

# CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF TERRY TODD

REMARKS BY JAN TODD

28 July 2018

*Preface: There were two services for Terry, who died on Saturday, 7 July 2018. Strongman Dennis Rogers presided at the graveside service we held on the Wednesday after Terry passed. Several weeks later, on Saturday, 28 July 2018, we held a public memorial service at The University of Texas to honor Terry and celebrate his life and accomplishments; more than three hundred people attended, including some of the strongest men in history. At that ceremony, seven men spoke briefly about different aspects of Terry's life: Mark Henry talked of him as a father figure and coach; Jim Lorimer spoke about his founding of the Arnold Strongman Classic; Dr. Thomas Hunt talked about Terry as a personal role model and academic mentor; Dr. Jack Berryman spoke about the importance of his academic research; Michael Joseph Gross discussed his humor, his writing, and broad cultural impact; Dr. Bill Crawford spoke of his impact on powerlifting and the sport of Strongman; and Timothy Ray, our nephew who lived in the same house with us when he was a small child, talked about what it was like to have Terry Todd as his uncle. Dr. Colin Duerden, who became our friend in the 1970s when we first lived in Nova Scotia, Canada, was master of ceremonies. Following the remarks of all these men, I came to the stage, joked to the audience that Title IX demanded we have at least one female voice in this gathering, and then read the remarks below. I share my comments here in their entirety (and without editing them) because they provide context for some of the readings that come later in this special issue, and because I want to say, again, how grateful I am to those who surrounded me with love and support when Terry passed away. Thank you. I have been truly blessed to have such friends and family.*



**T**hank you Colin, and let me first thank the speakers for your kind words about Terry, and also thank you in the audience who made time to be here today. Terry would not have wanted us to make such a big fuss—which is how he would have described all this—but I'm glad that others feel, as I do, that he deserved one, and thank you all again for being here.

I'd like to begin by particularly thanking Cindy Slater, Kim Beckwith, Connie Todd, Stacey Metzler, Ryan Blake, Waneen Spirduso, and Andy Miller, for helping me plan today's memorial, my sister Linda and niece Jill for being here with me this week, and the entire Stark Center staff and our grad student volunteers, and my faculty colleagues for their support. I'd also like to thank Dennis Rogers for leading Terry's earlier graveside service, and I'd particularly like to thank Bill and Caity Henniger of Rogue Fitness and filmmaker Todd Sansom for the many things they've done over the past three weeks for me and Terry—and especially for making the beautiful slide show that played before we began and for the film that concludes the formal part of today's celebration of Terry's life. Following the film please join us just across the street at the Stark Center for the reception, where we will have refresh-

ments and hopefully tell more stories—led off by Dr. Bob Goldman and Bill Martin.

Ok . . . now on to the hard stuff . . .

So what do you say at the memorial service for your husband? I've been asking myself that for three weeks. He was larger than life—funnier than anyone I've ever known—fiercely proud of his family and Texas roots—and in many ways a force of nature. He was fearless—he wasn't afraid to take risks—and he worked incredibly hard—as he/we did in creating the Stark Center—where he was bull-headed and stubborn enough to keep trying to find the right way to make things work—even if it didn't the first time. It took 25 years for us to get the university to finally agree to allow us to build the Stark Center—with the caveat that we'd have to also raise the money to build it and keep it running—but he was undaunted by the enormous challenge of that. And, thanks to Walter Riedel and Tad McKee and the Stark Foundation of Orange, Texas—and Joe, Betty and Eric Weider—and many other donors in the years since then—large and small—and our great friend David Onion, who's advised us in so many ways, Terry rose to that challenge.

He was, quite simply, strong. Strong in body, strong in mind, and strong in his sense of self. Terry believed—as I do—and no doubt as many of you do in this room today—that physical strength can be transformative—in *Inside Powerlifting* there is, in fact a short passage where Terry talks about how men *and* women need strength to live not only in their bodies but through them, writing there, “It takes strength to be gentle and compassionate, strength to love and be free.”

Freedom to him was everything—and he loved his academic life because it allowed him the freedom to study and work on those things he found most interesting—and for most of his life—what fascinated him—enraptured him really—was the complexity and importance of human strength...which no other academic had paid much attention to before him.

I met Terry at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia—where he was a faculty member and I was an undergrad student in 1970. The first time I saw him was at a lecture that he gave—dressed in jeans and a short-sleeved shirt. He walked across the front of the auditorium and then—in those days before PowerPoint—turned his back on the 150 freshmen seated there to write the title of his lecture on the blackboard. I clearly remember how struck I was by the big, wide shoulders, his large biceps, and the muscular forearm attached to the hand holding the chalk. He looked like no man I’d ever seen before—for he was the first person I ever met who’d trained seriously with weights.

The other freshmen sitting in the audience with me were part of an educational experiment—which was in large part Terry’s doing—an experiment to see what would happen if students had greater educational freedom—and so we had almost no required courses, could take most of our classes pass/fail, and once a month we met for a special lecture delivered by one of the faculty leaders of the program that connected to books we’d been reading on big topics like the environment, or racism, or women’s rights, or, on that particular morning—the value of freedom and independence.

The width of Terry’s back hid what he was writing, and so when he finished, turned back to us, and moved off to the side with



**Terry and I married on 17 November 1973 in this house, called The Millhouse, which Terry owned outside Macon, Georgia. The house had originally been a gristmill and was located on Rum Creek. Our wedding was a small, informal affair and no one took pictures. This photo, from January of 1974, is the first photo I have of us together. The dogs are Pooh Bear, our English mastiff, and Aggie, my pet from before we married. The Millhouse no longer exists; it was destroyed by a flood caused by Hurricane Alberto in 1994.**

a smile on his face, the room erupted in whispers and then outright laughter as we saw that his title was “The Educational Value of Hucking Around.” At a small Baptist college like Mercer, it was a risky title even if he did go on to talk about *Huckleberry Finn*, one of his favorite books. My friend Bob Goodwin—who’s here today and sat in that auditorium with me will confirm, I suspect that Terry’s audacious lecture title is still remembered by most of us who were in that lecture hall, even if they didn’t notice his muscles that day as I did. It was exactly the kind of bold thing Terry did again and again in his life.

Mark Twain’s story of the smart, adventure-loving, and fiercely independent *Huckleberry Finn* isn’t too bad a metaphor for Terry’s own life.



**Guitarist Dickie Betts of the Allman Brothers Band stopped by to visit Terry and Muffin, our new English mastiff puppy, in the spring of 1974.**



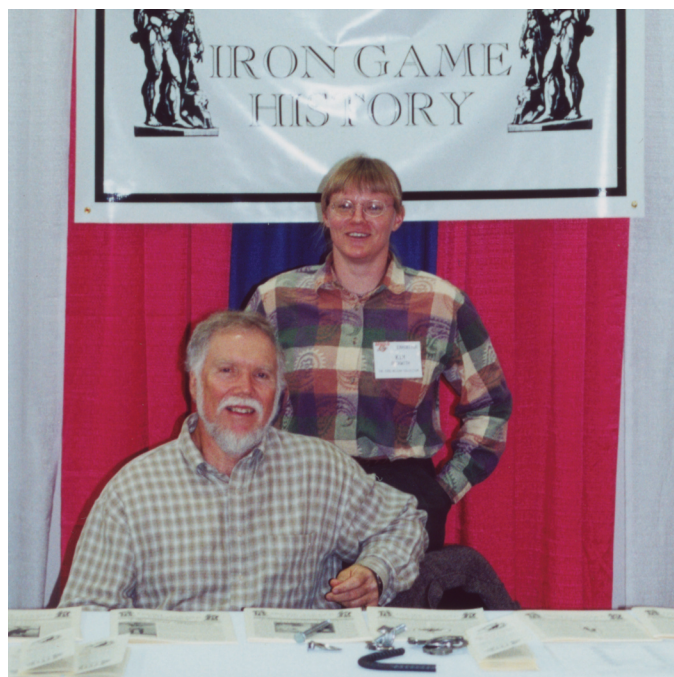
Terry joined the faculty at Mercer University in 1969 and is shown here at a faculty party with Patricia Nordenhaug, the wife of Terry's good friend and academic colleague Theodore Nordenhaug, who was also involved with the creation of the Experimental Freshman Program. At age 31, he still looked and was very strong, even though he'd dropped nearly a hundred pounds from his days as a superheavyweight.

Like Huck, Terry was also kind of an outlaw—going against the advice of coaches and other authority figures—generally believing more in himself than what others suggested he should do, and his life—at least the part I saw after we married in 1973—was a great journey filled with adventures, media work, fascinating friends, collecting, movies, music, fires, floods, a talented and accomplished family—and *many large dogs*. We lived for a time on an island three miles off the coast of Nova Scotia—where he learned to drive an old Cape Island boat and navigate by compass in fog so thick you couldn't see the bow; we hung out with the Allman Brothers in Macon who owned a farm near ours; he marched for Civil Rights and found himself driving to Memphis just to be there after Martin Luther King was killed; he founded Black Studies at Mercer; he ranched 300 acres along the San Marcos River and delighted in owning a horse that weighed 2400 pounds; he coached several of the strongest men in history; wrote the first book on the sport of powerlifting; and somehow along the way, he even managed to do some academic work. But the way Terry reminds me most about Huck, is that he, like Huck, went through life lifting people up, helping them

find their own their path—their own strengths—and empowered them to be more than they might have become had they not met him—as I'd have to say he did with me.

It is no secret that Terry—like Twain's other great character, Tom Sawyer, was also magically able to find people to whitewash fences for him when needed. I often think about the hundreds of UT students who helped us sort books and magazines and make lists of things in our collection before we opened the Stark Center—and the incredible men—led by Steve Slater who's here today—who do the real work in running the Arnold Classic for us—and Cindy Slater who does far more than just work as a librarian at the Stark Center, and Kim Beckwith who's been willing to be part of dozens of Terry's grand schemes over the years, and Richard Sorin, and now Bill & Caity Heninger—who spent incredible numbers of hours designing and building the equipment that we've used in the Arnold over the years simply because Terry asked for their help. Thank you, thank all of you, for helping him—and helping me.

But having said that, Terry actually worked harder than just about anyone I've known. He never tired of



In 2001, Terry, Kim Beckwith and I travelled to Columbus, Ohio, at the invitation of Jim Lorimer, and saw the Arnold Sports Festival for the first time. While there, we also set up a table to help spread the word about *Iron Game History* which Kim Beckwith helped manage. Kim has helped produce *IGH* for 30 years now and she also serves as a judge at the Arnold Strongman Classic each year. She is a friend extraordinaire.

thinking about strength, or learning new things about its history or, especially, talking with his dear friend David Webster, who flew in from Scotland to be here today. And he loved, over these last 17 years thinking about the Arnold, and what to do at the next show. In fact, Jim Lorimer and Terry even had a joke they played on me each year as he'd begin preparations for the Arnold—which did admittedly take up enormous amounts of Terry's time—and Jim would call and remind me that I should lighten up on Terry for the next couple months—that his great mind was not to be bothered with things like dishes or housework—because as Jim always told me, I needed to remember that I was married to a visionary.

I loved those personal calls from Jim—but I'd known Terry was a visionary before we even married—he was brilliant in the true sense—not just intelligent but creative and inventive—which coupled with his incredible memory and limitless confidence that he could make things happen if he set his mind to it—meant he was constantly coming up with new ideas for things *we* should do—projects *we* should start—and many of those were big dreams—big projects—with big impact.

He would never have remained engaged, for example if The Arnold was just a regular strongman contest—because if he was going to be part of it, it had to have the best equipment, the biggest prize money, it had to connect to history—and it had to *have the biggest, strongest men in the history of the world* as its competitors. And, at this moment, I just wanted to say thank you to the historic men who travelled here today—Hafthor Bjornsson who won both the Arnold and the World Strongest Man this past year; and Brian Shaw who's won the Arnold three times and World's Strongest Man four times; and Dimitar Savatinov who's been America's Strongest Man; and the legendary strongman Odd Haugen, who also helps us run the Arnold; and to Stefan Solvi and Andri Reyrr Vignisson—who came all the way from Iceland to honor Terry, and who appear with Thor in the last documentary Terry helped produce called *Fullsterkur*, a film about strength and the culture of Iceland. Terry never talked of retirement, and



**Caity and Bill Henniger, our close friends and the owners of Rogue Fitness, stand on stage with Terry at the 2016 Arnold Strongman Classic in Columbus, Ohio. The Hennigers, who are passionate about the history of strength, building great equipment, and encouraging participation in sport, have been the lead sponsor of the Arnold Strongman Classic since 2014. They are also significant donors to our work at the H.J. Lutchter Stark Center, for which I am deeply grateful. On a more personal note, I'm not sure I would have made it through these past two years without Bill and Caity at my side.**

actually felt in many ways, I think, that he'd just hit full stride. He took great pride in the role the Center was playing in preserving UT's athletic history and was so happy that Augie Garrido, our former baseball coach had contacted him last December, well before Augie's own death, and that the two of them had met and Augie agreed to give the Stark his collection. Terry was also delighted by the recent gift of Olympic weightlifter Tommy Kono's collection—which John and Sarah Fair helped make happen—and he was particularly overjoyed when after a 30-year quest to save the collection of famed strongman Milo Steinborn—who introduced the squat to America—we were finally able to bring it home to the Stark Center last year.

He particularly loved in recent years working and travelling with film director Todd Sansom and Tim Irwin, and J.P. Kaukonen—his crew members—as we made documentary movies about strength and culture and the Iron Game that are unlike any films ever made before. We were, in fact, scheduled to head to Germany to work on two films with our friends on the day after he passed away. But the Rogue documentary films, which are freely available on the internet, may well live, I believe, as a kind of capstone to Terry's long career—and it won't surprise me because of the nature of the internet if, in time, they aren't remem-

bered more than his writing for *Sports Illustrated*, his books, or his hundreds of articles.

I apologize for speaking so long—I have just a couple more things I'd like to say.

Terry was especially blessed to have a truly remarkable soulmate in his sister, Connie Todd, who was his sounding board, his favorite film critic, and I'd have to say, his closest friend. And he loved my mother, Wilma White, who has lived with us for the past 20 years—tending several generations of big dogs I might add—and also tending to us—and making it possible for Terry and me to have more time to work on projects like the Stark Center and the Arnold.

Because we waited to have children while I was lifting, and then I had ovarian cancer, Terry and I never had any biological children of our own. However, we've never felt like we have not had children. When I married Terry we lived in a big house that we shared with Terry's sister Connie, her husband Frank Ray, and her son Tim—whom you met earlier. Watching Tim grow up and become the man he is today was like having our own son—and Terry and I both are so very proud of him and all that he's accomplished—including the very wise choice he made when he married Sheri. And along with our son Mark Henry—we have been blessed to have his beautiful wife



Terry's sister, Connie Todd, stands with her son, Timothy Ray, in front of the family's giant Christmas tree. Tim now works in cyber security and was one of the speakers at the memorial service. Connie, also a bibliophile like her brother, directed *The Wittliff Collections* at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Jana, and our grandchildren JoJo and Jacob in our lives—and they brought him much joy. In truth, Terry and I have always felt that we had “children” everywhere—for one of the joys of coaching and teaching is that bonds form and strengthen over time—and the fact that so many of you who were taught or coached or worked with him over the years have come back today—or reached out in other ways—leaves me without words.

Terry as we all know—was never without words and its ok if you laugh at that. He loved to talk, to tell stories and he always had great stories to tell. But he also, always...always seemed to know exactly the right words to say in times of stress or trouble—like the day in 1988 when I'd been diagnosed with ovarian cancer and the doctor told me that the mortality rate for my form of cancer was about 75%. As soon as we got out of the office, however, Terry turned that around for me—saying “Well, you know there is another way to think about this,” and then asking me, “when have you not been in the top 25 percent?”

This was only one of many times that Terry found the right words to inspire me—and others—to possibilities we could not envision without his help. I've watched him do it when coaching Mark Henry, and Bill Kazmaier, and Joe Hood, and former grad students—like Jason Shurley, and Tommy Hunt, and Charlie Kupfer—who've now gone on to their own academic careers—and with the dozens of members of the Longhorn powerlifting teams we coached over the years. I'm not sure how exactly to explain it, he just had a truly unique ability to make you believe you could do more—and be more.

Mark Twain never tells us what happened to Huck Finn in later life—there is no volume two—but I like to think that when Huck headed west—he found something to be as passionate about as Terry was about strength—and he used that passion and enthusiasm to make things better for future generations as Terry did. Although it will be harder—without him at my side—the Stark Center—his great legacy to future generations—will go forward. I could not have said that back in 1973—but he made me into a stronger and more self-reliant person too.

While this is, obviously, a bittersweet day for me personally, I am grateful that he was allowed to live up to that old Southern saying—which he first heard from his grandmother Todd—

“It's a good life, if you don't weaken,”...And, he never did.

Thank you.

