

Steuben Lives! Rest in Divine Creativity, Tom Gallison

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The ‘Art Never Dies’ website was inspired by the untimely death of Tom Gallison, who was killed when he was struck by a train on February 25th, 2000. He had turned 31 on February 12th. The medical examiner ruled his death a suicide, but his family, friends and those who knew him well refuse to believe this. The circumstances surrounding his death have never been properly investigated nor fully explained to this day. It remains a tragic mystery.

Tom expressed his art in a number of ways. Primarily, he was an actor and a musician. What amazed my friends and me about Tom was that while we all had our passions—Tom focused on his 24/7. His creative spirit fired on all cylinders—all the time. Tom and I spent much time together – and it was not simply two friends hanging out for a while. An evening with Tom was an event. Our friendship was always – always – a celebration of the bond we had. It was a friendship that I am thankful to have had—because I have never experienced anything like it before or since.

Those of us who knew Tom are left with a tremendous void in the wake of his death. I personally looked at my life in a completely different light after that fateful February morning. I consider myself an artist—but I saw that I was really not doing all I could. Tom had an amazing creative energy that was unrivaled. His death was a terrible waste – what treasures and memories have we been cut off from all these years since then?

It was such a tragic shame – I asked myself what I could do to A) preserve the memory of Tom and B) get off my ass and start making art a priority in my life.

I started out small. I’m not a landscaper, but I like working with my hands, so one day I took some old bricks and a shovel out in my backyard and dug out a modest memorial to Tom. I made a large square with the bricks and inside of that a distinct capital ‘T,’ then planted flowers. Tom and I used to play all night games of Scrabble, so originally, the ‘T’ had Scrabble pieces glued onto it that spelled out his name and his alias: Steuben. Sadly, the Iowa weather has since taken its toll on those. I found a big rock and placed it above the ‘T’ with plans to one day bury a sealed time capsule of various Tom Gallison artifacts. (Playbills, performance reviews, song lyrics, etc.) I completed the Gallison memorial by placing an old bench at the foot of it. It is a peaceful place to sit and relax after a long day.

My cats found the site very much to their liking—they were always prowling about over the bricks and lying on the bench. I found it amusing because they had an affinity for Tom that they showed to very few people. That first summer I planted mammoth sunflowers to one side of the memorial and they grew over 7 feet high. They were like sentries standing tall in honor. I remember that fall when they died, the huge dried blossoms of each flower hung down like heads lowered in prayer.

It was a very long time after Tom died before I could write any songs. I didn't even try—didn't have the desire—didn't want to. I knew better than to force something as delicate as that. I sat on the bench of my little Gallison memorial and strummed my guitar all summer long—playing nothing in particular—except maybe a short chord progression that seemed to keep rising to the surface.

At last the words came, slowly and shyly, like children emerging from behind furniture when they've broken something valuable. I wrote 'Curtain Falls' and put it to the chords I'd been playing since the previous summer. It was April 2001. Afterward there were many versions of this song both lyrically and musically—it was an incredible struggle. I had never written anything quite so personal before. My songs at the time were mainly story-based songs revolving around fictional characters, though their experiences were reflections of my observations of life. 'Curtain Falls' was the beginning of a project that would span well over 3 years and over a dozen songs—dedicated to or written specifically about Tom.

In December 2004 I completed a full-length CD of original songs titled "A Portrait of the Artist." I made numerous copies for both the family and friends of Tom as well as others whom I knew could appreciate the tribute.

As the recording of "A Portrait..." was winding down, my thoughts turned to what I could do next. I felt a tremendous epiphany at being able to share my personal relationship experiences with Tom. But I was only one person. The very idea came to me as I was writing a letter to Tom's mother. The letter would contain the first copies of the CD dedicated to her son. Here is an excerpt:

Tom brought an incredible amount of joy and entertainment into the world. This CD is a celebration of our relationship in particular. I am only one person—and for him to have touched my life in such a way is a gift I will never forget. I can understand the sorrow of each and every one of his friends, because I'm pretty sure they can each say the same thing in regard to their relationship with him. I don't have to tell you how special a person he was. His memories have now become as large as his life was. They are all we have. These lyrics,

music, sound bites and samples are all a celebration of Tom Gallison—The Artist. May he rest in peace—his memories and his art will never die.

The seed was planted. I was only one person—what about the rest of Tom's friends? What about my promise to take my own art more seriously?

Thus, artneverdies.com was born. A website to house and promote my artistic and musical projects past and present as well as a place to remember and share the memories of Tom Gallison. Admittedly, I'm not much of a web designer. But then again I wasn't an expert on landscaping either, but that didn't stop me from getting my hands dirty. Sometimes you just have to dig in and see what happens. I'm learning as I go.

It is my hope that whoever was touched by Tom will come to this site and share their stories, photos or whatever else they may have to share.