

Some Memories of Tanner

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Tanner Ottley Gay (nee Tanner Leigh Ottley) was born on 27 January 1940 in Lexington, Kentucky, and died on 7 January 2021 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her father worked for the Army Corps of Engineers, and her family moved frequently. When she was 5 years old, the family moved to Bradenton, Florida, where her father worked at Sarasota Jungle Garden. He built a series of houses in which the family lived, until finally he was satisfied with the last house he built. Tanner's mother was a school teacher, and Tanner was allowed to start school a year early to solve the babysitter problem. She was a bright student and did well. At age 7, she met Sally Dorst, with whom she has been friends ever since. Tanner's family eventually lived on Anna Maria Island, near Bradenton. The three of them liked to go to the island's beaches, and they collected sea shells. Her father made a glass-top coffee table for displaying the sea shells, many of which are rare (some bought by her father from sponge fishermen in Tarpon Springs), and that table has been in our living room for our whole married life. Her father also made "goofy birds" out of shells and sold them in the Jungle Garden's gift shop. We have a little display of "goofy birds" in our living room.

For college, Tanner went to the University of Kentucky, where she joined the Kappa Delta sorority. In high school and college, she worked summers in the northeast, first harvesting shade tobacco, which stained her hands and convinced her not to smoke, then as a waitress in Kennybunkport, Maine at one of the "old combustible" (wooden) hotels. She liked the northeast, and upon college graduation moved to Boston, where she got a job with Houghton Mifflin Company. There she worked in the School Reading Department, where she eventually became an editor. HMCo would hire big names as textbook authors. The authors would design the reading series, but the editors would actually write the books. Thus Tanner got to write text books (which she liked) and the ancillary material, e.g., teacher guides (which she did not like so much). Given a very limited vocabulary, she could craft a story, using pictures for words not in the vocabulary.

Tanner sang for a while in the Ralph Farris Chorale. She was not skilled at reading music, but was smart and diligent, which Ralph liked.

Tanner's parents both died before I met her. Her father got cancer, possibly caused or abetted by garden chemicals he worked with at the Sarasota Jungle Garden, and died in 1966. Her mother died in 1974 while teaching school. (She laid her head on her desk after telling the students to put their heads down for a nap. When nap time was over, she did not raise her head; in fact, she had died of a heart attack.) Tanner got an inheritance after her mother's death and was then able to buy a house in Watertown, Massachusetts.

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Tanner had a sorority sister, Grace Ford, who was an excellent cook. Grace inspired Tanner to learn more about cooking. Tanner grew to be an excellent cook herself, and she would read a cookbook like a novel. We have many cookbooks (and other books).

Sally reminds me that Tanner started sewing all of her clothes when she was in high school. She made her wedding dress and continued sewing her clothes well into our New Jersey years. In Albuquerque, she limited her sewing to making special holiday pot holders for friends and family. She made a growing number of pot holders as Christmas gifts, a practice she finally gave up a couple of years ago.

Tanner also sang with the Canterbury Chorus at Trinity Church, Copley Square and was a member there of the Phillips Brooks Club. That's where I met her. PB would have a meal Sunday evening (right after the Canterbury Chorus rehearsal), followed by a program, usually a speaker of some kind. PB was a wonderful thing for us (then) young people; we are still in touch with a number of PB friends. One time a speaker pointed out that men and women could simply be friends without being romantically involved. I asked Tanner if we could have lunch together and talk. She agreed. We met a few times and of course attended various events with our PB friends. At length, we both felt romantic feelings toward each other and decided to marry, which we did on 2 August 1980 at Trinity Church. The reception, a joyous event, was in Tanner's back yard.

Her Boston friends remember Tanner as never speaking ill of anyone. If she couldn't find something good to say about a person, she simply stayed silent.

In Boston, Tanner developed her love of cats. The one non-negotiable detail of our marriage was that her then current cat, Lani (short for Liliuokalani, the last Hawaiian queen) was part of the package. Lani and I got along very well; later we had other cats.

The summer after we married, I had two meetings in England with two weeks in between. We rented a tandem bicycle and stayed in bed-and-breakfast places. We figured the experience would make or break our marriage. We enjoyed the experience and bought our own tandem bicycle after we got home.

I accepted a job offer from Bell Labs, and in the fall of 1981 we moved to New Jersey. We were fortunate to find a house only two miles from the Murray Hill Labs. In good weather I rode my bike to work; when there was ice, I walked. Our house was on the edge of suburbia. We could take a bus or train into New York City, and we could hop onto our tandem and soon be in the countryside. We had many nice tandem rides and attended several tandem rallies.

A year or two after we moved to New Jersey, we felt our marriage was going well enough that we could have kids. We tried. For months I would think, "Maybe this time she will get pregnant." But it never happened.

Tanner continued her editorial work in New Jersey, now as a free-lancer who mostly worked for Houghton-Mifflin Company. Our first printer was a "whirlygig" printer whose output looked like typing, so the HMCo people would not be put off by the new-fangled personal computer she was using.

Tanner's friend Sally Dorst lives in New York City. We often went into NYC, sometimes driving into the City (there used to be a great parking lot near Lincoln Center;

now there is a building there), sometimes driving to Hoboken or Jersey City and taking the PATH train, sometimes taking the bus or train from home. We had Saturday matinee subscriptions to the Metropolitan Opera and City Opera; after a performance, we joined Sally for dinner. Sometimes we went to a museum, then saw Sally for dinner. In New Jersey, we also enjoyed attending performances at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and at Papermill Playhouse.

Soon after moving to New Jersey, we discovered Calvary Episcopal Church in the neighboring town of Summit. We both joined the choir there and sang in many services and afternoon concerts. We really enjoyed the after-concert parties. We are still in touch with some of our Calvary friends.

Tanner often accompanied me to meetings. She and other spouses would sight-see while I attended talks. Sometimes we traveled just for fun. We went to the Galapagos, to Bolivia's Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, to Singapore (we took my parents for a two-week visit with my brother and sister-in-law), to the Antarctic, to Alaska, to Poland, and to Iceland.

We took a Spanish course. The instructor advocated watching telenovelas to help learn the language. Tanner liked the idea and enjoyed watching many telenovelas. She would write down unfamiliar words and look them up after the show ended. She also enjoyed exchanging E-mail with a couple of friends who were watching the same show.

Near the end of our 22 years in New Jersey, Tanner did some work for a small company that did not pay her. That small company was working for a bigger publishing company; to make sure they had rights to the work done by the small company, the big one finally paid Tanner for her work. The experience soured her on doing more freelance work.

In 2001 the "dot-com bubble" burst, and I accepted a retirement package from Lucent Technologies (then parent company of Bell Labs). I was allowed to continue using my office for two years while we sought to work out paperwork for the modeling language AMPL that Robert Fourer, Brian Kernighan, and I had created. In 2003, when the Lucent lawyer I was dealing with got very sick, I accepted a job offer from Sandia National Labs in Albuquerque, NM, and in September 2003 we moved to Albuquerque. (Meanwhile we finally got the AMPL paperwork done. For years I could receive no pay for AMPL and could only work on it in the evenings, after my regular work at Sandia.)

In Albuquerque, we soon discovered the (Episcopal) Cathedral of St. John, and we both joined its choir. We sang Sundays at the 11:00 service and went on several choir tours to England (which were great experiences). After one of the tours, Tanner and three other folks were encouraged to "retire", which they reluctantly did.

Sally Dorst has a friend nick-named Scrib, whose mother, Muriel, lived in Albuquerque and was active in the Assistance League of Albuquerque. We saw Muriel many times before she died. Tanner decided to do volunteer work at the Assistance League's thrift shop, then called the Bargain Box. (Later the national Assistance League organization insisted that the name be changed to "Assistance League Thrift Shop"; we continued to call it the Bargain Box.) Until she broke her hip, Tanner spent many weekdays

working in the Bargain Box's back room, where contributions are sorted. She made many friends in the process.

Albuquerque has a surprisingly rich cultural life. We enjoyed attending many performances at some of the venues. We also enjoyed attending Santa Fe Opera performances in the summer. We had subscriptions, and we would drive up and have a picnic dinner in the parking lot, then attend the performance and drive home.

For many years, we had the habit of going for a walk after dinner. We live in a nice neighborhood for such walks — not much traffic and an interesting variety of houses. We often enjoyed interacting with folks who were walking their dogs.

In 2010 the AMPL company got an NSF SBIR grant to do more work on the language. I wanted to be involved, but Sandia would not let me work half-time for AMPL, so I left Sandia. Sometimes when a spouse suddenly spends much more time at home, there is friction. Fortunately my being home worked out well for us. While I worked at my computer, Tanner could work at hers and now and then ask me questions, or she could watch TV or listen to the radio or to our CD player.

A few years ago, I had a meeting in Mexico. Tanner accompanied me, and we noticed her hand shaking. After we got home, she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. In hindsight, she had been showing small signs of PD for some years. For a long time after the diagnosis, daily doses of Carbidopa-Levodopa held her shaking at bay and significantly improved her capabilities and quality of life.

In 2019 I had a meeting in Trondheim, Norway. Tanner accompanied me. She had three falls (one being my fault for having us try to walk down too steep a slope). On the last, she broke her hip. At a nearby hospital, she had her hip replaced (while I gave my talk); she received wonderful care from the Norwegian medical system. Back home, we got her a four-wheeled walker; after a while, she graduated to a cane. Alas, some months later she fell, was hospitalized, and had to return to using a walker.

On February 6, 2020, we were to fly to Michigan to attend a memorial service for my step-mother. Unfortunately, just after getting out of bed, I fell and broke my collarbone. A CT scan at the hospital revealed a brain tumor. In short order, I had two operations, a little one to install a shunt to relieve spinal-fluid pressure on my cerebellum, and an 8-hour one to deal with the tumor. Tanner came daily to visit me, spending the night a couple of times. One day, while visiting me, she fell and was taken to the ER. She had had a small stroke and was found to have atrial fibrillation. We both got to share the same hospital room. I was sent to a rehabilitation hospital, and a few days later, Tanner joined me there, again in the same room.

In the summer of 2020, Tanner's Parkinson's disease advanced. She fell and spent more time in the hospital. At home again, she fell many more times. A few weeks before she died, her speech slowed. On 27 December she fell four times, once while I was home (I helped her to her feet), three more times after I left for a sleep study. On 29 December she could not hold a fork to feed herself. I called 911 and she went to the ER. She had low blood pressure, which was corrected a day or so later, and an infection of some kind, for which they gave her a couple of antibiotics. Her left lung collapsed, and

she was given heavy oxygen, up to 15 liters a minute. They still had not identified the infection, despite many tests. I hoped they would soon do so, give her appropriate medicine, and restore her to her old self. I approved intubating her to fix the collapsed lung. They did (a painful operation), and a pulmonologist suctioned stuff out of her lung, which I think then reinflated. I was hoping she would improve, but on 5 January I learned that they had identified the infection as aspiration pneumonia, probably caused by the Parkinson's disease degrading her ability to swallow. It was recommended that she go to a hospice facility at another location of the hospital chain. I was allowed to go to her ICU room, where I signed papers for her to go to the hospice. I rode there with her in an ambulance. The next day I spent a while reading Christmas cards to her. I was about to leave for the hospice on 7 January (2021) when the call came in that she had died. I was devastated.

Tanner and I had a wonderful life together. We were great companions, with similar interests and perspectives; we had many "gentle adventures" and never got mad at each other. She let me have much time for technical work. I miss her greatly.

There will probably be a memorial service for Tanner at the Cathedral of St. John in Albuquerque (likely streamed, for those who cannot be on hand), perhaps in late summer or the fall — once everyone has had a chance to be vaccinated against Covid19. She will be cremated and her ashes will reside in a columbarium at the Cathedral. Mine will join hers when the time comes. If you have special memories or (scans of) pictures of Tanner that you would like to share, please E-mail them to dmg@acm.org or send them to me by U.S. mail (900 Sierra Place SE, Albuquerque, NM 87108-3379). Time permitting, I will collect them into a "More Memories of Tanner" document that would also include details of Tanner's memorial service.

In lieu of sending flowers, please consider making a contribution in Tanner's name to one of: The Cathedral of St. John (<https://stjohnsabq.org/>), The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (<https://www.michaeljfox.org>), or a charity of your choice.

An obituary of Tanner appears at

<https://www.affordablecremationabq.com/obituary/Tanner-Gay>



Tanner in 2007



Tanner and Dave in August, 2020; this is in black and white on our 2020 Christmas letter.