

Aphelion Webzine - Issue 132, Volume 13 - May 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my sad duty to report the death of an old and very dear friend from my years in college at the University of Georgia . Back in January, Tom Deitz suffered a massive heart attack. Monday, April 27, Tom succumbed to the damage done to his heart by that attack. He'd spent the intervening time in and out of the hospital. When the end came, friends from Gainesville State College, where he had been teaching, were with him. Sunday, yesterday, some two hundred or more people gathered at that school he loved so well to celebrate his life. At his request, we did not mourn his passing, but rather cherished the memories of his time among us. Because, as was pointed out many times yesterday, Tom is not gone from our lives. For those of us who were blessed by knowing Tom, he will always be with us- invisibly, perhaps, but here just the same. Indeed, I can feel a comforting hand on my shoulder as I write these words. And as usual for Tom, he's trying to copy edit as I type.

I've known Tom since 1976. Deitz was my very first Editor. That is, he was the first person to take a story I wrote and attempt to make it readable by someone who wasn't living inside my head. I learned that I had not clearly presented the scenes that I typed out, that my story was a bit confusing, and that I couldn't spell worth a flip. Gently, he led me to see where I could reword different passages in order to allow a reader to understand what I meant to say, rather than what I had conveyed in a near-shorthand style. This was the single most aggravating and enlightening experience of my writing journey. And that seems to sum Tom up nicely. Gentle, enlightening, and sometimes aggravating in his quest for perfection. You couldn't help but love the man. His skills at painting, drawing, writing, costuming- at whatever he turned his hands to do -was nothing short of awesome. I could be envious, but not jealous, every time I saw some new creation of his. Be it novels, or artwork, or costumes for SCA events, Tom approached everything he did with the desire to get it absolutely right, down to the smallest detail. Back then, the name "Aphelion" was used as the title of the fanzine put out by the UGA Science Fiction Literary and Discussion Club. During my time at the University there were four, nearly quarterly, issues of Aphelion published and snail-mailed out so a couple of hundred people. I was lucky enough to have either a story or poetry in three out of the four, as I recall. When it came time for me to start my own e-zine, I contacted some of the folks in charge of that print fanzine and asked for permission to use the name. Since you're reading "Aphelion" online right now, I'm sure that you can guess that permission was granted.

One tradition from the original incarnation of the Aphelion fanzine has been carried on by Aphelion Webzine. Every issue is usually late. I believe that Tom would get a kick out of that.

Friends, Tom wrote twenty or so novels that you can find at online retailers. Or if you're really lucky, in brick & mortar bookstores. Prints of some of his artwork have hung on the walls of every apartment and house that I've called home since my days at college. His SCA costumes have been the envy of everyone who saw them. Murals he painted still adorn the walls of the homes of some of his friends. The few times I chose to bother him when I thought he was not busy writing, he was a joy to be around. He was supportive and offered advice when I decided to start writing and submitting stories to

online e-zines and print publishers. His advice? "Don't get discouraged by rejections. Always do your best, then polish it to make it better. Never give up because something isn't easy to do. Everything worth doing is worth doing right."

Tom always sought to get the details exactly right. He was never satisfied with "that's good enough" but always wanted to go that extra step, to make the best better, to make things as perfect as was humanly possible. He never gave up on a project, but kept tinkering with it until he knew that it was right. He wasn't afraid to give his all. He wasn't content to do anything halfway. It was either right, or it wasn't finished yet. I think the worst thing Tom could ever say to anyone was "you can do better than that."

Tom touched thousands of lives. Through his books, through his time as a teacher, through the Society for Creative Anachronism, through his artwork, through his friendship. I, and everyone else who knew him are far richer for having done so. Some people may think that we're poorer for having lost him. I disagree. We haven't lost him at all. There is now, and always has been, a little piece of Tom inside everyone whose life he touched. Tom isn't gone, he's just moved to a different place again. This time it may be a bit further away, but his love and friendship and joy and example will always be with us.

Thank you, Tom. I hope I returned a friendship as good as you gave. I'll never give up. I'll be forever trying to go that extra step, to go beyond "that's good enough" into the realms of "that's right- now I can call it finished!"

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Thomas Franklin Deitz. Writer, artist, scholar, teacher, and friend.

Dan

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