

# RECALL OF THE WILD

## Recall of (a Champion of) the Wild

It may be trite to say that Life may deal us some cruel blows but Tom Maccagno's untimely passing from this earth was such an event for me. I met Tom through work I did several years ago on AWA's Lakeland campaign. He was generous, knowledgeable, and passionate. I learned a great deal from him.

In the years I have been *WLA* editor I occasionally thought we should interview Tom for Recall of the Wild. I always rejected the thought because I felt that interview would be more appropriate to do ten years from now. I was wrong.

If you never knew Tom you may never know what you missed. I hope the eulogy delivered by his son Morris at his funeral in Lac La Biche and the reflections of Aaron Davies, someone I regard as Tom's apprentice, will give you some measure of the man.

- Ian Urquhart

## Eulogy for Tom Maccagno (12 January 2012, Lac La Biche)

***Do not go where the path may lead,  
go instead where there is no path  
and leave a trail.***

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our dad Tom Maccagno cut new trails for others to follow in many different ways. Through his intellect, passion, and energy, he was a leader in the Lac La Biche community for many years. He put his energy to a range of causes. He understood well the values of community service, cultural heritage, and the good stewardship of all life on earth. He was not driven by his own gain, but wanted to help build a better world for us all.

His list of accomplishments is long, as is the list of recognitions that he received. His interests and pursuits spanned widely.

He was first person at Lac la Biche to take a law degree. Early in his professional career, he took cases that advanced social justice, and defended the interests of those with few advantages. He volunteered many hours to Catholic Social Services. We often heard that he was the "go-to guy" when a loved-one was in difficulty in hospital.

Later, as his career matured, he broadened his community service. As Mayor...he became involved in a Charter challenge

... Lakeland Park became a reality... he helped the Mission ...he was key to the designation of Portage la Biche .... he led the celebration of the 200th anniversary of David Thompson's arrival ... he was key to the expansion of Churchill Park to include all of the islands. He worked with First Nations and Metis people ... the Beaver Lake Cree Nation considered him a "light in the darkness" ... He discovered new orchid species in Lakeland Park.

He was ahead of his time. 30 years ago, he opposed turning a beautiful little lake into a sewage lagoon, and some thought he was crazy. Today, in contrast, to turn a lake into a sewage lagoon would be considered crazy.

Since retirement, he worked more deeply on Western Canadian history, and published articles in several journals. Until the end, he fought for the Lac la Biche Big Dock ... and we hope that this project won't die with him.

As one of his brothers once said, "Tom flies with the eagles." But, our dad also knew the deepest of pain. He understood the lines of Aeschylus that Bobby Kennedy memorized: "He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God."

Our dad was a caring brother and husband, and wonderful father and grandfather. Growing up, our house was filled with art,

music, and books. He shared in our joys, and guided us through difficult periods with wisdom and love. His thoughts and opinions were the result of contemplation, understanding, and wisdom.

We had glorious days together... fishing, hunting, and discovering the natural treasures of the area. He taught us sailing. We water-skied and cross-country skied together. We found arrowheads together. We gazed at the stars. He provided us with many, many rich experiences that we will be eternally grateful for.

He was a spiritual person, grateful for his many talents and gifts, and also generous with these talents and gifts. He had a good soul and strong connection with our Lord and Creator.

He left this world a better place. Upon hearing of our dad's passing, a long-time friend offered the following passage (from Douglas Hutton):

*"During each autumn, the leaves of Canada's ... trees fall to the forest floor soon to be covered by a blanket of snow. Each spring the warmth of the sun grows new buds within the rhythms of a new season. As the people who have enriched our lives throughout history have come and gone, new pages of life go on each day with hopes and dreams that begin with another dawning and the promise of tomorrow."*

Thank you Dad, we love you, and may God care for you. 🍀





*Aaron and Tom somewhere in Lakeland*

## Remembering Tom

*By Aaron Davies*

I had the good fortune of meeting Tom Maccagno on an AWA day hike he led in Lakeland Provincial Park several years ago. I was amazed at how much he knew and cared about the area. Despite growing up and living in Edmonton, I had spent a lot of time in Lakeland with my family. Tom and I instantly made a connection rooted in a mutual love of the area's natural history. We kept in contact and I later moved to Lac La Biche where we became good friends and shared many memorable times fishing, orchid hunting, bird watching, berry picking and exploring the wilderness in and around the Lakeland region.

My favorite memory of Tom took place in the Garner orchid fen, a quiet Natural Area outside of Plamondon, which Tom was responsible for having protected. This dark and humid thicket of black spruce and mineral springs was an area Tom and I explored frequently. We searched for orchids and other rare plants, often getting lost or separated after roaming the woods

with our heads down, focused exclusively on scanning the moss.

On one occasion, we both ended up stepping off the narrow and winding game trails and were forced to separately find our way back to the main road. I eventually managed to find my way, but waited for Tom for nearly an hour before he stumbled out on the road a half a mile up from where we originally parked. He told me he had wandered around in circles and at some point lost his glasses. Although disappointed, he shrugged the loss off, along with the possibility of ever finding them again.

A few weeks later we returned with the intention of checking on the sparrow's egg lady's slippers which were set to bloom, and measuring the diameter of a birch tree which we suspected could be the largest in the province. After photographing the lady's slippers, we made our way to the very back of the fen to the birch tree. It is a long and arduous trek in which you must cross a large and muddy spring. It is an area that rarely sees human footprints.

After taking some measurements and more photos, we began to make our way back. We stopped and rested under a large spruce tree and casually chatted about planning our next adventure. I looked down to my right and to my amazement, saw his long lost glasses sitting in the grass. I held them up slowly. We stared at each other in silent bewilderment, no doubt simultaneously calculating the odds of finding them by accident in the jungle-like environment of the fen. After contemplating the seemingly impossible reality, we both agreed that the moment we just shared was special. Then we laughed. And laughed.

Over the years Tom and I shared numerous experiences like this one. Along the way he shared with me a lifetime's worth of knowledge about the area. It is difficult to summarize the impact he has had on my life. He was thoughtful, articulate, and gentle, but relentless in his pursuits. All other things aside, the lakes and woods will simply not be the same without him. Rest in peace, my friend. 🍓