

THOMAS PHILIP CAROLAN
(1936 – 2022)

Thomas Philip Carolan “Tom” was born on November 15, 1936, in Decorah, Iowa, and passed away on September 14, 2022. Tom was the son of Margaret “Maggie” Hall McConnell and Thomas Harold Carolan. His father was a vocal New Deal Democrat and newly married graduate of Georgetown Law School when he returned to his native Iowa to practice law. He was soon elected County Attorney of Winneshiek County, a hilly corner of Iowa near the Mississippi River that is an anomaly of natural beauty and progressive politics in a state better known for dreary flat landscapes and notoriously peevish Republican politicians.

Tom was predeceased by his eldest sister Mary Bryne (Robert Callahan), his brother Michael the Obscure, and just recently by his sister Ann, a cosmopolitan former “spook” aka CIA analyst.

After Maggie’s arduous decade of exile and child bearing in the Midwestern hinterlands, exacerbated by the privations of Prohibition, the Carolan family moved back to Washington, D.C. in 1942, where Mr. Carolan prospered in private practice and became active in the national Democratic Party. Maggie, a devout Catholic, was proud to be one of the first in the D.C. area to host an event for presidential candidate John F. Kennedy.

Tom started his education at Blessed Sacrament School in Chevy Chase, after which he attended Georgetown Prep and Georgetown University. He graduated from Georgetown Law School with his J.D. in 1961. During his career he was licensed to practice law in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Texas. He was a member of the Army ROTC during college and law school and after graduation was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, where he was an Infantry officer and was briefly deployed to Florida during the Cuban missile crisis.

Tom’s twenty years of marriage to Jeanne Dahlsted produced six children, Thomas, Timothy, Jeannie (Joseph Broadhurst), Michael, Kathleen (Ventura Aquirrezabal) and Suzanne. He also leaves eight grandchildren spread from coast to coast across the United States, as well as innumerable Callahan nieces and nephews and their offspring in Georgia.

After an honorable discharge from the Army, Tom lived briefly in Maryland, then in Chicago working for the commercial real estate firm Rausch & Company for three years. He subsequently moved his growing family back to Maryland where he went into law practice with his father. While in private practice, Tom represented criminal defendants, either by court appointment or on retainer. Tom successfully represented one client he felt was unjustly prosecuted. As for the rest, he did his best to obtain fair sentences.

Tom spent his early career at the Department of Justice Lands Division trying eminent domain cases in numerous federal district courts in 46 states and the territory of Guam. During his travels he met Pamala Nelson at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Boise, Idaho. In February 1987, they were married in a ceremony on the beach in Honaunau, Hawaii.

Later that year, during a get-together with out-of-town DOJ friends at the Irish Times Bar, the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Texas offered Tom a position taking over the land condemnation docket in his District, which at the time was one of the busiest in the country. Having passed the Texas bar exam while in the Army and eager for a change in circumstances, Tom accepted the offer and they relocated to Sherman, Texas. Once settled in Texas, the ever frugal and cash strapped father prevailed on his college age children to consider Texas public colleges due to their very low in-state tuition, prompting a migration of Carolans to Texas.

After working through the backlog of condemnation cases involving Lake Ray Roberts, Tom went on to prosecute federal criminal cases, many including fraud and embezzlement. After retiring in 1994, he enjoyed teaching classes at Grayson County College, taking “Academy of Lifelong Learning” classes at Austin College, and “farming” on his five acres in the woods until moving to Buda, Texas, in 2004 to be closer to grandchildren.

Tom had a zeal for gourmet cooking, both at the stove and especially at the table. He was a lifelong gourmand and inveterate beer drinker in addition to decades of intermittently repented smoking, necessitating the heroic efforts of his doctors and wife to remediate the numerous ill effects thereof. Tom almost certainly would have felt his epicurean life choices were vindicated by the manner of his death – an ordinary fall in the home.

Tom was a lifelong member of the The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, a prestigious fraternal society dedicated to wearing tuxedos for the ritual consumption of boiled ham, cabbage and “pratties” on March 17th each year. Tom was raised to believe he was 100% Irish, yet bore with great stoicism the news that DNA revealed his mother was partly of the perfidious British races. The Scottish name McConnell should have been a clue, but as one perceptive yet indelicate nun at Blessed Sacrament School very pointedly observed to his parents, young Tom could be a bit slow on the uptake.

Friends and family may wish to raise a glass of Harp or Guinness in remembrance of Tom (or pour out a can of Milwaukee’s Best or whatever is on sale—it’s all just urine he would say). He had a full and interesting 85 years on this earth and will be sorely missed.

The family wants to thank cardiologist David Hayes and oncologist Punit Chadha for taking such good care of Tom for many years.

A memorial/Irish wake will be held for friends and family on Sunday, October 9, beginning at 3:00 p.m. at the Onion Creek Senior Center in Buda.

“May your glass be ever full, May the roof over your head be always strong, And may you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you're dead.”