Memories of Tom Brylawski

Remembering Tom Brylawski

We welcome remembrances from those who enjoyed Tom's company over the years.

Please include "Tom" in the subject line as you send your remembrance to the email address given at the bottom of the home page for this memorial site.

We'll post them below in reverse chronological order.

Memorial Service on Sunday, September 9 in Washington, D.C.

Tom's father, Henry Brylawski, his sister, Kathy Miller, and brother Sam welcomed many who knew Tom to a memorial service at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue, located at 6th and I Sts. NW, at 11:00am. (I Street is between H Street and Massachusetts Avenue.) Following the service there was a luncheon.

Condolences

If you wish to send your condolences to Bruna Brylawski, you may email them to her at bruna"at"med.unc.edu or mail them to her at 5111 Tudor Place, Durham, North Carolina 27713.

Other Recognitions of Tom

If you are looking for another way to honor Tom's memory, Tom's wife Bruna has mentioned the possibility of sending a donation to:

Duke Hospice Inpatient Facility at the Meadowlands, 1001 Corporate Dr., Hillsborough, NC 27278.

As you write a check to Duke Home Care and Hospices, please be sure to indicate on the subject line "for ICF use only".

This will ensure that the donation will go to the hospice where Tom was.

Personal Remembrances

Liz McMahon, 1982 UNC Math Ph.D.

I was a PhD student at UNC from 1978-82, and I took a reading course from Tom, which instilled in me a love of combinatorics; I now do research mostly in the field, although that wasn't what my PhD was in. However, that wasn't the first time I'd had Tom as a teacher. I grew up in Chapel Hill, and my senior year of high school, I took calculus at UNC because CHHS didn't offer calculus at that time. Along with 3 others, I took Tom's one and only 8:00am calculus course -- it was his first year of teaching at UNC, and the new faculty always got the 8:00 classes. Thus, Tom was the first mathematician I ever met. He was, as others have mentioned, a rather unique teacher. I distinctly remember the first exam. This was an ordinary calculus class, and he'd asked us to prove that the function that was 0 on the rationals and x on the irrationals was continuous; another problem was to prove that $f(x) = x|x|$ was differentiable at $x = 0$. I didn't do too well on that exam -- I got a 62, and was completely devastated, since I?d never gotten a grade like that on a math exam before. After he finished handing back the exams, he told us we were all a bunch of idiots -- the highest grade in the class was a 62! Far from being devastated, I was suddenly thrilled with my

grade. (I spoke about this to Mickey Elam, one of the other students, recently, and she remembered the grades as being in the 20s?) One of my proudest achievements was getting a grade in the 90s on the final exam for Calc II. Tom made a deep impression on me at the time, and I think that part of why I'm a mathematician today is his influence.

Terry Bridgman, 1989 UNC Math M.S.

I was saddened to learn through a colleague of Tom's passing. Though living in the western part of the country has caused me to lose touch with Carolina and the Math dept, I nevertheless will always look back at that time with fondness and, sometimes, amusement, and Tom was a part of that. Whether leading a tour of his eclectic collections at his home, having his multiple requisite cups of coffee in his office or in the lounge (which to this day I believe was just an extension to his office), dodging slabs of mortar dropping through the roof of Plyer during his lecture (I had the good fortune of actually witnessing this), becoming disheveled mere minutes after arriving at campus, or sharing his belief that his wife could only tolerate a finite amount of time with him, so he would adjust his living habits accordingly, Tom was and always will be unique. His time on earth was too short and I think people would have gladly tolerated a bit more. He will be missed and remembered.

Rhodes Peele, 1978 UNC Math Ph.D.

Tom loved Italy and spent many of his summers there, combining mathematical work with other interests such as visiting with his many Italian friends, sightseeing, going to art museums, eating great food and so forth. In one of these early trips, his knowledge of the Italian language was still minimal, and he wanted to improve quickly. Therefore he decided to give his talk titled "The Mathematics of Watergate" in Italian. His preparation consisted of going through the English text of the talk virtually word for word, consulting his Italian dictionary and grammar text frequently to produce an Italian translation for oral delivery. This talk did not go over too well. Tom has always had a problem with talking too loudly when he is lecturing. On this occasion, when he looked out on his bewildered audience, he tried to deal with their non-comprehension the only way he knew how, by talking even louder. After two or three of these "upgrades" he was unconsciously shouting at his audience! Even Professor Rota, whom Tom enlisted as a kind of volunteer from the audience at one point (much as a stage magician asks for volunteers) was unable to comprehend him and facilitate Tom's demonstration of mathematical lie-detection. Despite this, the largely Italian audience adored Tom, and on most afternoons, after the last talk in the conference had ended, many of the participants would follow Tom to a local restaurant or disco. In subsequent summer trips, Tom's knowledge of Italian improved greatly, and he soon achieved complete fluency in the language.

Some of Tom Brylawski's Favorite Things..

A partial list (I knew Tom for 37 years, first as a student; later as a friend):

* His wife, sons, and extended family
* Carolina basketball
* 50's Rock and Roll music
* Word games
* The Putnam exam

* Visual art, from Raphael and Leonardo to Duchamp and Warhol
* Italian architecture
* Bridge, both rubber and duplicate
* Good movies from the past
* The Andy Griffith show (with Opie, Aunt Bea, et al.)
* Traveling
* Eating, drinking and smoking
* The school of combinatorics developed by Professor Rota and his disciples

Bob Frommer, M.I.T. Class of 1966

Tommy and I were fraternity brothers and roommates in our undergrad years at MIT, where Tom virtually defined the term "infectious smile". The room would light up when he walked in, and a sea of anticipatory grins would precede his words when he made spontaneous short speeches at our fraternity meetings. Nobody ever doubted that Tom was the smartest in our small class. We considered his fondness for creating mathematically precise large oil paintings just another of his varied interests. I was in Tom and Joan's wedding after graduation, and we kept in touch sporadically after that. I was delighted when they and their 2 little kids visited me in Berkeley in the early 70's and Tom and I planned a rendezvous at the Spanish Steps in Florence the next month. We met and spent a great day together, and that's the last time I saw Tom. My years of procrastination getting back in touch with him have now cost me ever seeing him again and I am saddened. The world is an emptier place for his passing.

Karen Stingle, Wilson High School Class of 1962

I am so sorry to hear of Tom's passing. Though I haven't seen him since high school, I can still remember him vividly, his wonderful sense of humor and the caring he expressed with it. We were in math classes together, and although I always got A's, it was always clear to me that my A's were not the same as Tom's A's - he was brilliant - and yet he didn't lord it over others, just seemed comfortable with his own genius, as a gift he was given.

Gary Gordon, 1983 UNC Math Ph.D.

I met Tom in the Fall of 1977, when I began graduate school. I grew up in an environment that especially valued quickness and humor, and Tom was quicker than anyone I had ever met, and he was also extremely funny. He was a big part of my entire graduate school experience, from the classroom to the pitcher'Rs mound to He's Not Here. One of his favorite stories about those old softball games: Tom was pitching and talking, two of his favorite activities, and someone on the opposing team yelled at Tom "The score is wrong! You can't count!" My response (yelled back from my position in the field) was rapid: "He can't pitch, but he CAN count!"

Tom taught me lots about counting and even more about what it means to be a mathematician. As a thesis advisor, he always had lots of ideas for me, and he was extremely generous with his time. As a teacher, he inspired me (after frightening me, I suppose), and I was thrilled if he thought something I did was "clever", probably his highest praise. As a father, he was gentle, loving and firm. I saw him with David and Michael from 1977-1982, and I always thought he was a wonderful role model for me as a parent. He was wonderful with all children, and when Liz McMahon and I returned to Chapel Hill for a sabbatical in 1993-94, he talked to my two daughters as if he cared

about what they were thinking, which I'm sure he did. As a host, he and Bruna were always very gracious and hospitable. Finally, as a friend, he was terrific fun to be with. Time spent with Tom always seemed to be party-time. I will miss talking to him, his humor, the bridge games, the beer, the food, the Dolphins-Redskins games, all those UNC basketball games, but especially his friendship. His influence on me and on my career is impossible to overstate.

Edouard Din, 2000 UNC Math M.S.

Homage to Dr. Thomas Brylawski: If a great master is someone who guides and acts decisively on the fate of an anonymous student under his watch, then Dr. Brylawski was of this caliber. I was introduced to Dr. Brylawski by Dr. Assani because of his works on mathematics and art. I had little academic background in mathematics and was interested in pattern-making as well as the role of symmetry as a principle of composition in architectural design. He welcomed me at the Graduate School and hand in hand, he helped me learn how to look at and see through things. He was an inspiring artist and a beautiful mind who led me to share his passion for mirrors, patterns, figures, combinations and finally symmetry. I still remember that day of training at his home, when losing patience, he uttered: "Din, you don't need a master degree in math to be a great architect!" I was not able to strike back that day, but in my heart, I pledged to do my best to earn his congratulations one day! I earned my degree in 2000 and enrolled in the PhD Program - Design Computing at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. Later, I returned to his house to show him my qualifying paper for the Ph.D., wherein I convincingly demonstrated how mathematics is important to formal design at the age of computer-aided design. He made a promise to be part of my Ph.D. Committee. In fact, I have been working hard to deserve his congrats on "Emergent Symmetries: Exploration of Complexity, Ambiguity and Emergence in Architectural Design". So when at the end of Spring Semester 2007, I got my proposal approved, I was ready to show to the master how important and critical group theory was to the analysis of late modern architecture. I had planned to pay him a surprise visit the week of July 23 (after my daughter's orientation at UNC). This time, Dr. Brylawski had already left the place, without explaining to me "why reason can dream what dreams cannot reason". I simply say goodbye to my beloved mentor with one pledge: a dedication of my Ph.D. to Dr. Thomas Brylawski.

Andrew H. Levy, boyhood and college friend

To capture Tom in mere words (or even formulae) is an impossible task. Just his spontaneous laugh and nod routine was and is still enough to make me smile. And, of course, there was always so much more. He could find the humor in anything, everything. I knew Tom from the age of 5. We were in elementary, junior high and high school (and religious school, too), and then on the opposite sides of Cambridge, Mass. So many stories. I will leave to others to tell of his academic and professorial achievements, all of which were foreshadowed by his obvious brilliance and precocious intelligence. We worked together one high school summer at an operations research company, where we were supposed to be applying something called the Markov process to minimizing elevator waiting time in multi-story buildings. The most we achieved was to improve our game of hearts, with the 2 other future MIT students who made up our foursome.

Tom was one of the most creative people I ever met. And he could be driven by a sense of doing it all. One Saturday

he called me to tell me he had been fixed up with a girl at Radcliffe for that night, and he wanted me to check her out in our version of the face book. I told him she passed, so he was pleased. Surprisingly, I didn't hear from him till late Sunday afternoon. When he called to report on his date, the explanation for his delay in calling became clear. It turned out that she, like Tom, was an Agatha Christie devotee, and she had, in fact read EVERY one of the Agatha Christie books. Tom was short by a count of 6. So, after dropping her off, he had gone straight to the library to read those 6 books so that, by the next time he spoke to her, he would have read as much as she. I never took it as a sign of competitiveness from Tom, but rather a view that the order of things would only be in balance if he, too, were to read all of them. That same date also was quick to match him formula for formula when they confronted some strobe photographs of a drop of water hitting a pool of water -- Tom couldn't get over it!

As freshman, we both were applying for summer jobs in the Federal government. I took the multiple-choice exam a few weeks before Tom did. I still remember sitting in my freshman dorm and being quizzed by Tom over the phone about the types of math problems and their degree of difficulty. I happened to remember a specific one, and when I gave him the question, he was quick to reply with the mathematically correct answer; no surprise. And yet, I was able, accurately, to tell him that his answer was incorrect. Tom jumped to the challenge, did the math again, and insisted that his initial answer was correct. Again, I told him he had missed the mark. Now, I truly had Tom's attention, and he dissected the question with great analytical precision (much more than the question deserved, I should add), only to arrive at the same answer. When I told him, yet again, that his answer was incorrect, Tom was incredulous and almost defeated. So he finally, reluctantly, accepted his fate and asked for the correct answer. When I told him that it was "(e), none of the above", he roared with laughter -- I can still hear it! Later, he told me how he had almost been socked by several of his MIT fraternity brothers, when he had gone through the same catechism with each of them. He loved it! And, we would laugh about it from time to time, and he would re-experience the joy of it each time.

Tom and I sat next to each other in 6th grade. We had fliptop desks. The inside of mine was always organized, and his was always piles of books and papers and pencils. From time to time, Ms. McClure would ask me to straighten the innards of Tom's desk, which I would do. If one ever needed proof that Tom was a magician, here it could be seen; for, no sooner had I done my work, and flipped the top down, then Tom would raise the top, only to show off the instant "organization a la Tom" -- a free-for-all of books, papers and pencils. He must have used magnets, but I never knew how he did it. What I came to understand later is that Tom had his own notions of "organization", and they were at a higher power than mine, or, daresay, Ms. McClure's.

Last June, I had the delight of spending a leisurely lunch in New York with Bruna and Tom. I had never met Bruna (whom I instantly adored), and I had not seen or talked to Tom for many years. We reminisced, we talked of our children, we spoke of the future. My wife was out of town, and my daughter (an MIT freshman this past year -- something that pleased Tom) was not able to join us either. I wish they had been with me to experience the electricity that Tom always generated, and to have the pleasure of meeting Bruna. I will carry that charge with me always. Thank you for your light. Safe journey dear friend.

Andy Moursund, Wilson High School Class of '62

I was in Tom's homeroom and classes for his six years at Deal JHS and Wilson HS, and while I never really hung out with him, he was still one of those people you will never forget. He was universally acknowledged by all of us as the one true genius of the Class of '62 and yet never put on any airs about it.

My favorite 'Bry' moment is actually centered around an 11th grade English teacher who was perhaps even more well remembered by some of us than Tom himself: good old Mrs. Grover, one of the many certified loveable nutballs on the Wilson faculty. One of Mrs. Grover's favorite devices for dodging any actual teaching was to get her students to take turns preparing long summaries of our assigned literary readings, while she'd be nodding off at her desk. She also had a vivid imagination when it came to our political sympathies, seeing herself in Limbaughesque terms as a brave American patriot among a sea of suspicious liberals. We loved her anyway. In any case, one day Tom was assigned to summarize a play---can't remember exactly which one---that centered on labor. And while he was as non-political as anyone at Wilson I can remember, his mini-lecture unavoidably touched on issues of class distinctions. We could see Mrs. Grover stirring in her seat, wide awake for once. Tom finished up with a characteristic one liner or two and then sat down. Mrs. Grover said nothing. But the next day, the first thing she did was to send Tom down to the principal's office on some sort of an obviously contrived errand. Since she was the boss of the classroom, he complied without questioning it. As soon as he'd left the room, though, she darted towards the door, made sure he was out of sight, and then turned to the class in the most stereotyped hush-hush / confidential tone imaginable, and whispered: "Tell me, is Brylawski a Communist?" The class completely broke up and couldn't stop laughing for the better part of the entire period, and more than a few of us asked him that same question---in that same hush-hush / confidential tone, of course---at every appropriate opportunity for the rest of the year

Candace Carroll, junior high school classmate

I went to junior high and high school with Tom. He was not only extremely smart, his was always in a good mood and was *hilariously* funny. When I try to remember all of the funny things he did and said, the only thing I can remember was that one day, in the terrible Miss Schombert's history class, before she came in, he was involved in some kind of foolishness and said fairly loudly, "You two get along so well, you should really get married." I sat katty-corner behind him, and my best friend Dana Allen sat directly behind him. I think Sam Hopkins sat in front of me, next to Tom. We all said, "Tom, who are you talking about?" and he replied, "Oh ... me and me." He then put on a pantomime of being in love with himself. He crossed his arms and wound them around each other in a demented way in order to clasp hands with himself. Then he said "Give us a kiss, Tom" and turned his lips inward and kissed himself with an enormous, loud smack. Dana and Sam and I, and those around us, were convulsed with laughter, whereupon, of course, Miss Schombert walked in and was, as usual, furious that we were laughing and generally out of order.

I haven't actually seen Tom since our 20th high school reunion in 1982, but I always think of him smiling and laughing, always a happy and cheerful and funny presence, no matter how gloomy the day. I will never forget him.

Robert Bryant, 1979 UNC Math Ph.D.

Tom was a wonderful teacher for me in my first year in graduate school (though he never let me forget that I was

from NC State, that redneck college over in Raleigh that simply couldn't hold a candle to UNC). I was greatly saddened to learn of his passing.

Tom Dowling, 1967 UNC Ph.D.

As you might know, we were matroid theory colleagues for two or three years in Chapel Hill before I moved to Columbus in '72. While my memory is faulty, I don't think I saw him at conferences after that---with the exception of the big Seattle conference in '95 where we met. I'll always remember our most interesting nightly after-dinner conversations there among 6-8 people at a nearby campus restaurant, discussions nearly always led by Tom. He was on those occasions the Tom I remembered from more than 20 years earlier : most outgoing with strong opinions, loud-speaking at times, but a great listener as well.

Dan Curtin, 1979 UNC Math Ph.D.

Ellen and I were saddened to learn of Tom's death. As others have mentioned, among the faculty he was far and away the most welcoming of new people, especially if they were willing to pitch in on cryptic crossword puzzles, word games, math puzzles, trivia, or just general high-spirited conversation. The math common room probably added two years to my doctoral time, but immeasurably to my fun and general knowledge. Fluid dynamics memories are a bit shaky, at least later in the evenings. Softball...It's a wonder Tom wasn't killed on the mound as he tongue-lashed opposing batters. Actually I nearly killed him once myself as he manfully covered first base and I came up firing. (Darn it, if he had caught the ball, or if, as was more likely, it lodged in his throat, we would have just got the guy!!) I have many fond memories of UNC-CH (most of them true!). Tom figures in a disproportionately large number of them. Our love and prayers are with him and his family and his many friends, among whom we are proud to be counted (discretely, of course.)

Rob Pratt, 1999 UNC Math M.S.; 2003 UNC Operations Research Ph.D.

Tom was my master's thesis advisor and later served on my doctoral dissertation committee in the Operations Research department. I'm not a morning person, and my favorite story about Tom relates to that. When Tom began teaching at UNC, he was assigned a class that met at 8 a.m., a much earlier time slot than he wanted. His attempts to get the schedule changed were unsuccessful, and so he taught the course as scheduled that semester. When he was told the good news that his earliest course the next semester would be at 9 a.m. instead, Tom replied, "Oh, please don't give me a 9 a.m. class. I can't stay up that late!" Rather than getting up early, he had been staying up all night.

Owen Franken, M.I.T. Class of 1968

Tom was my "big brother" in the AEPi fraternity when I was a freshman and he was a senior. I mostly remember his wonderful energy, constant bridge, and smoking, and his love of life and sense of humor. I have not the slightest idea about all the math stuff you, his lucky colleagues and former students, are talking about, wallpaper patterns and Tutte combinations and Elaine (who is She?) or whatever, (I am a photographer in Paris now) but the Friday Fluid Dynamic seminars sound like something I am sorry I missed. And the World Beer Festival. And Tom. You are all welcome to google me and find me in Paris and continue the tradition, perhaps with wine.

Neil White, Combinaorics Colleague, University of Florida

Thanks to Tom, I was a visitor in the Math Dept. at UNC in Spring 1978 and again in Fall 1980. I came away with

many happy memories: working with Tom, sitting in on Tom's graduate combinatorics course, the combinatorics seminar, the softball team, the Fluid Dynamics Seminar, and the frenetic level of activity that always surrounded Tom. Tom played another very significant role in my career: when the book (later series of books) on Theory of Matroids which I was editing for Cambridge University Press was in serious danger of imploding, Tom produced in a very short period of time both the central chapter on Constructions and the appendix on Matroid Cryptomorphisms. These are certainly the most often consulted and referenced contributions to the whole series, and Tom's effort at that time was the turning point of the whole project.

One evening when my wife, Mary, and I visited Tom, we noticed a rug he had created which exhibited a solution to the squared-square problem, that is, an n by n square which was decomposed into squares of distinct integer side lengths (at that time only one or two solutions were known, though since then a few more have been discovered). This inspired Mary to create a quilt using the same pattern, a tangible memento of Tom that we still cherish.

Bob Proctor, UNC Math Colleague

Tom was the most entertaining member of the math faculty. He was a wonderful story teller, and his quips often enlivened our hallways and faculty lounge, boosting our spirits. I couldn't help but think of him as the human embodiment of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle .. the moment you had determined his position to be the water fountain, he was already seated in the middle of the lounge preparing his next class!

Tom's steady attendance at our departmental colloquia was exceeded by none. Non-mathematicians may not be aware that any one mathematician is dwarfed by our subject. Relatively few faculty members attend talks which are far outside their subject, even if the talk is designed for a general audience. As a fellow combinatorialist, I thought I had some sense of Tom's knowledge set. But time and again he would amaze me in the way he was able to follow the general drift of a talk and ask an astute question at the end. His knowledge of many areas of discrete mathematics was encyclopedic, and will be sorely missed.

Tom took the lead in hiring me into the department, and it is a wonderful job to have. He was professionally supportive of me over the last twenty years, also leading the way for my promotions within the department. So I am especially indebted to him. Tom, thanks for everything! -- Bob

Charles Gunn, 1983 UNC Math M.S.

Tom was my advisor for my Master's project at UNC, "A Computer Implementation of the 17 Euclidean Wallpaper Groups". It's funny, I can't remember how I decided on this project, but in retrospect I think it must have been at Tom's initiative. For many years he taught a course for education majors, introducing them to the beauty of discrete (and other) mathematics, and a big part of this course was an elementary treatment of wallpaper patterns. I believe that Tom, knowing my passion for computer graphics, and being aware of the difficulty I had in uniting that with my other passion for mathematics, suggested the project himself. He was a helpful and interested partner in fulfilling this project. He knew little about computer programming, so he didn't feel inhibited in suggesting features that turned out to be impractical to realize, but many of his ideas found their way into the final project. I continue to work on further incarnations of this project, including some of his then-impractical ideas!

Tom was also a good friend, always open to a discussion in almost any direction. I visited UNC in fall of 2005 and

saw Tom again after a break of several years. It was as if we had seen each other only yesterday. Tom kept a child-like quality about him throughout the years; there was a part of him which I think stayed about seven years old. Wherever Tom is now, I imagine that child is finding lots to be amazed about. May he find the forces he needs to meet the adventures that await him, and may our good thoughts follow him there and give him the kind of unconditional support he gave to others throughout his life.

Idris Assani, UNC Math Colleague

I am very sad to learn of Tom's passing. I had very high regards for him even if I disagreed sometimes on his teaching style. Tom was a unique person. He had several gifts that I have rarely seen in my life. I will surely miss him.

1) Tom had a "BIG" and generous heart. Evidence of it was the immediate love that kids had for him. After a few minutes at a party you will see all kids following Tom around. He had a unique way of communicating with them and kids responded to him immediately.

2) Tom was one of the main, if not *the* main, elements of the Department in my view. He was one of the few to welcome new comers in the Department: senior or young researchers, graduate students, ... He would find a way to talk to them, know a bit about their work, their life experience. If he could, he would try a few words in their native language or talk about a book or a movie he saw linked to their culture. This was a very natural caring side of his personality and he would come up with these details from his remarkable memory. He really wanted people to be happy around him.

Tom has been instrumental in my academic life. It was his curiosity and often precise analysis of someone else's character that helped me at UNC-CH. But I do not want to close with sad notes , Tom would not want that. There is one event that happened with Tom in the mid-nineties that always made me smile when I met him. Finding out that my family and I were visiting Washingtom DC, Tom invited us to have breakfast at the house of one of his relative's, where he was staying. We arrived the next morning and knocked at the door. Well, Tom was asleep and did not inform his relative of the invitation he had made for us. His relative woke him up. Tom simply said that everything was alright and came up with a very original breakfast. He really wanted us to have breakfast with him even if he did not pay too much attention to ... a few details.

Navin Vembar, a former Ph.D. student of Tom's

The first time I met Tom was at the Brauer Lectures where Andrew Wiles was discussing his proof of Fermat's Last Theorem. I had come with another student from GWU to see the department and discuss matroids. Meeting Tom cemented my attendance at UNC -- his open, vibrant manner was an invitation into both his academic life and his personal one as well. My first year as his graduate student included both fascinating mathematics and attending the World Beer Festival with him, a tradition we upheld every year, even after I moved out of North Carolina.

His influence on me is hard to overstate. It was he who convinced me to come back and complete my Ph.D., which has opened up opportunities that simply would not have existed before. Our shared passion of everything from combinatorics to pop culture always made for fun Friday evenings over beer. He always made me feel welcome in his home. I will always be grateful for his time in my life.

Jim Campbell, former UNC Grad student

Friends: Jim Campbell here, I was a grad student at UNC in the late 70's/early 80's and considered Tom Brylawski a dear friend. Tom's energy and vitality were extraordinary, and he brought these to every endeavor. I remember looking for Tom one Friday around 11 am. I was standing in the third floor hallway of Phillips, when I asked Gary Gordon (a student of Tom's) if he knew when Tom was teaching that day. Gary said only that he knew Tom was not teaching just then. "How do you know that?", I asked. "Because", said Gary, "I cannot hear him lecturing". (You all know what he meant, don't you?) I remember when Tom, a dyed-in-the-wool discrete mathematician, sat in on our graduate level complex variable course, just to get a feel for the subject. At first we students were all intimidated, but we got used to his presence in the class, and found it ultimately comforting - because he had the moxie to ask questions that we often had but may have been too intimidated to ask (you recall that just-in-grad-school feeling, I'm sure). I remember talking to him later about the course and he said he enjoyed the tightness and power of Cauchy's theorems, because they gave a discrete sort of feel to the subject.

We used to have grad student-faculty softball games at the picnics. One time Tom was swinging a bat to warm up - and hit my wife Susan in the head. She was fine. He was embarassed, if you can believe (or imagine) that. I remember Tom at Fluid Dynamics at He's Not Here, having an animated discussion with somebody about something, strongly making a point - then turning into Mr. Sweets when his young sons would arrive later, hugging and kissing them and showering them with attention.

Then there were those many nights of bridge: Tom's powerful mind often could very quickly see how the hand would play out, and we-of-slower-minds often had to ask him to please let us play it out because we hadn't quite gotten it. Of course he was almost always right.

Tom and Bruna once came to visit us in Memphis. He gave a great talk in the department here, made quite an impression, people later were asking all about him. Later that day, despite my youth and (I thought) my advantage in athleticism, he creamed me in tennis. (Why I thought I ever had a chance I'll never know). And finally, you know how Tom loved his rock'n'roll. It was always fun when he would host tv viewings of Carolina games, because not only did the house have shag carpet but he had mile-after-mile of reel-to-reel tapes of 50's/60's rock'n'roll and soul music, which we got to hear when the game was over. During his trip to Memphis of course he and Bruna visited Graceland. When they returned, Tom asked me "Jim, please, can we trade jobs?".

After he became famous, Elvis was asked what he missed most about Memphis, to which he replied "Everything". That is what we will miss about Tom. -- Cheers, J.

Scott Provan, Department of Statistics and Operation Research

Tom was one of the founding members of the Combinatorics and Optimization seminar, a Triangle-wide seminar that ran for about 15 years in the 80's and 90's, as well as a major contributor of interesting combinatorial material of all ilks. He had a reputation for talking faster than most people thought, and listening to his lectures was often akin to riding a tornado. One of Tom's favorite phrases was "This discussion is taking a nasty turn!" when somebody's question required a gruesome technical argument (which of course he gave). The secretaries in Smith jokingly said that they learned a lot from his lectures without ever leaving their offices, and those of you who have heard him

speak can attest to his decibel level. Anyway the seminars were always a rollicking affair, and usually nobody got three sentences out without Tom or somebody putting in their two cents worth. Speakers really earned their dais. We will miss Tom's style and humor.

Caroline Charbonnet Munzing, friend of Tom's son David

I met Tom through his son David while we were in college. Through David and his family in DC, I fell in love with the city, the art and the excitement. I eventually moved there after spending several summers in college working on the Hill. David took me to the East Wing of the National Gallery for the first time. I'll never forget being in the Library of Congress with Tom's brother, Sam. I still feel like DC is my second home. I owe it all to the Brylawski's. To all of Tom's friends and family, wishing you peace.

Jo Ellis-Monaghan, former student

Tom had a huge impact on my mathematical career that continues to this day. This began when I was a graduate student at UNC, beginning my first forays into combinatorics under his tutelage. Tom's work on matroids and the Tutte polynomial is foundational, and it was an incredible opportunity to learn this material directly from him. His powerful personality and sheer intensity drove me to work harder than I knew possible. He was energetic, he was demanding, he was effusive and joyous, and he insisted on best effort and nothing less. He evoked a combination of terror and hero-worship that profoundly shaped me as a mathematician. This influence has not diminished. Over the years, much of my research has centered around the Tutte polynomial, and I regularly reference Tom's seminal papers. Indeed, I was working on an extension of his original work on deletion-contraction invariants when I received the sad news of his passing. His mathematical legacy most definitely lives on.

Tom was unquestionably larger than life. I will always remember his intensity, I will always remember his laugh.... --Jo

Maria and Bob Burka

Such a great loss -- and so suddenly, too. But surely never to be forgotten.

Zari Kamarei, Math/Physics Librarian

Tom was a caring person. He stopped by the library to talk with us, and to discuss world politics. Tom was a great library supporter. Back in 2003, we had to cancel Discrete Mathematics, an Elsevier journal. Tom donated his own subscription to the library. Thanks to him, up to last month this journal was current in our library. Tom also had a passion for Persian movies. He often recorded these movies and shared them with me. Rest in peace Tom, we will miss your presence.

Fluid Dynamics Seminar, Special Edition

As most of you know, Tom Brylawski was one of the founding fathers, perhaps the founding father, of the Friday fluid dynamics seminar. This seminar, which has been open to all, requires no special mathematical knowledge and has been attended over the years by a legion of Tom's friends as well as faculty and graduate students from the Math Department. Some of its many locations have been Quickee Takeout, Town Hall, He's Not Here, the Carolina Inn, Groundhog Tavern, Four Corners/Woody's, WB Yeats. Its current location since the 90's is Pantana Bob's at the intersection of Church and Rosemary Streets.

The special edition of this seminar held on Friday July 20 was very well attended. On behalf of Bruna Brylawski, the Department of Mathematics would like to thank everyone who was able to attend.