

Thomas M. Atkins '68

January 28, 1950 – November 8, 2024

Saint John's Preparatory Regent and Board Chair

Eulogy by Jon McGee

I want to begin by extending blessings to Jann, Jeff, and Julie and your families. Tom loved you more than anything – particularly his six grandsons (his double hat tricks of boys). Tom delighted in nothing more than telling stories about your accomplishments big and small.

I also want to thank you for inviting me to share some memories of Tom. He was my boss for a while as chair of the Board of Regents but my friend forever. I am deeply grateful for his counsel, kindness, wisdom, and friendship.

Sister Joan Chittister OSB had this to say about a good life:

Every day is meant for living life to the full. We aren't here to waste life. We are here to shape it. To make something out of it that makes life better for the rest of the world, as well as for ourselves.

That thought, that calling, wonderfully describes Tom Atkins' passionate commitment to life and living. I'm quite convinced that he viewed and experienced all of it as a wondrous adventure – animated by a sharp and searching intellect, extraordinary curiosity, and most of all, an abiding sense of love and purpose. Tom engaged the world (took it on, really) both to experience it and to shape it – a rare gift to be so devoted to both.

I met Tom five years ago when I became head of school at Prep. I quickly learned that to meet Tom was to experience Tom, and he never disappointed. Even as a verbal person myself, I have never met anyone with so many stories to tell – interesting, sometimes twisty stories, always enthusiastically told and typically colorfully punctuated

with a strong takeaway point. He expected to be taken seriously; I often heard him use the line “yours to use or lose” when he provided me with a spreadsheet, insight, or advice, though I’m certain he never quite meant the “lose” part. But he also conveyed a roguish sense of mischievousness, no doubt learned from or at least honed by his high school years in the Prep dorm. His blue eyes sparkled. He recognized that life was often funny and must be lived joyously, even exuberantly.

People who knew Tom experienced him as a driven thinker, thinking framed by a powerful North Star and a deep spirituality. He visited campus often. Jill Pauly on our staff described him (accurately) as Prep’s biggest cheerleader. I’m quite certain he had a standing reservation with Fr. Cyril for a room in the Guest House. He would stroll into my office with his ever-present cup of coffee, grab a piece of candy, sit down in one of the comfortable chairs, and the conversation – and lessons – would begin.

Several years ago, he gave me a stone inscribed with a phrase from the Book of Proverbs:

A plan in the heart is like deep water, but a person of understanding draws it out.

That stone sits where it always has, in the middle of the meeting table in my office. Tom was a planner through and through – not just professionally but personally. But he was a planner with a deep and wide heart. He expected those he knew and loved to think, to look ahead, to seek understanding, and not to settle for what was easy. He prodded and poked and often asked hard questions, expecting thoughtful answers. His curiosity was expansive. He willingly and even gleefully shared himself and his gifts with others, serving as a consummate connector (and sometimes provocateur) kicking off and extending discussions about almost anything, but that frequently returned to a lesson or an insight about life or faith. And he was a wizard with a spreadsheet, which I am quite certain he would want me to point out. I would have loved the opportunity to just sit and talk with Tom by a fire under the stars at his beloved log cabin.

Parents, spouses, grandparents, friends, mentors – those we love – never die. They don't even fade away. They live on forever in the people they have shaped, guided, nurtured, and loved. Us.

Thank you for sharing a life so marvelously and generously lived, Tom. You have earned your eternal reward.

Rest in joy, my friend.