



*Tom, Sherry, and  
Bee in front of their  
Kenmare home*



## Tribute to a Founder

### Rorie

**T**om Nicholson made innumerable contributions to Innisfree over the past 46 years. As a founder, board member, treasurer, and parent, he was tireless in his work to ensure Innisfree's sustainability. I only had the privilege to know Tom for a short time, but he welcomed me warmly to Innisfree and imparted much wisdom in my first years here. The following reflections by former directors and his daughter Bee give a glimpse of the kindness he shared and the genuine relationships he held with all who knew him. His loss is felt deeply by our community.



**Thomas Nicholson**

*June 24, 1930 - January 14, 2018*

### Bee

My Dad and my Mom and Susanna and I lived in Falls Church, VA for the first part of our lives and I remember how my Dad was always happy to see me when I was

away. And he would tell me that he loved me and I would always help my Dad wash the cars. And always at 6:00 I would be waiting for my Dad to come and I would go outside and sit on my Dad's lap and drive the car into the garage. And in the summer we would go over to Ireland to a house that we had in a town called Kenmare, Co. Kerry. Ireland is so green all the time. I love Ireland and I will miss it very much. I loved being with my Dad.

### Phyllis Sato

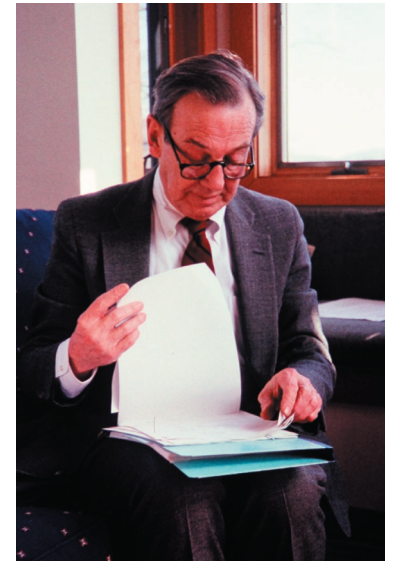
First memories are always the strongest, and mine of Tom were of him as a loving Dad. My family, with two high school daughters and a middle schooler, lived in Walnut Level with four older male coworkers in 1977. At first Bridget was our neighbor in Echo, living with Carolyn and hanging out and eating with us on Carolyn's days off. Then Bridget replaced one of the men, bringing fresh spirit, and her parents into our lives. I knew of them as one of the special founding families of Innisfree, but came to experience them as fellow parents with strong relationships with their daughters. Somehow it seems as if in those earlier years, before computers, email or texting, there was more time for long phone calls or face-to-face chats that engendered connections. Over the years I came to realize how much time this

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*Dedicated board member  
Tom Nicholson hard at work*



successful businessman gave to Innisfree and how vital his financial savvy was in laying a strong foundation. Our farmer, Joe Coleman, used to call all of us “hippies” but it was Tom Nicholson who helped make those hippies’ dream mesh with reality. I thank Bridget, Susanna and Sherry for sharing this kind and generous man with us.

### **Carolyn Ohle**

There are some who have given so much to this community, to the cause of life sharing, that their timelines and Innisfree’s intertwine. Tom Nicholson has been part of the fabric of Innisfree since its founding in 1971. He and the small handful of founders present since the beginnings, dared to dream our village into existence.

Tom’s thoughtful guidance and brilliant oversight as Board President for a term in the early seventies and then as Treasurer for the next many decades, navigated Innisfree through purchase of our land, through shortages and recessions, to growth into a vibrant village. Tom and wife, Sherry became even more involved in 1977 when their daughter Bee (then Bridget) came to live at Innisfree, in Echo where I was a young volunteer.

Some people touch our souls...deeply. In many ways, my tenure at Innisfree extended multiple times because of Tom. He stood beside and behind. He supported. He listened. He trusted. He led. He showed appreciation...all in

the gentle way we, who loved him, so admired.

I’m keenly grateful for my final conversation with Tom just a few days ago. Musing on our long friendship, we reviewed some of the highlights, the challenges of community. Tom summed up by saying, “What a miracle it is that Innisfree exists, that it survived and prospered... truly amazing.” For me, for Innisfree, Tom is key to the miracle of Innisfree.



*Bee and Tom at a coffee shop in Ireland*

### **Lee Walters**

It was a pleasure to get to know Tom, Sherry, Bridget and Susanna over a long stretch of time. So much so that even though, given his age, his death was not entirely unexpected, his passing has left me with the sense that something dear is missing from the known universe.

In thinking about Tom the word generosity comes

clearly to my mind. Generosity of time, of attention, encouragement and appreciation. Tom managed to give thoughtful creative attention to Innisfree from its inception so much so that by the time I arrived as a volunteer in 1981, the community had a strong foundation. He and Sherry, along with other



founding families were intent on creating a life for their sons and daughters far more meaningful, productive and joyful than what was seen as possible at the time. This highly focused attention carried Innisfree through wild, crazy and tender times and offered a way of life that has enriched hundreds of people in that spectacular place and across the globe.

Years later, when I became the Executive Director I knew that I could call Tom



*Sherry, Bee, and Tom taking in the beautiful fall scenery at Family Day*

times he remained calm and kind.

When I retired in 2005 Tom and Sherry told me that now it was time for me to go to Ireland and teach weaving for as long as I cared to stay. He had gotten to know a group of people who had sons and daughters with intellectual disability and for whom there was

very little do. He was keen to share resources and the Innisfree experience with these people. It was obvious they felt noticed and knew Tom really cared for them. I didn't know all that much about weaving so Tom did some research on looms and bought three brand new Louet looms from The Netherlands. My son Luke and I put them together and by the end of my month in Kenmare our group had finished a scarf! I don't know if anyone is still weaving but my time there was a treasure I carry in my heart's

core much as I hold dear the gift of having known Tom.



*Tom chatting at the first Innisfree Mayfair*

whenever we needed anything. Whether I called him or not he found ways to encourage our work. At board meetings or in private discussions Tom was a keen listener, never rushing decisions. He readily communicated his delight in our accomplishments with a sincere, "Isn't that wonderful!" In stressful



*Bee and Tom sharing a laugh*



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*a newsletter of*  
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## **Songs and Streams Win Awards**

### **Mildred W. Spicer Award**

Cathy Bollinger received the Mildred W. Spicer Arts Fund award on Monday, November 27, 2017 for her promotion of the art of music exploration throughout the Charlottesville-Albemarle area. Cathy has been a vital member of the Innisfree community as a music therapist for almost 30 years, guiding us through Family Day and Mayfair performances, custom songs for siblings and parents, and learning new instruments. From us to you, congratulations Cathy—you deserve it!



Carolyn Ohle, Cathy Bollinger and Mildred Spicer

photograph by Norm Carter

### **Clean Water Farm Award**

In December the Innisfree Farm received the Clean Water Farm award from the Thomas Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation District. The award is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. They pick award recipients based on farming practices that “result in a reduction of nutrients, pesticides and chemicals in local waterways — protecting and enhancing water quality and soil conservation.” Great job!



Farm workstation head Tim Wool, farm assistant Clark Alexander, and farm manager Nich Traverse proudly show off their award.



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