and for clothes at "Kathryn's." He indulged Katie by ordering food from "Tiffany's Restaurant" and even checking books out from "Olive, the librarian." They loved exploring together and regularly went on quests to find the best reuben sandwich across metro Detroit delis.

Fall weekends were also ritualized by watching UM Football as a family. Sometimes (often), when in the third quarter things weren't looking good for

his beloved Wolverines, he would get in the car to “leave.” He also was a Lions fan and stuck with them for enough years to fully appreciate this last winning season. Rooting for the Tigers on TV and at games was another experience he loved sharing with his family. A highlight was sitting on the first baseline with the whole family, including all of his grandchildren.

Tom and Libby moved from their first apartment in Roseville to Clawson and eventually bought their home in Royal Oak in 1978. They quickly made many friends in the neighborhood, most of whom are still close friends today. A lover of books, Tom felt at home at the Royal Oak Library and was appointed to the Library Board in 1978. He served for many years and eventually became the Library Board President. Ever the bibliophile, Tom loved libraries and bookstores. His all-time favorite was Borders, but he would visit bookstores worldwide. It was a must-see on any trip, and he would spend hours browsing. Owning more books than he could possibly ever read, Tom loved reading everything from the classics to more contemporary books. His last pursuit was Charles Dickens’ ambitious novel Bleak House.

Classical music inspired Tom’s life, too. He and Libby were lifelong members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and regularly attended with their friends, David and Pat Paruch. They both traveled to hear symphonies, but within their home, Tom collected and played thousands of classical albums. His musical taste expanded to jazz and folk, including a love for the Kingston Trio. Cinema moved Tom as well. He loved films, old and new, and watched old sitcoms. Especially in these last years, when mobility was more difficult, Tom appreciated how streaming services allowed him to reconnect with shows and movies from the comfort of home.

He and Libby had the opportunity to travel around the US and Europe many times. They visited Libby’s siblings in Colorado, Arizona, California, Connecticut, and Utah. They especially loved trips to Chicago and NYC. Tom

also traveled with his dear friend Rick Browne many times to Chicago but also around the US to visit baseball stadiums. Another highlight was a father-son trip to Cooperstown to visit the Baseball Hall of Fame. During his travels, Tom appreciated art museums, especially visiting the Chicago Institute of Arts. Later in life, Tom and Libby had a memorable trip to Paris with Libby's sister Kitty and her husband, Harvey, as well as Road Scholars' adventures with the Andrews, Martins and Mitchells around the US. With the support of his dear friend, Terry Mitchell, Tom also spent many summers house-sitting in Reston, VA, and enjoying proximity to Washington, DC.

It's impossible to talk about travel without sharing the importance of the UM Alumni Association's Camp Michigania. Tom's family, along with his fraternity brothers Barry Andrews and Terry Mitchell and their families, first went to Camp in the summer of 1975. Located in Northern Michigan on Walloon Lake, they loved it so much that they recruited other fraternity brothers and Libby's college friends to attend. By the late 1970s, a regular crew of 6 families (Andrews, Crooks, Gustafsons, Martins, Mitchells, and Richards) would travel from across the country to camp together. The "Camp Family," as it became known, was a cornerstone for Tom. He was an active 3v3 basketball player in the early years and even participated in the beloved "Boskydel" Regatta. As the years went by, the activities Tom loved at Camp changed, with him spending most of the day at the "Ed Center" reading and attending faculty forums in the evening. He was often the champion at the evening Trivial Pursuit games and was also a regular fixture on Camp Sherwood Road, walking the four miles up and down daily. Ever the family man, Tom delighted in watching his children run through camp with their friends taking in the many activities. They attended Camp almost every year for close to 35 years, even experiencing its magic with their grandchildren, Ben (born in 2004), Dominic (2006), and Libby (2009).

Tom took to heart his nicknames of Papa and Grandpa. Opportunities to visit

with grandchildren included watching sports and movies or doing crosswords. Tom was an enthusiast who completed multiple puzzles daily. Although he often knew the answer, it was an opportunity to ask questions and connect with his grandkids about popular films, television, and music. He was the only person we know who could complete a Sunday New York Times crossword puzzle in one sitting. More recently, he learned to love the digital puzzle game Wordle and, at the prompting of his grandchildren, was just getting into the mini-crosswords and the Spelling Bee. Tom came alive in the presence of Ben, Dominic, and Libby. He loved joking with them and watching them compete in baseball, soccer, and gymnastics. He cherished and saved the artwork and expressions of gratitude they made for him.

Tom's pride for his children and their spouses (Paul/Cindy, Katie/Tim) was known by anyone who spoke with him. He enjoyed spending time with Cindy, especially on his many trips to Arizona, and even watched MSU basketball and football games with her (except when they played Michigan!). His relationship with Tim centered around learning and conversations about all kinds of issues, particularly medicine (especially handy for all the medical clues in crosswords).

It's difficult to sum up what made Tom so incredible, but as we sat down to write this, we kept returning to the words "lifelong learner" and "being curious." His learnings often led to extensive collections of curiosities – stamps, baseball cards, dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference books, books, pencils (for crosswords, of course), bookmarks, albums, and CDs. His intellectual curiosity was insatiable. In fact, just recently, Tom and Libby had started a "Great Courses" about the history of Ireland. Although these last years were challenging for him physically, he never lost his quick wit or passion for learning. His brilliant mind was a great gift throughout his life.

The smartest decision Tom ever made was to share his life with Libby. Married for 55 years, Libby was his rock and his foundation. She prioritized and realized a quality to their lives, especially after his diagnosis with Parkinson's. As a champion of his eating better, Libby took it in stride when she found fast food wrappers in the car. Though stubborn at points, Tom's gratitude for Libby and their partnership was undeniable.

Life is not only about the big moments or the significant accomplishments, although Tom had many of them. The little things throughout his life defined and revealed his character. Tom wasn't the loud one (in fact, he hated loud noises!), and he never sought attention, but he was always there. His presence was reliable, grounding and impactful. Whether making quizzes to help us study for school subjects or attending our events and performances, he was a constant support in our lives. Tom's legacy gives us a treasure trove of memories. We are blessed to have known and been known by him. He remains an integral presence in our lives, and we are humbled and grateful that we can still find him in this world by heading to a library or museum, picking up a crossword or dictionary, turning on a Wolverines game, or listening to a symphony.

Tom is survived by his extraordinary wife of 55 years, Libby, his beloved kids and their spouses, Paul and Cindy (Phoenix, AZ), Katie and Tim Schuster (Ann Arbor), and his incredible grandchildren (who proudly bear his name), Ben Thomas Richards and Dominic Thomas and Libby Schuster. Tom is also survived by his nieces and nephews, Ann (Richard) Zidek, Mary Calleja, Jim Fitzgerald, John (Karen) Fitzgerald, and Amy (David) Diehl, his brothers and sisters-in-law, Fr. Chuck Fischer, Kitty (Harvey) Fraser, Mark (Mary Beth) Fischer, Maggie (Chip) Rose, and John Fischer, and an amazing network of lifelong friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Ada and Donald Richards, his brother, Don Richards, and his sister, Betty Fitzgerald.

Visitation will be held Sunday, January 15, 2023 from 3 – 8:00 pm with a 6:00 pm prayer service and sharing of memories at the Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Home, 705 W 11 Mile Road (4 blocks E of Woodward), Royal Oak. Thomas will lie in state on Monday, January 16, 2023 from 10:30 am until the time of Mass 11:00 am at St. Mary Catholic Church, 730 S. Lafayette Avenue, Royal Oak.

In lieu of flowers, we ask that you consider making a donation in memory of Tom to the places that held special meaning to him:

- The Royal Oak Public Library (via the Royal Oak Civic Foundation- Public Library Fund) to support ongoing programs and services at the library
Online at (<https://www.romi.gov/499/Make-a-Donation>) or (<https://www.romi.gov/506/Royal-Oak-Public-Library>)

Via mail: Royal Oak Public Library, 222 E. Eleven Mile Rd. Royal Oak, MI 48067

- Camp Michigania Mott Family Program to allow families with children facing serious illness to experience the magic of Camp Michigania without the cost.
Online at (<https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/alum/umaa/michigania>)

- Detroit Symphony Orchestra to support ongoing programmatic, education, and support for the DSO

Online at <https://tickets.dso.org/support/donate>

Or call: 313.576.5114

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 15. 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors-Royal Oak
705 W. Eleven Mile Road
Royal Oak, MI 48067
(248) 541-7000
royal@sullivanfh.com
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

Prayer Service & Sharing of Memories

JAN 15. 6:00 PM (ET)

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors-Royal Oak
705 W. Eleven Mile Road
Royal Oak, MI 48067
(248) 541-7000
royal@sullivanfh.com
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

Funeral Mass

JAN 16. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Catholic Church
730 S. Lafayette Avenue
Royal Oak, MI 48067

Tribute Wall

MG

“ *Libby, thinking of you and your family - I have many good memories of working with Tom in the Appellate Division of OCPO. He lived life to the fullest!*
Mary Geer



Mary Geer - January 20, 2023 at 04:09 AM

RT

“ *Rene and Rosalind (Rosie) send our deepest condolences to your entire family. Despite being Libby's friend for nearly 25 years, there are so many things I learned about Tom highlighted in the beautifully written obituary celebrating his life. We hope that the memories of the happy times shared together can be of some comfort during this incredibly difficult time.*

Rosalind Garcia Tosi - January 15, 2023 at 12:16 AM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Thomas S. Richards.*



January 13, 2023 at 08:15 PM

SI

“ *The Royal Oak Public Library is sorry for your loss. We truly appreciate his time on the Board and the contributions he made to the library and our community. Our condolences to his family and friends.*

Sandy Irwin - January 13, 2023 at 01:51 PM