

Good morning, I'm Paulette Song, Tom's niece. My mother Simone, is Linda's older sister. I (along with my brother Rick and my cousins) am one of Tom and Linda's "rent-a-kids."

In recent years I have thought a lot about Tom - more specifically about what Tom loved – and loved to do.

He was an extremely passionate, dedicated man with many interests, who loved many things. Tom enjoyed many pursuits, and was an unequivocal "doer."

When he did something he did it with heart, with humanity and with great dedication. Whether it was his work at the "State Department," flying a Cessna, SCUBA diving and snorkeling in St John, being part of a community through HAM radio or training as a volunteer EMT - Tom pursued what he loved with determination and purpose.

And he loved so many things!

He loved learning about his heritage as part Catawba native American...attending POWWOWs and readily identifying with other Native Americans. Similarly, later in life, Tom was very committed to tracing his genealogy – spending hours perusing the church website's deep resources to better understand and track his lineage.

He loved practical jokes and poking fun...and we loved it back!

He was hilariously funny and loved 'tricking' us! When I was a kid Tom frequently did a genius impersonation of a seal over the

phone - assuring me that the seal ACTUALLY lived in his bathtub in NJ. And I believed it of course!

He loved music and playing guitar, as well as harmonica. And Tom played piano at a young age. Tom's mom was an artist – a creative spirit and a musician - and so Tom had to play piano. As a very single-minded person, even at the age of 8, playing piano just wasn't something he wanted to do. So one day when his mother was out he burned all of her sheet music – and his grandmother told him “oh you're going to get it” when your mother gets home. Sure enough he did get it! But he said it was completely worth the trouble he got in – to no longer have to play.

And Tom could sing. Our family enjoyed Tom's karaoke rendition of Jonny Cash at family get togethers!

Tom loved cooking his signature dishes: brisket, smoked duck, hoppin John on New Year's Eve. Tom was, after all, a proud Southerner transplanted to the Northeast and mid-Atlantic.

And he loved telling stories, from his military service in Southeast Asia, to the stories of his and Linda's adventures while they were assigned to both Bangkok and Abidjan.

Beyond their overseas work assignments, Tom and Linda have accumulated many miles of travel around the globe - which have lent itself to a wonderful cannon of stories that have captivated our family for decades.

Tom's love of different cuisines, his passion for learning about new people and cultures...his fundamental curiosity – informed their many great adventures.

It was Tom's zest for life, his motivation to pursue what moved him, with conviction and determination, that defined who Tom was and how he lived.

But for all of Tom's loves - of food, travel, and adventure – of all his many interests...he had just one enduring, unrivaled love – and that was his love for Linda and the life they shared for nearly five decades.

I have always admired my uncle Tom and the diversity of his lived experiences, his extensive knowledge and the many roads he has taken - roads that for most of us, are less traveled, less familiar, often less comfortable.

But what I have admired most is the love that that he and Linda have shared: the true friendship, unwavering support, the unconditional love that has fueled the flexibility, versatility and agility with which they could get up and go – move to another continent, make connections that would last for decades, build community wherever they went and be their own architects of an enriching life together..

Their success as a couple is rooted in the strength they derived from their bond – an enduring, dedicated strength that mutually supported them through times of great joy as well as tough times requiring resilience and strength.

And so today I invite you all to join me in celebrating Tom, his many interests and his thirst for knowledge - and the inspiration his life offers us. He was a man who loved – wholeheartedly, fully, passionately, mindfully...but of all these loves, nothing reflects Tom more, or better, than his love for Linda.

Thank you.