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### *Remembering Tom: A talented & respected falconer* By Mike Yates

**Tom's interest in falconry and birds of prey was kindled in his early teen years, and quickly became a passion that raged within him until his passing at the age of 58.** By the time he unexpectedly left us in December 2016 Tom had become a talented and respected falconer, hood maker, falcon breeder and biologist, an internationally recognized authority on prairie peregrine falcons, a devoted husband and father, and a treasured friend to many within and without the falconry community.

Tom's boyhood home in Geneva, Illinois was convenient to some of American falconry's finest practitioners. He sought out those (like Jack Oar and Jim Weaver) who could help him learn and excel at falconry, and was delivered to their homes by his mom before he could drive. It was quickly apparent that not only was he born to the art of falconry, but that he would attack it and his every other undertaking wholeheartedly. Lifelong friend and hawking partner Sam Lindberg recalls a cold Illinois day when Tom's red-tail caught a cottontail that had run across a frozen quarry pond, and the pair broke through the ice. Without hesitation Tom not only retrieved them by breaking ice until immersed to the armpits, he humanely dispatched the rabbit during his return to shore while uttering a whole lot of words his mother never taught him. Tom and Sam traveled west after high school graduation, crossing the Bighorn Mountains to the area east of Cody and meeting other falconers on their western tour. Tom would come to call Sheridan, Wyoming his permanent home base before long. Tom and Sam volunteered as hack site attendants for Peregrine Fund release sites along the Mississippi, honing their rappelling skills on local rock faces.

In 1981 Tom was elated at being invited to participate in the Greenland Peregrine Falcon Survey. During the ensuing 18 summers he would prove to be one of its most essential assets. Fearless, tireless, knowledgeable, capable and dependable, he was a constant that everyone relied upon to assure the work was completed successfully and safely. A founding member and later Director of the not-for-profit Earthspan (along with peregrine research colleagues such as Mattox, Seegar, Yates, Fuller and Whitney), Tom participated in or oversaw many of their projects on peregrines and other species. He directed their Padre Island (TX) Peregrine Falcon Survey for two decades, conducted field work in South America, Mexico, Alaska and Russia, and authored or co-authored numerous scientific publications.

As a young adult Tom never wanted to own any more possessions (and most of those falconry-related) than he could fit into his pickup for a quick and clean getaway. All that changed in 1989 when he met Kathy at South Padre Island during the peregrine survey. They were soon married, relocated to Boise and later welcomed daughter Ireland. Fervent game hawking with falcons and English Setters, innovative field research and dedication to family and friends were the constants in his life. Returning to Sheridan, he created Bighorn Environmental Consultants; its success was attributable not only to his manifest talents but the fact that everyone who ever knew Tom liked and respected him. He was embraced by the local community, sat on conservation and wildlife panels, was a spokesperson for environmental issues, flew gyrfalcons at sage-grouse and raised gyrs in captivity.

So many falconers are captured at an early age, marching to a drummer they never sought out and are powerless to resist. Tom embraced that journey and made it his own, carving out a life we can all admire. Everything falconry and our natural world gave him he repaid tenfold through his tireless quest to leave it all better than he found it. His was a life well-lived but far too brief, and Tom's many friends within our community will forever feel his loss.



Photos above by Bill Satterfield

## Tom's passion: Greenland Peregrines by Bill Mattox



**Of Tom Maechtle's many areas of interest and activity, other than falconry and hood-making, one stands foremost: Greenland peregrines.** Tom went to Greenland first in 1981; he traveled there each season until the last one in 1998, when the Greenland Peregrine Falcon Survey ended operations. Bill Seegar took over from Scott Ward in 1979 and was our Army contracting liaison in Greenland for 18 seasons. Other than Bill's sterling support and participation in the field, Tom's record of field activity and fidelity to our cause remained unsurpassed among the 90 participants who volunteered to fly to Greenland and hike the tundra surveying the peregrine's status.

I co-founded the Survey in 1972, and later came to rely on Tom's field strength and knowledge of routes, best campsites, nesting locations, and survival techniques. In the first seasons he and Jack Oar kayaked the area of Tasersuaq (North) west to the outflow at tidewater. They found most of the nest cliffs on the

north shore of the lake. As the first team to find nesting falcons in that area they had the privilege of naming cliffs; so we find place names like their wives Kathryn and Connie, as well as descriptors of events or local conditions and people like Lost Knife, Wentland, Mosquito, and Fitch's Backbone. In the 1985 season Tom had Greenlander Kåle Siegstad as his kayak partner, so some Danish or Greenlandic cliff names crept in like Tasersuaq (large lake), Guleklippen (golden cliff), and Kiagtup ðimve (place where it is easy to land or launch an umiaq). It was here they were able to climb up the cliff face directly out of the kayak to access the new eyrie. Near tidewater, almost at the western extent of Tom's travel, he named Unnga, Helle, and Golgoth. Tom used such local place names because he had deep appreciation for the culture and rugged landscapes of Greenland. And he knew what the names meant.

In later seasons Tom paddled the shores of Tasersuaq with Mark Haley, Mark Robertson, Ralph Rogers, Bob Rosenfield, and four seasons with Phil Vance, who spoke in most humorous terms about his adventures with Tom.



Photo by Bill Satterfield



After we received Danish and local government permission to capture and tag adults at the eyrie, in early summer of 1983 a so-called "Advance Team" of Tom, Bill Seegar, Tom Nichols, and Mike Yates flew in a helicopter to nest cliffs. After roping down to the eyrie, Tom placed the eggs in a padded box, put it in a safe place near the eyrie, and set a noose gin over dummy eggs. Then Tom ascended and found a hiding place with his radio, rope and climbing gear. The other team members spotted, and radioed Tom when the falcon had returned to the eyrie and was caught. Then all hell broke loose as Tom made some world-record rappels down to the eyrie to grab the falcon and replace the eggs. One year he reported tagging and releasing the falcon at the eyrie. He then started to climb back up, only to have her spot him and get caught on the noose ring tied to his backpack. So there he was half-way up the ascent of a steep rock face, both hands gripping the rope or ascenders, with a noosed falcon screaming right in his face. You just can't make this stuff up!

Left photo above by Bill Satterfield



Photo above by Bill Satterfield

