

From a young age I always encouraged Tom to spread his wings. To experience life and not sit around and let it happen around him. To give freely of himself to those that were in need of help.

Since he was a young boy he always took his responsibility and commitments seriously. My relationship with Tom was not only the special one Mothers have with their eldest child but he always freely confided with me about matters in his life. Whether excitement like when he called about being contacted by the Forest Service and they were going to come and meet him at a conference he was attending or conflict about the politics in the office or his private life.

He had to give no thought to accepting the position in Wells. He laughed when he told me that they were concerned with getting someone willing to live in Wells and not commute from Elko. Some of his best friends lived here and I was happy because I knew he'd be part of their family and be treated like a son in my absence.

He loved the big open spaces and loved the interaction with his permittees. He'd talk about his many visits to their houses and ranches. He was in love with the Jarbidge Mountains.

One day he called to talk about the posting for the detail in Afghanistan. I could have probably told him at that time that it wasn't a good move, that he shouldn't do it. If I had told him that he shouldn't go he wouldn't have pursued it. I know many of you tried to convince him he shouldn't go. I bit my lip and listened to him talk about the position. There was excitement in his voice. I told him that if that was something he really wanted to do he should go for it. His concern being that he didn't quite meet all the qualifications. I told him submit the application. They may see something in you that is just what they were looking for.

Prior to leaving he had much concern about leaving his job here in Wells. He loved it here. He was concerned about who would be taking care of his permittees, would they handle them properly. He had great respect for them. During our conversations I told him "Tom, Your people know that you're coming back, they respect you and they'll do the right thing while you're gone. They'll be ok" Out of concern I reminded him many times "Tom remember you are volunteering to go to Afghanistan. They can't make you go or keep you there once you've arrived. If at any time you are

uncomfortable just tell them that you're going home." Except for his helicopter reports he always had positive things to say. The projects that he and the other men at the PRT were working on were making a huge difference.

The Sunday before he was killed he called just before we were ready to walk out the door. I could tell the concern in his voice. He'd been trying to make plans for when he returned in January. We'd talked numerous times about other positions that were opening up around the country, I'd always get the call the evening the postings closed. This time it was one in New Mexico. He had it figured to the hour how much further from home he'd be. We talked about how in Wells he had the Dalton family to call home and in New Mexico there would be no one he knew. He said he loved his job here. I ask him then why are you moving. There is pressure in the Forest Service to advance they need to move around. My comment to him was: Tom- you have to do what is right for you. If you are happy with what you have you can't ask for anything more. It's your choice do what's right for you don't let anyone else decide for you.

Four days later we were sitting around the table stunned by what had happened. Although I feel a huge loss, a void that will never be filled, I felt Tom come back to me to give me strength. For anyone who knew Tom very well they would now that he would not want them mourning his death. He would want them to celebrate his life, his accomplishments, and following in his footsteps to better the world.