

June 27, 2011 from Richmond, Virginia

Dear DiSalvo Family,

We were so sad to hear about the death of Tom DiSalvo. Our deepest sympathies on your loss. I thought we should share with you some of our memories of Tom.

We met Tom shortly after we moved to Chicago in 1970. He and Marilyn Weltz were living in the apartment right next door to us in a building called "La Floresta" just a few blocks from the University of Chicago. We had a common back balcony from which we could easily enter one another's kitchens through the back door which soon became a very common occurrence. Tom and Marilyn were graduate students in something called the Committee on the Analysis of Ideas and Methods, which as I understood it was a very exclusive group of deep thinkers in the areas of philosophy, history and art. Sam and I had just arrived from Texas where I had obtained my PhD in Psychology and was doing post-graduate work in the Medical School. We were all about the same age and the four of us quickly became good friends.

I had never known anyone like Tom, who was an amazing scholar and intellectual. He was knowledgeable about the classics of literature, philosophy, religion, art history and seemingly everything else in which I, being a scientist by training and inclination, knew almost nothing about. Knowing Tom's thirst for knowledge and understanding, you can imagine the many, many long conversations we had together about the different perspectives on the world of science and the arts. Over the 40 plus years of knowing Tom, I learned so much from him. Going to an art museum with Tom, as we did many times, was like having a personal guide, albeit one with a certain peculiar point of view about everything. I do know that we came to respect each other a lot and trusted each other's judgments about what we each knew best.

Not that our time together in Chicago was all deep conversations. It was a time of change for all of us and we dived headlong into the exciting life of Chicago, going to movies, concerts, museums, just walking around. I think our favorite place was "the Point," a park on Lake Michigan near the Museum of Science and Industry that we could easily walk to from our apartment. I remember dozens of walks there and the long drive out to Morton's Arboretum when we just needed to get away from the city for awhile. Another favorite thing to do was going out for meals. We tried just about every fabulous cuisine that Chicago had to offer. We also ate together at least once a week. Sam and Marilyn did the majority of the cooking; Tom had not as yet developed into the good cook he became, but we did have some of his Italian specialties.

Tom finished his Master's degree and became a social worker during our two years together in Chicago. It was during this period that Tom's dream of becoming an artist began. He had taken an art criticism course at the University which had a big influence on his thinking. We spent a lot of time looking at his sketch books and other drawings. Sam and I both loved his work and encouraged him to continue. It was a distinctive style, full of amazing ideas and images. You can imagine what a thrill it was for us to hear Tom explain what he was drawing. Images just seemed to flow out of him. They came from such disparate places as Greek and Roman mythology and the lyrics of Bob Dylan. What a wonderful time that was!

Our daughter Sarah was born in January 1972 in Chicago. Tom and Marilyn were there for us every step of the way. I have pictures of Tom holding baby Sarah. We would go for long walks to the Point, Sarah in her buggy (yes, we had buggies back then). Sarah and Tom became friends for life, starting when she was just days old.

In the summer of 1972 we moved to Durham, North Carolina where I had taken a teaching position at Duke. Both Tom and Marilyn visited us there, but soon they were off for Africa. This just seemed to come out of the blue but was just the beginning of Tom's itinerant lifestyle. We even ended up with Tom's old Chevy that he asked us to look after in Durham until he came back. I remember that car well. It had been in a serious accident at some time before Tom bought it so that it did not drive straight, but kind of moved down the road like a crab sidling at angles. I remember well the regular correspondence from Tom from Uganda, stories of exotic places and new experiences, images that found their way into his art. In fact, we have one of Tom's paintings based on an image from there which, sadly has faded badly because he used ink on canvas. Indeed, we have several of Tom's early paintings, including one of the cemetery which I remember visiting with Tom near Highland Falls.

One of my favorite paintings of Tom, which we had for awhile, was a fairly large one of the Hudson River Valley in Fall near where the family lived. It too faded badly. All together, we have about 10 paintings or drawings from Tom. His beautiful oil named *The Hermaphrodite* has the place of honor above our fireplace where it totally brightens up the room with color. The brush work in the painting is exceptional. We love it, and so does almost everyone who sees it (except my mom who finds it a little risqué). It is such an honor to display Tom's work in our home and to know something about the history behind every piece.

Over the remaining years as Tom moved from one place to another, we saw him at least once a year, kept in contact by phone. I had the pleasure of visiting the family in

Highland Falls where I met Frank and Rosa. I must have met the brothers too, but I don't remember it well. What I do remember was a fantastic family meal. I think it was in the garage where tables had been set up. Being not particularly familiar with the 3 course Italian meal, I ate my fill of appetizers and the glorious pastas as they came from Rosa's kitchen. I could not believe it when a whole other course appeared of what I recall was veal or chicken scaloppini, but of course I found room. We got to know Rosa pretty well over the years as she would visit us with Tom as he was driving through Richmond on his many trips between Florida and the northeast. We always had great visits and really looked forward to them. It was especially great when he stopped in both driving north and south.

Tom and I may have had the intellectual connection but Sam shared the Tom that loved fishing, gardening, and cooking. Tom and Sam spent many hours cooking together and he wasn't afraid to let her know her spaghetti sauce tasted like BBQ. Sam and Tom made the best Mango Chutney ever but because it was two cooks and a recipe used with many substitutions and laughter, neither of them could ever replicate it. Tom also taught us how to play a few Italian Card games and how to cheat.

We were very impressed with how Tom had found such joy in his ever expanding family, his aunts and uncles, brothers, their wives and children, cousins. [How many DiSalvo relatives are there anyway? It seemed like a never ending supply.] We heard so much about each and every one of you, we almost feel like part of the family. I know you must miss him terribly as he was so involved in your lives. We also visited Tom and Rosa in Boca Raton several times, and had so many great meals, stories of his garden, visits to the studio and gallery.

Tom even lived in Richmond for about a year. He had a great studio/apartment right off the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University. I remember so well getting ready for his opening. Tom made several friends here in Richmond and sold some of his pieces here. We were so sorry to have him get his wanderlust and move on so soon.

Of course I knew about Tom's heart condition, but thought he had put that behind him with surgery. He always seemed healthy and good spirited. Its so hard to think of him gone. Our sympathies go out to the family. Tom was a really special and unique person, and he was a great friend. Tom was a dreamer, gentle, witty, intelligent, single-minded, loving and full of the joy of human creativity in all its many manifestations. I think he as a great artist and I sincerely hope that his work can live on. I think Tom fantasized about being discovered as an artist at some point in the future. Who knows? Maybe it will come to be.

As I sit here listening to the beautiful CD that Tom made for me of Neapolitan songs by Roberto Murolo I can only think with joy about all of the many things I learned from Tom. Hope to see the beauty in things, the deeper meanings and craziness of life. He was a great man. We miss him and love him.

Bob (and Sam) Balster