



Thomas Knowlton Sawyer

May 11, 1929 - July 27, 2013

Long-time Easton, MD, and Seaford, DE, resident Thomas Knowlton Sawyer died on Saturday, the 27th of July 2013.

Tom, son of Francis Lucas Sawyer and Grace Shaffer, was born on May 11, 1929, in Phoenix, AZ. A Depression era economy forced the family to resettle in Washington DC, where, at age 17, Tom answered the call of both duty and adventure, enlisting in the army. He served his country in the 6th Infantry during the Korean War.

After active duty, Tom completed his BSc. in Biology at American University in 1953. It was there he met the love of his life, Wyoming native Dorothy May Lee, and their marriage, on June 2, 1951, marked the beginning of 62 years as husband and wife, the flame burning brightly throughout.

For a scientist who was later to become one of the nation's most renowned microbiologists, his was an inauspicious beginning with his first job - cleaning monkey cages - at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda. Later assignments included rabies research in Georgia and heartworm disease in Maryland. During this time Tom, while raising a young family, alternated nights between second jobs and night school at George Washington University, where he earned a MSc. in 1960 after eight years of part-time study.

In 1964, Tom led his family from Bethesda to the Eastern Shore of Maryland for an assignment at the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries' Oxford Laboratory. Focusing on shellfish, fisheries, and human health diseases, Tom was instrumental in identifying diseases such as Legionnaires; viruses such as the reemergence of a once-eradicated polio strain; and even chemicals, like his collaborative recognition of the source of toxic kepone concentrations in James River bluefish. Tom's work led to his discovery of a number of new amoeba species, and he took great pleasure in naming them after the people most important in his life.

After finishing his PhD. at University of Maryland in 1973, Tom returned to the Oxford Laboratory, where he continued his research until retiring in 1987. Husband and wife next formed Rescon Associates, Inc., a joint non-profit research company. Tom left the petri dishes and microscope behind in 2002, when he and Dottie moved to Seaford, DE, his passion for science traded for an equally energetic passion for fishing.

Tom was particularly proud of his membership in, and contributions to, the American Society of Parasitologists, American Microscopic Society, Helminthological Society (past president), and Sigma Xi. He was proud of putting his research findings to pen, authoring at least a hundred peer-reviewed scientific papers. His children remember how he often read his manuscripts around the dining room table, and how they could spell words like acanthamoeba long before even most two-syllable words. Tom cherished his family, their photos hanging on his study walls beside diplomas, mementos of a scientific career, the Army Reserve certificate recognizing 26 years of service and his rank of Lt. Colonel, and – in his eye worthy of equal merit - a certificate for his first 5-lb bass.

Tom was preceded in death by his parents; sister, Patricia O'Shaughnessy, and brother, James X. Sawyer. He leaves behind his wife, Dottie Sawyer;

brother, John Lucas Sawyer; three children, Patricia Crowder, Robert Sawyer, and Barbara Starkey; grandchildren, Kelley Allen, Kendall Allen, Christen Sawyer, and Ethan Starkey; and great-granddaughter, Savana Turner.

Tom lived a rich and long life. Still, the void he leaves looms large, and the hole in the collective family heart will not likely heal.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on Monday the 12th of August at Methodist Manor House, 1001 Middleford Rd., Seaford DE. Flowers may be sent, but Tom would want his friends to take a youngster fishing.

Tribute Wall



“ Thomas Knowlton Sawyer

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ Thomas Knowlton Sawyer

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ Thomas Knowlton Sawyer

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ This man and his lovely wife have always been a testament to the goodness in people. The parents of my childhood best friend (and one I still consider a soul mate) they were a huge part of my life growing up. Always kind, always generous, always gentle, always embracing, and humorous, if the world were filled with folks like these, we would have no war, no poverty, no strife. God bless Dr. Sawyer eternally. <3

Priscilla (Merrill) Agari - August 10, 2013 at 03:58 PM



“ Shawn McLaughlin lit a candle in memory of Thomas Knowlton Sawyer



Shawn McLaughlin - August 08, 2013 at 08:14 AM

CF

“ I am so sorry to hear of Tom's passing. My thoughts and prayers are with Dottie and the entire family.

Carey Foster - July 30, 2013 at 08:34 AM

BS

Thank you Carey.

Barbara Starkey - August 04, 2013 at 09:43 AM

NW

Hello Dottie Sawyer,
50 plus years ago I was a guest for a night or two in your then Maryland home as a primary friend of your elegant husband Tom. "Thomas Knowland Sawyer" if my memory yet serves me. At least that's what I remember. I see that the obit writer did not quite get it that way. I was befriended by your husband as a result of both being members of the 805th Hospital Center, USAR under the command of Brig. Gen. Frank Elmore Wilson. The unit was decommissioned in 1964 and the entire unit suddenly found themselves without a home. Actually my hitch was up about the same time so I avoided the transfer to the new unit located in Rockville, Md. At any rate, you were a very gracious hostess having to abide the characters Tom occasionally dragged home. I even remember that you professed being the daughter of a veterinarian, a favorite vocation. Another thing I remember is that Tom would drag me off, with very little effort, to meetings he would attend at parasitological groups. I feel a pang of guilt not keeping up with the wonderful friend once I went off to California to work as a zoo curator. But then this is about Tom and not me giving you enough data to maybe remember the heydays we shared. I'm sure that Tom lived a full life and that he will be greatly missed by his friends and family. What a character he was! You have my late condolences and best wishes.

Neal W. Welsh,
11501 East Peltier Road,
Acampo, CA 95220-9745

Neal W. Welsh - August 24, 2017 at 03:26 PM

SM

“ Steve Mccarty lit a candle in memory of
Thomas Knowlton Sawyer



steve mccarty - July 28, 2013 at 09:20 AM