



Thomas Kepler

April 6, 1971 - March 12, 2026

UPDATE #2

Tom was a musician and artist, and music was an important part of his life. This playlist includes songs he loved, along with those he wrote and performed as Frog and Toad with his musical brother Dave Schwartz.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0KYil8pM4rqf7cUatfOXZN?si=be076026e2e14b91>

The photo reel we shared at yesterday's open house is linked below for those who were not able to attend, or those who (like me) just want to spend a little time with him today.

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WpAfVIKhmdhdhovLHfcevCBxhiJcCdr3RvSAwwsrMVp8/edit?usp=sharing>

UPDATE

Please scroll down for obituary.

Also, in support of the sobriety communities that were so important to Tom, the open house will be a sober event.

A note from Lizzie:

Hello everyone. Thank you for the incredible outpouring of love and support. Tom was loved and will be acutely missed by so many.

Tom did not want to have a memorial service. To honor his wishes while also offering a place for folks to bring their broken hearts over his sudden and unexpected loss, we will be having a reception/open house this coming Friday, March 20th.

Because Tom has dear ones all over the globe, we will have a dedicated time for folks to gather remotely via Zoom in the morning, followed by an in-person open house in the afternoon and evening. If you are able, please come by to share your Tom stories, bring a snack, and grab a hug or three.

Zoom Gathering

When: Friday, March 20th, 10:30am to Noon CST

Where: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81338751134?pwd=NGW4q8VROC60gDPnJ4g1uKNvXSo1uY.1>

Open House Reception

When: Friday, March 20th, 2pm to 8pm

Where: 2004 Seward St. (on the first block west of Dodge) Evanston, IL, 60202

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to: We Rate Dogs at <http://15outof10.org/> or Chicago's Public Broadcasting Station, <https://secure.wttw.com/?s=t-oa-web-pledge>

Tom Kepler, 54; art director, graphic and book designer, typesetting expert, dog whisperer, and talented artist and musician; passed away unexpectedly

but peacefully in his sleep at home in Southwest Evanston, in the early morning of March 12, 2026. It appears that Tom's death was quick and without distress

Thomas Alan Kepler was born in Columbus, OH to Jim, a writer and Ann, an editor. Jim cautioned friends and family that "the first person to call him 'Tommy' does not get to see him again." He was Tom to everyone.

Tom lived exclusively in Evanston since he was three years old. He attended Lincoln Elementary where he was a Cub Scout, Nichols Middle School, and Evanston Township High School – where he met Lizzie, whom he would later marry. Tom also attended Columbia College.

From his earliest days, his parents knew that Tom was smarter than either of them. Most importantly, he had wisdom and kindness beyond his years—and a wry and marvelous sense of humor. His parents discovered that he could read at age three when they heard him reading street signs on a car trip, chalking it up to PBS and valuable bedtime stories with his mom. Being the only child of a writer and an editor came with benefits; from a young age, Tom collected books. Tom loved letters and words, pens. More than anything, he loved to draw. The couple would bring their tiny son to a restaurant, place paper and crayons in his hands, and enjoy their meal. Tom's drawing talent was evident from an early age and would be something he would do throughout his life - creating comical characters that always had a little extra dollop of humanity and sweetness.

His first professional contribution was at the age of eleven, when a piece of art appeared in a brochure. His first design schematics was a book on Japanese floral arranging. Tom was 14.

Tom was also a left-handed male who excelled at art, math, and music, qualities not uncommon to someone with a stutter. As a child, Tom masked his speech impediment by locking eyes with his conversation partner, nodding, and repeating "uh huh." The search for synonyms in a stutter led to an expansive vocabulary. The stutter completely disappeared when he was singing, imitating other people, arguing with his Oscar the Grouch handpuppet, or angrily telling off childhood bullies.

While in high school, Tom worked at Tom Thumb craft supply and skate shop on Davis and also at Thee Fish Bowl on Dempster.

He became a member of the youth group at the Unitarian Church of Evanston, along with dear friends Tyler Duston and Dave Schwartz (and so many others). With this cherished family of friends, Tom would attend the UU Lake Geneva Summer Assembly for nearly 30 years. Dave and Tom formed a musical duo called "Frog and Toad" in those years, with Ty joining them as "Newt" from time to time – playing to the packed coffee house at LGSA, Norris Center at Northwestern University, and every Saturday night at the Time Out lounge at the Evanston Holiday Inn.

Tom was often fond of saying that he started dating Lizzie in high school, but she didn't start dating him until college – and his immediate and (at the time) unlikely premonition that he and Lizzie would one day marry came true when the two wed in November of 1998 at the Unitarian Church of Evanston. Lizzie and Tom would have many adventures together over the years, including a trip to Scotland with Nora in 2017, and many unforgettable trips to Seattle and Butte, Montana to visit friends Doug and Megan and their army of well-loved Samoyeds.

With his parents, Tom was a three-legged stool book production team, working for and eventually buying Adams Press in 1998. The family business

specialized in small publishing houses, with Tom acting as designer and typesetter. They helped authors produce textbooks, business books, fiction, memoirs, and children's books on a wide range of budgets and print run sizes. Tom also had a side-hustle publishing client websites using WordPress.

A die-hard Cubs fan, Tom and his daughter Nora played baseball in the back yard, and he briefly got her into collecting baseball cards. The two enjoyed annual school supplies and stocking stuffer excursions, with a Taco Bell stop added into the mix once he decided she was old enough that the food wouldn't harm her. Nora also briefly took up the accordion to follow in Tom's footsteps, to Lizzie's great entertainment. Evenings at the dinner table were filled with goofiness, laughter, and sometimes musical interludes on plates and glasses. Every day when Nora was off to school, Tom would give her a bright "Have a Ducky Day!" "Have Ducky Dreams!" saw her off to bed at night.

Tom was notorious for composing songs, jingles, and ditties for random life events: a stuffed animal that looked funny, taking a different route to school in the morning, making a sandwich, etc.

Above all, Tom was a remarkably kind person and was one of the funniest people folks have had the pleasure to know.

Tom celebrated eight years of sobriety in the fall of 2025 and made many cherished friends through his recovery communities.

Beloved husband of 28 years (together for 37) to Elizabeth "Lizzie" Allen Kepler (nee Stukey). Devoted father of Eleanor "Nora" Cady Kepler (partner Ian) of Texas. Cherished only child of James Alan Kepler and the late Ann Linda Kepler (nee Overtree), formerly of far Northeast Rogers Park.

Tom was predeceased by Gabrielle (the little white cat), Lovecraft, Jenny Linsky, and his beloved Mira dog. He is survived by his faithful pet companions Fogo the jet-black, 70lb standard poodle (really Tom's dog), Minnie the chihuahua/beagle mix (really Lizzie's dog), and his Grand-dog, Fajita.

He also leaves behind countless dear human friends, including his lifelong best friend, Eric Fine.

Arrangements by Inclusive Funeral Care, 773-318-1305 or www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com.

Previous Events

Open House Reception

MAR **20**. 2:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Family Gathering
2004 Seward Street
Evanston, IL 60202

Tribute Wall



“ *Inclusive Funeral Care created a Tribute Video in memory of Thomas Kepler*



Team Inclusive Funeral Care - March 22 at 12:49 AM



“ *Inclusive Funeral Care created a Zoom Gathering for Tom in memory of Thomas Kepler*



Team Inclusive Funeral Care - March 16 at 02:36 PM

LH

“ Dear Lizzie, Nora and Art, we apologize for our inability to come to comfort you in person. It is very regrettable because one of our strongest memories of Tom is his consistency in showing up for others. Reading his obituary we recognized much that we knew from our contacts with Tom and you. As Seth Himrod's parents we only encountered you in connection to events in Seth or Lisa's life or Eric and Jen Fine's and yet Tom was always memorable in his kindness, care for others and sense of humor. He will be greatly missed. His life was one of great meaning and memorable to others His memory will be a blessing. Lola and Dave Himrod

Lola Himrod - March 20 at 03:29 PM

AB

“ This is heartbreaking. Tom is my friend and always will be. I met him when I was 16 at Lake Geneva. We didn't get to see each other much over the years. When we did it was as if no time had passed. My condolences to everyone who knew him.

Amanda Black-Pherson - March 20 at 10:05 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Thomas Kepler.



March 19 at 08:01 PM

RF

“ *Tom and Lizzie.* ❤️



Rachel Frothingham - March 18 at 08:30 PM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Thomas Kepler.*



March 18 at 04:27 PM

PO

“ Tom, my dear, dear friend. I first met you when we were colleagues at Publications International, Ltd, both of us in the very early stages of our careers, and I can honestly say that I’d never met anyone quite like you before that time of my life. I instantly felt safe in your company and immediately reaped the benefits of your dry wit, wry sense of humor, true sense of self, beyond-your-years insight, innate kindness, and gentle spirit. We hadn’t even spent 2 years as coworkers before Susanna and I moved to Vermont—but lucky for us, you and dear, sweet Lizzie had reasons to visit the Green Mountain State, so over the years we were blessed with the occasional connection with the two of you out here (and in Chicago when we were visiting family). These wonderful times together were few and far between—but they were always wonderful, life-giving, life-affirming gatherings that not only left us grateful that we had friends like you, but served as a reminder that there were good, kind, compassionate people like you in the world. Good night, sweet prince—my sorrow is deep, but my gratitude for having known you is much, much deeper.

Peter Olson - March 18 at 07:03 AM

JF

“ Always enjoyed engaging with Tom, be it online or at that special spot in Wisconsin. May his memory be a blessing.



Jeffrey Field - March 17 at 02:38 PM

KH

“ Tom loved dogs, coffee and cows. He had a gentle yet incredibly strong spirit that I greatly admired. He was my rock through difficult times and made me laugh on countless occasions. I'm deeply grateful to have known him and heartbroken he's gone.

Katherine Hickson - March 17 at 07:32 AM

JG

“ tom was a wonderful friend. i knew him for almost eight years and he was funny, generous, kind and caring — such an important part of our community. i'll miss him terribly.

Jenni Grover - March 16 at 12:35 PM

MP

“ Marsha Nelson Pesavento lit a candle in memory of Thomas Kepler



Marsha Nelson Pesavento - March 16 at 11:05 AM

TO

“ Tom was the best, and this is heartbreaking. I loved his mind, his heart, his sense of humor, his music. Gabrielle the Little White Cat has been one of my favorite songs for over 30 years!



Tom - March 15 at 10:22 PM

JK

Tom with his Grandmother Kepler.

James A Kepler - March 18 at 01:33 PM

DA

“ *David & Roselle Ashkenaz purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Thomas Kepler.*



David & Roselle Ashkenaz - March 15 at 04:10 PM

JD

“ *Lizzie, Nora, and Jim, I can't put adequate words to my sorrow. Tom was a special, smart, funny, wonderful human being; we worked together on iREAD Summer Reading and other projects and it was always fun, no matter the deadline. I'm holding you all in my heart.*

Jill Donovan - March 15 at 03:49 PM

TB

“ *I worked with Tom many many years ago at Tom Thumb. We have not been in touch since but I have enjoyed following him over the years to see what a wonderful happy life he created. I'm so deeply sorry and regret I never reconnected. My deepest condolences.*

Tracey Correia Brosnan - March 15 at 03:18 PM

MK

“ *I only met Tom on two occasions, but it was clear that he was a kind soul. We shared some laughs and fun memories of Chicago radio history, along with other local lore. He was the kind of person you can be comfortable around right off the bat. May his memory and the support of those around them bring his family comfort.*

Mike K. - March 15 at 09:48 AM



“ I met Tom in 7th grade in Evanston. He was one of the neighborhood kids who we hung around with, but we've stayed friends throughout the years. In 2016 I was hospitalized with a serious back injury, and Tom was the first person to call me to see if I was all right, with genuine worry. I was touched by that and I've never forgotten it. Truly a beautiful person.

David Clasky - March 14 at 08:44 PM

MF

“ Tom and I first met in Kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary in Evanston. We were honest on classmates for 4/6 years there. He was so sweet, quiet & smart. As we continued into middle school & ETHS, I was always impressed with his sense of self, humbleness & quiet confidence. He met the love of his life in HS & some of his adoring lifelong friends. I'm heartbroken for all who knew and loved Tom. He will be SO very missed. □



Marcy Fein - March 14 at 02:29 PM

AJ

“ When people ask, "Why did you stay in Chicago and not go back to the Bay Area?", I think of Tom and Lizzie.

This was our first year in Chicago, and we had ZERO friends. Then Thanksgiving came around, and this lovely couple, whom I knew through my classes, invited us to their house.

We were so shocked! Inviting us to their home for a holiday that's usually for family? But that's exactly the kind of people they were!

Over the years, we spent many, many joyful moments (and a few more Thanksgivings) together, and theirs continued to be a friendship that we wholly treasured!

Rest in peace, Tom 💙 My heart breaks for you, Lizzie, and Nora. Sending you all our love.



Ajanta - March 14 at 01:33 PM

RF

“ I met Tom when I was 14. He was one of the funniest people I have ever met and so creative and generous. Very grateful that I was able to see him in August last year in Chicago, and grateful to have known him.



Rachel Frothingham - March 14 at 01:31 PM

Jl

“ Tom was a joyful, creative and deeply sensitive man whom I had the privilege and pleasure of knowing when we were both 18 and the occasional delightful surprise of encountering unexpectedly years later. I am terribly sad to know that he is gone and I no longer have the possibility of seeing him again and enjoying the light he carried within so beautifully.



Jill - March 14 at 12:34 PM

DS

“ Tom was my brother. He was my closest friend for 38 years. He was my musical/creative partner actively for 15 of those, and passively for the rest. I have never known a kinder or funnier person. I feel so profoundly privileged to have had so much of him in my life. And so profoundly sad to imagine a world without him in it.

David Schwartz - March 14 at 12:16 PM

RR

“ I am holding you all in my heart and prayers--and am thinking fondly of Tom's creativity in the work that we did together for 2U. I am grateful to have known him and am sending all of you love from Connecticut.

Rev. Adam Robersmith - March 14 at 12:10 PM

TC

“ As a teen, I heard Tom as part of Frog and Toad at UU camp on Lake Geneva and thought those guys were the coolest in the world. They even had a song just about Lake Geneva that captured it perfectly: <https://soundcloud.com/user-945773149/lake-geneva-song>

As an adult, I got to know Tom as a peer and friend rather than an idol. He supported many small non-profits, including the one I founded and two others where I worked, through his excellent website development and maintenance. I'm positive he worked many more hours than he ever billed us for.

I shared Tom's advice and wisdom with young people in my life and it was incredible helpful for them, and for me.

One of my favorite memories of Tom was hearing how joyful he was telling me how he was going to be taking a trip together with Nora, who by then was an adult. He was so, so proud and loving.

Tom, our lives are better because your light was in them. Thank you, and may you continue to bless us even after your body's gone.

Tom Clowes - March 14 at 09:57 AM

DB

Beautiful tribute.

I remember Frog & Toad at Lake Geneva too. Their song My Little White Cat with meow, meow, meow as the chorus was so sweet and funny. That's the moments I'll always remember of Tom, besides his love of Lizzie and then there was baby Norah! Lots of years ago 🌹

Diane Brown - March 14 at 10:33 AM

JD

Lizzie, Sue and I share in your and Nora's grief. Your family has always been good to us and I will always remember him as a good man, wonderful musician and masterful punster. May he rest in peace and reach out to us for anything should you require assistance.

Jonathan Dunmore - March 15 at 05:29 AM

AU

“ I met both Tom and Lizzie in high school and was so pleased to learn that these two wonderful, talented, caring people married each other. Though far away, I was always happy to learn what was on Tom's mind and what delights he was up to. My deepest condolences. The world needs more Toms.

Andy Utech - March 14 at 09:38 AM

SR

“ Susan Richter lit a candle in memory of Thomas Kepler



Susan Richter - March 14 at 08:26 AM

VP

“ 6 files added to the tribute wall



Valarie Palacios - March 14 at 08:25 AM

VP

“ Sending love to surround your family and our friends. My heart is saddened with loss to the hope we might have hugged and shared some space one more time at MUUSA and to have shared memories. Such a kind and gentle soul to have had the joy of knowing you. Rest in love.



Valarie Palacios - March 14 at 08:19 AM

DM

“ 1 file added to the album Tom and dogs



Doug Mahugh - March 14 at 08:01 AM

DM

I've know Tom since 1982, and we had many great times together. He was a kind and gentle soul who loved dogs madly, and dogs knew it. Much love to Lizzie, Nora, and Jim.

Doug Mahugh - March 14 at 12:01 PM

MR

So sorry to hear. He designed my first website many years ago and was very kind and creative. May his memory be a blessing.

Mary Hutchings Reed - March 14 at 03:34 PM

JP

“ *Julianne Pacheco lit a candle in memory of Thomas Kepler*



Julianne Pacheco - March 14 at 07:34 AM

RF

“ *Rachel Frothingham lit a candle in memory of Thomas Kepler*



Rachel Frothingham - March 14 at 03:15 AM