

Of a certain age

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The eagle’s-eye view from the property is awe-inspiring. The energy of the surroundings is healing for those who come seeking rest and solace.

Tom’s Rest, located on a hill six miles east of Sisters, was created for that very purpose – to offer a place of respite from busy lives. With the untimely death of Tom Edwards at age 61, his wife, Cheryl, expanded its mission to also providing a safe place for grieving hearts to share their losses and learn to integrate them into their lives going forward.

Tom and Cheryl met during their junior year in high school in Michigan, when Tom cleaned the windshield of Cheryl’s car at the local service station where he worked every day after school.

“I’ve never had such clean windows in my life,” Cheryl remembered with a smile.

They married right out of high school at ages 18 and 19 and shared 42 years of life together, persevering through the lean early years, experiencing the loss of a daughter and health concerns of one of their sons.

“Tom always had the strength to go to the next thing,” Cheryl said.

Tom’s mother had left him as a child with relatives, later marrying and raising another family. He was passed around among family members, often sleeping on dilapidated couches. In high school, he lived on the top floor of low-income housing in Detroit, surrounded by soot from the Ford Motor Company factory across the street.

Cheryl never heard Tom complain about his difficult childhood. Despite being abandoned by his mother, at Christmas Tom would take gifts to her. He helped out her other family, providing rides for his half-brothers and doing special things like taking them to the circus.

In Tom’s heart, there

wasn’t room for resentment. He was always interested in others and what he could do for them. Throughout their life together, Tom never tired of telling Cheryl, “I just want to make you happy.”

On the dash of her car, Cheryl has a little figure of a man, with outstretched arms, that was on the shift of Tom’s first car. Tom always mimicked the little man as he stretched out his arms, telling Cheryl, “I love you this much.”

Having been the first person in his family to graduate from high school, Tom’s drive for a better life led him to enlist in the Air Force to help him get a college education. His time loading bombs on aircraft during the Viet Nam war years left him with partial hearing loss and ringing in his ears. Again, Cheryl never heard Tom complain, despite no help from the Veteran’s Administration for 30 years.

“That’s who he was,” explained Cheryl.

Right before Tom died, the VA had finally granted him disability benefits.

Tom did get that college education, earning a master’s degree in engineering and another master’s in human resources. The Edwards came west to Sherwood, Oregon where they lived for 30 years while Tom worked for Daimler Trucks North America in Portland.

“I came kicking and screaming,” admitted Cheryl.

Once she saw the mountains and beaches, however, she was smitten. They hiked, biked, and kayaked.

“We saw every inch of the state, most of it on our bikes,” Cheryl said.

They participated in a cross-country bike ride from Seattle to Washington, D.C. to raise money for a charity supporting research into a blood-clotting disorder that Cheryl experienced. While cycling, they discovered the “Showers Program” where people along the route offer free showers, camping,

clothing, whatever they have to share. Tom and Cheryl’s experiences planted the seed for a place where cyclists could come to camp, rest, shower, and make repairs.

They purchased property in Central Oregon and, for six years on weekends and vacations, they cleared the land, put in a road, well, and septic system, moved a cabin to the property and refurbished it, and installed solar panels to support being off-grid. Tom built a barn outfitted with equipment for working on bikes.

There is an RV with complete hook-up and a gathering room where campers and visitors can meet, talk, and eat. There is space for tents and an outside shower for campers. Working alongside Tom, Cheryl said she learned how to do so many things.

“Not a day goes by I don’t use something he taught me. Everything I do, I hear him telling me how,” she recounted.

When Tom retired, they planned to move to the property, build themselves a house to live in, and run the camp. He did retire in 2015, with



PHOTO PROVIDED

Cheryl and Tom on the evening before leaving on their cross-country bike ride from Seattle to Washington, D.C. in support of charity.

plans to do some part-time work from home so they could move.

Boxes were all packed in the garage ready to move and the Sherwood house was on the market. Tom had a routine doctor’s appointment and on his way home, he called to ask Cheryl, “Do you need anything?” – something he often did.

When he returned home, he went through his regular ritual with Ardee, their yellow Labrador, chasing him around the house and then giving him the mail to carry in. Tom pulled out a bouquet

of flowers from behind his back.

“These are for you,” he told Cheryl.

He offered to put them in a vase, asking which one Cheryl wanted him to use. The vases were all packed already so Tom found something to put them in. Cheryl was focused on some work she was doing and not really paying close attention, when she heard Tom say, “Something’s wrong. Get me some water. I can’t breathe.”

Cheryl looked up to see

See **TOM’S REST** on page 25

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