

Reflections of Tanner—written May 2021 and delivered 10-15-21

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Tanner and I met at the Episcopal church Sunday School in Bradenton, Florida when she was seven and I was eight. Tanner and her family moved to Bradenton when she was 4 or 5. My family moved for my father's health when I was in the third grade. We didn't see much of each other outside of Sunday school since she lived on Anna Maria Island, the beach closest to Bradenton, plus we went to different grade schools. Her mother taught in Palmetto, just a short distance from Bradenton, but required a car to get to. Since neither kindergarten or day care or public transit existed back then, Tanner got to start school a year early so her mom could take that teaching job. We became closer in high school as Palmetto schools ended after ninth grade. She had to join me in Bradenton at Manatee County High School. She came with her Palmetto friends, and I introduced her to mine. Alas, she wasn't able to participate in any after-school activities as she had to take the school bus to her Anna Maria Island home.

We got better acquainted during our college years. We were unusual back then (19957) for leaving Florida—she to the University of Kentucky and me to the University of Colorado in Boulder. For those four years we wrote letters to each other, sometimes we practiced our shorthand. After our college graduations we continued being unusual in that we didn't immediately get married or move back home with our families. Tanner struck out for Boston while I headed to New York City.

It took us a couple of years in our entry level jobs to have enough disposable income and vacation days to travel to each other's cities. Before that first visit, I remember we carefully broached the issue of the Vietnam War. Turns out we were both in the early wave of those who were against it. Once she heard that, Tanner sent me a photo she had taken of a white dove that she then turned into a peace poster. We were definitely relieved to know that we agreed on such an important—and at the time, divisive— issue.

Tanner was the only person I knew to wear Earth Shoes and the first to adopt the habit of running every morning (but not in those Earth Shoes!). She was also my first friend with pierced ears. We had such fun selecting and then giving each other earrings after I finally got mine pierced. For Tanner, a dangling earring was never too long or too colorful.

As anyone who visited Tanner in her many apartments or homes knows, she loved Tupperware containers. I kept refusing her offers until Tupperware finally discovered the square and the rectangle—shapes so necessary for anyone stuck with a small refrigerator. I still use the two squares (with bright red lids) she gave me decades ago. . . . She introduced me to NPR in their early days and cheerfully brought me Mamma Stamberg's cranberry relish whenever she made it. She knew I loved it and would never have room in my tiny kitchen for a Cuisinart the relish required.

We both sewed most of our clothes and enjoyed shopping for fabric together. I was with her in Boston when she purchased the fabric she used to make her wedding dress. A month or so later on a New York visit, she found the lace she used to trim her special dress. "I thought it needed a bit of New York City," she told me. She was so happy, Dave, to be in love with you. She had a glow about her I hadn't noticed until that visit.

Before she met you, Dave, she and I headed once a summer to Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, We would spend a weekend with Betty MacColl at her family's rather rustic hunting camp right on the big lake there. Betty, also an elementary school teacher, had been a good friend of Tanner's mom, Penny. When she died, Tanner, Betty and I became fast friends as did you, Dave, after 1980. Betty put all of her summer visitors to use doing chores that she either didn't like or felt she shouldn't do. On one of those early visits, Tanner and I got assigned the chore of climbing a rickety ladder to the top of the camp to clean the leaves off the roof peak and out of the gutters. It is the only time I've seen Tanner afraid. She was fine on the ladder but terrified once we were on the roof. She clung to my waist as I scooted up the peak on my rear and was able to sweep off the leaves. Cleaning the gutters wasn't nearly as terrifying, but Tanner was so relieved once we were back on the ground. And that leads to another Tanner memory: her Bloody Mary recipe, developed over the years. She would make them for anyone visiting that weekend for a picnic lunch and sometimes also pre dinner. To this day, I think of Tanner each time I drink one.

Tanner was a wonderful gift giver. She knew I loved red and I knew purple was her color—so color was often our starting point. In later years she discovered gift cards (definitely easier to mail!), but not just any card. She would carefully pick a store she knew I loved. She also made gifts—a practice she started years before she started the Christmas potholder tradition. Just last week I used for a picnic a red and white seersucker tablecloth with matching napkins she had made me for a birthday gift decades ago. Of course Tanner would find a red plaid seersucker as she knew it would never need ironing. If there was anything Tanner hated, it was ironing. Although, now that I think of it, Tanner would have expressed it differently—more along the lines of "I do everything possible to avoid ironing." I'm pretty sure "hate" was a word Tanner never used.

In 1975 Tanner read that the new play, A Chorus Line, would be moving to Broadway on July 25 and could I get us tickets for that opening weekend? But she added that she didn't want to sit in the last row of the balcony—a place I usually picked if I couldn't get a standing ticket. I bought tickets for July 26th, the second Broadway performance. She came down from Boston the night before and we sat in the front of the mezzanine. We laughed and cried our way through the play that day. Fifteen years later Tanner came in from New Jersey and we stood for the closing matinee performance on April 28, 1990. How our lives had changed in those 15 years.

Tanner loved to cook—she had cookbooks featuring just about any cuisine you might imagine. But when we ate out, it was Mexican food that drew her. The hotter the red and/or green sauce was, the happier she was. One May while they were still in New Jersey the three of us planned a visit to as many western national parks we could fit into two weeks. At our nightly Mexican dinners out, she would always ask the waiter which sauce was the hotter. She'd then request that one. On a second similar trip a few years later, a friend of mine joined us. We four were all Tony Hillerman mystery writer fans. His stories always had as much about the Native American landscapes as they did clues and odd plots. So we called this our Tony Hillerman homage. We even managed to be in Crown Point for the monthly rug auction. I do believe Tanner nearly fainted when she saw the prices those stunning rugs fetched.

I retired in the fall of 2010. Three weeks later I learned I had breast cancer and would need surgery. As soon as Tanner learned the details, she informed me she was flying in from Albuquerque and no, I could not reimburse her for the flight. Somehow she knew to arrive a few days before and stay for several days after my surgery. What a wonderful friend.

So I was extremely upset when I could not be with her while you, Dave had brain surgery. This all happened back in early February of 2020. Tanner insisted I wait until after the surgery when she would have a better sense of your future and her needs. Since I don't drive, I did not protest. When I could have flown out, Tanner was also in the hospital (from her fall and slight stroke while visiting Dave) and then Covid-19 restrictions nixed any thoughts of travel.

Fortunately we were able to keep in touch thanks to the telephone. I called Tanner every afternoon or evening from February 9 through December 28, the last night she was home. For eleven months I listened to Tanner as she faced Dave's second surgery, the Covid-19 mandated isolation, and the fact of her Parkinson's slowly getting worse. The August 2019 fall in Norway requiring a hip replacement—done on your anniversary—was a turning point. The friend I had known and cherished for decades began to disappear with each daily call.

Some days she was her old self; other times she had trouble finding words. Every now and then she would say she almost fell. Other times she'd describe the falls in detail. She would struggle to prepare her meals while you were still in rehab and then insist that tomorrow she'd have the Visiting Angel help her prepare several dishes she could freeze. . . . She so missed being able to see you, Dave, and the few facetime sessions the two of you had weren't much help.

From Thanksgiving of 2020 on, her decline was steady and truly scary. . .

It has taken me until this month of May to be able to look back and remember the Tanner I met when we were in third grade.

I emailed Elizabeth back on Jan. 5 or 6 a final greeting for you to read to your beloved wife and my dear friend. As I recall I wrote something like this: Dear Tanner, we have known each other for more than 70 years. We have been there for each other through so much of our lives and shared a great deal—many good times and a few hard ones as well. I can't believe that it is now time for me to say goodbye and send my love.