



Dr. Thomas Cowan Wood

*Oct 4, 1938 -
Sep 25, 2021*

Dr. Thomas Cowan Wood, 82, died peacefully at home in Anchorage, Alaska, on Sept. 25, 2021, with his loving family around him. It was one of his favorite kind of days, with snow on the Chugach Mountains, golden leaves on the birch trees and fall in the air. Tom was a man who was grateful for his life and all the people, places and opportunities it provided him.

Tom was born in Denver, Colo., on Oct. 4, 1938, to Virginia and Gerald Wood. His parents and maternal grandmother died in a tragic car accident when he was 11 and his younger brother, Nick, was 5. This loss instilled a strong bond between the boys. After Tom's parents died, he established a loving surrogate father bond with the family's Methodist minister, Dr. Harvey Potthoff.

Dr. Potthoff's influence was a strong factor in Tom's early years as he reflected on his own religious views. In Tom's formative years he worked as a ranch hand in Wyoming, where he learned about self-dependence, hard work and big breakfasts, which were all hallmarks of his life from then on.

Tom and his first wife, Kathryn Francis, were married 1964-1992, and together they had daughter, Karen, and two sons, Bob and Paul. He married Kathleen Erlwein in 1998, and the Wood family grew further to include her daughter, Kara. Tom was a devoted father and grandfather. He attended many hockey and baseball games and concerts, untangled fishing line and cooked steaks and s'mores over fires. In his later years, he took great delight in the energy, laughter and interests of his three grandchildren.

Tom remained intellectually curious throughout his life. He read books of history and philosophy, and closely studied each issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. In his younger years, he loved fishing and hunting, particularly for the elusive mountain goat and Dall sheep. He loved classical music, working in the yard, eating good meals

with family and friends, throwing a ball for his dog Belle and spending time at the family cabin. Tom loved the outdoors, and enjoying and protecting the natural beauty of Alaska was important to him. He noticed the birds, animals, mountains, trees and water wherever he was. Tom demonstrated his values in the way he lived – with gratitude, frugality, hard work, generosity and kindness towards others.

After graduating from Dartmouth College in 1960, Tom pursued a medical education in Colorado, graduating from the University of Colorado School of Medicine. He completed an internship in San Francisco, then headed north to Fort Richardson, Alaska, where he served with commendation as Captain of the Medical Corps for the 4th Missile Battalion from 1966-1968. Following discharge from the U.S. Army, Tom left Alaska for the University of Washington to complete his residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in cardiology and nephrology.

Alaska had taken hold of him, and Tom soon returned to Anchorage and set up practice in 1971, as an internist with his first partner, Dr. John Selden. During their first year they

treated eight to 10 patients with dialysis. In 1973, the Alaska Kidney Foundation was incorporated to help Alaskans with permanent, irreversible kidney failure. Drs. Wood and Selden started this organization to raise money to help pay for Alaskans with kidney failure to travel to Seattle for transplantation or home dialysis training so they could return to Alaska.

Today there are many nephrologists practicing in Alaska, including Dr. Wood's replacement, Dr. Stefano Emili. In June 2006, Dr. Wood was featured in the Anchorage Daily News as Alaska's "Father of Dialysis." Tom was always humble about his accomplishments saying "I happened to be in the right place at the right time." But to hear a couple of his patients tell it, though, "Dr. Wood might as well have ridden here on a white horse."

Tom's main focus became caring for patients with kidney failure. He loved the people he served and appreciated their gifts and payments of fish and game, jams and other handmade items. Alaska offered doctors like him the chance to be pioneers in improving medical services. Tom's notable career achievements included being a guiding

force in establishing the first modern paramedic system in Anchorage, coordinating and developing organ donation and dialysis programs in the state of Alaska, serving as a model of professionalism in his many leadership and instructor positions, and being a champion of medical ethics at Providence Alaska Medical Center and elsewhere. He received many awards and distinctions throughout his career, including the Laureate Award from the American College of Physicians Alaska Chapter and later he became a Master, the highest level of achievement with the National ACP level. Following his retirement in 2006, Tom spent the next 14 years serving as an active volunteer, including as medical consultant at the Anchorage Neighborhood Health Clinic and supporting Anchorage Project Access, Life Alaska and the Kinship Families Network at First Congregational Church of Anchorage.

Tom was preceded in death by his dear brother, Nick. He is survived by his loving wife, Kathleen; children, Karen (John) DiBari, Bob (Connie) Wood, Paul Wood and Kara (John) Burke; and grandchildren, Eli, McKenna and Keegan; sister-in-law, Mimi Ryder;

and niece, Becky (Hunter) Albright. Tom is also survived by an extended family as well as many friends and colleagues.

A special gratitude goes to Dr. Tom Hunt who diagnosed Tom with a rare bacterial infection and successfully treated him, adding 12 more years to his life. And a sincere gratitude to his longtime nephrologist partners, Dr. Steven Tucker, and to Dr. Peter Hulman, who was his partner at Alaska Kidney Consultants; to Bob Swartz and to his loyal staff and the many people he worked with during his 40 years of private practice at Providence. And, last, a very sincere debt of gratitude to all the internists, nurse practitioners, nurses and medical staff at Providence Hospital who gave Tom the very best of care during such a difficult time during the last six weeks of his life.

A Celebration of Life is being planned next June at the Kincaid Chalet, where we can all gather to honor Tom. In the meantime, please consider making a gift to Anchorage Project Access or the Alaska Conservation Foundation.

