



## Thomas Knotek

December 24, 1957 - November 6, 2025

Thomas Joseph Knotek, beloved brother, son, and gifted multi-instrumentalist, passed away in his home in Morton, Pennsylvania on November 6, 2025, at the age of 67.

Born on December 24, 1957 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and raised in Racine as the second of what would eventually be five (5!) sons, Tom spent his early years on adventures that only a large pack of young, semi-civilized boys can get themselves into (and out of). Some of these adventures may have caused headaches for their poor, beleaguered parents, and, sure, maybe there were some hijinks at the Racine Zoo, but it was all in the name of good, clean, 1960's-70's small-town Wisconsin fun.

Despite his unassuming Midwest Americana origins, though, Tom was anything but ordinary, and this was evident to anyone who knew him, from an early age onward. Shaped by both his mother's formidable piano skills (young Tom's ears absorbed a good dose of classics) and his father's thoughtful, analytical, and industrious nature, by adolescence Tom was a voracious reader, free thinker, and, above all, an accomplished musician, driven by an incessant internal musical engine. He could play those blistering Terry Kath solos on the early Chicago Transit Authority albums note for note like it was no big deal, and was a fixture in the William Horlick High School jazz band. Tom mastered jazz guitar while studying and playing in Milwaukee. Guitar

wasn't enough for Tom, though, so he picked up piano, drums and bass along the way, too, and his skills on his "ancillary" instruments often surpassed others' talents on their primary ones. And those Chicago albums were just the gateway into jazz for Tom, and once he walked through those gates, there was no turning back.

While Tom was wholly devoted to the perfection of his craft, he did occasionally make time for other pursuits in adolescence and young adulthood. He read everything, hand-made all sorts of things, and debated anyone, anytime. Tom was a tenacious and unrelenting verbal sparring partner, and, unfortunately for his sibling opponents, he usually had the knowledge and information to substantiate his strong opinions. Tom's other leisure pursuits included defacing poor younger brother Bill's Barbra Streisand albums, and building, from scratch, a fully functional darkroom in the basement with his dad to support one of his other passions, photography. (Many decades later, his still-proud father would show off Tom's photographic journal of a family trip to San Francisco, taken when Tom's age was barely out of the single digits.) Tom was, in the truest sense of the word, what we today call a "maker"; virtually everything meaningful to him was crafted by his own hands and ideas: his music, his carpentry, his own singular life's path.

In his 20's, Tom forged a second path parallel to his musical journey, one that he cultivated and sustained the rest of his life: carpentry. It started with a job building cabinets in Racine, and continued when he relocated to Philadelphia to work at a custom woodworking shop that was an offshoot of the family business where he got his start. Carpentry came as naturally to Tom as music did; it appealed to both his creative and analytical skills, and both endeavors involved a daily, lifelong cycle of practice, refinement, and perfecting that Tom immersed himself in, and that he relished. What some call "the grind" or "the process" was the space where he thrived, and the fruits of his labor—the music he made, the things he built—are his legacy.

Carpenter by day, professional jazz drummer and guitarist on the Philadelphia scene by night: this was Tom's existence for the vast majority of his adult life, until the physical toll of decades of drumming rendered this duality impossible. A lifelong bachelor, Tom poured his whole life into his passions, and, as he was inherently a reserved and deeply private person, those of us who knew and loved him can only surmise the effects that these physical challenges had on his internal compass, though we bet they didn't stifle his drive to create beautiful and useful things.

To honor him and keep his spirit with us, then, we encourage you to make and savor something today: a dinner, a poem, a good joke. Tom most certainly would've laughed

Tom is survived by his father, Charles "Chuck" Knotek of Racine, his brothers Michael of Racine, Bill (Sandi) of Greendale, WI, Peter (Sonali) of Racine and Andy (Tracy Loland) of Evanston, IL; nephews Prasan (Alexis) and Sanjeev (McKenna) Knotek, Colton and Gregory Knotek, and niece Adele Knotek, as well as many cousins and extended family, including his colleagues from his decades of work at Scholtz Millwork. He was preceded in death by his mother, Patricia (Hueller) Knotek.

A celebration of Tom's life is being planned. Please check back to this website for details.

Donations may be made in Tom's name to the Milwaukee Jazz Institute: <http://www.milwaukeejazzinstitute.org/>.

For info: Inclusive Funeral Care 773-318-1305 or [www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com](http://www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com).



# Tribute Wall

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“ Just came across this. I met Tom when we worked at Badger Wood Products in 1979. We must have crossed paths before that as our families lived 3 or so blocks apart.

Tom turned me on to Jazz music. I also play guitar though I have not mastered it! I did take some guitar lessons from Tom. Tom recorded a cassette tape of music that he gave me which I still enjoy listening to!

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Dean - February 27 at 10:04 PM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



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Team Inclusive Funeral Care - November 17, 2025 at 06:25 PM