

In Memoriam Prof. Tom Brill 1944–2018



Propellants, Explosives, Pyrotechnics has lost one of our own. Professor Tom Brill, Associate Editor of PEP, recently passed away after a long struggle with Parkinson's disease. Tom impacted the lives of thousands. He was a scholar, a teacher, a scientist, and a technical advisor to national laboratories, where one of us first met him thirty years ago and a long-lasting friendship began. The other one of us first knew Tom as his graduate advisor and became his close colleague, as many of his students did.

Tom was a giant in the field of energetic materials, and a scientist of incredible depth and breadth. He received a BS degree at the University of Montana and a Ph.D. degree in Chemistry from the University of Minnesota in 1970. That year he joined the faculty at the University of Delaware, where he remained until retiring in 2006.

He was an experimentalist who thrived on creating new methods to investigate chemistry at elevated temperature and pressure related to explosions, rocket propulsion and deep-sea geothermal vents. He lectured throughout the world and worked for many years as a consultant for industry and government laboratories. For 20 years he also taught material properties to art conservation graduate students. One of us gave Tom's book on art, [Light: Its Interaction with Art and Antiquities](#), as a gift to our own daughter who was a student of art history.

Tom was known simply as *The Boss* by his graduate students while away from the lab, and *Dr. Brill* while present. He was calm and patient, yet he was also a strict academic advisor, once explaining that in all his decades of teaching he never gave a student a grade that they didn't deserve. Never arrogant or angry, he taught his students that it

wasn't the time that they spent in the lab that mattered, but rather what they produced. He also taught them how to write a technical paper, distilling a disparate set of data, seemingly too disorganized to make any sense of, into a logical story. At the time that one of us joined his research group in the late 1990s, he was easily the leading academic in the decomposition of energetic materials. It was also at that time that the first signs of Parkinson's disease began to appear, and shortly afterwards he decided to stop taking on new graduate students in his group, making one of us one of his last PhD students.

He always had amazing stories of his adventures to share with his graduate students, whether it was out-running storms down a high alpine mountain, or eating foods served at a foreign banquet in his honor that, for the average palate, were quite unique to say the least.

Tom was a superb contributor to the PEP international community. He had a lasting impact on the energetic materials field, graduating over 45 master and PhD students, publishing over 300 peer-reviewed articles, one book and five co-edited books, and co-founding the Energetic Materials Gordon Research Conference in 1988. He will be greatly missed.

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