



Thomas K Townsend

November 6, 1958 - October 4, 2019

Thomas K. Townsend Age 60 of Clayton, MO.

Creative icon, community leader and philanthropist Thomas Kingman Townsend, 60, passed away in St. Louis on October 4, 2019, following a brief battle with angio sarcoma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer. Tom was a beloved husband, father, uncle, cousin, friend, teacher, mentor, partner, and connector of people from all walks of life. He was a passionate writer, musician, artist, photographer, philosopher, and advertising professional. He was a true inspiration to people all over the world, and had a profound impact on anyone with whom he came into contact.

Tom was born in Charleston, SC, and spent an idyllic boyhood on the St. John's River in Jacksonville, Florida. He graduated from St. John's Country Day School in Jacksonville in 1976, and with honors from Duke University in 1980. While at Duke, he met the love of his life, Jeanne Knowles Townsend.

After college, he returned briefly to Jacksonville to begin his career in advertising. He moved to St. Louis in 1982 to be with Jeanne, who was in law school at Washington University. He was hired as a copywriter at Stolz Advertising Company. He and Jeanne were married in her hometown of Wilmington, Delaware in 1984. They began to put down roots in St. Louis, and focused on their respective careers in advertising and law. With boundless energy, drive, and creative ability, Tom rapidly rose through the ranks of the city's most prominent advertising agencies. He became a creative director at

Gardner Advertising, then a Senior Vice President and Group Creative Director at DMB&B, at the time one of the world's largest ad agencies.

Tom and Jeanne started their family in 1988, and moved with their three small children to their present home in Clayton in 1996. That same year, together with Tim Rodgers, Tom founded the advertising agency, Rodgers Townsend, creating a culture of creativity and character that was recognized not only as the most awarded creative agency in St. Louis, but annually as one of its Best Places to Work. During Tom's years at Rodgers Townsend, countless friendships were forged, careers were fostered, marriages were entered into, and children were born and raised. The R/T family is immense and beautiful. Today, even after the retirement of both Tom and Tim, R/T continues the legacy born and bonded over 23 years ago.

Tom's many achievements in advertising and business included the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year award, the "Spirit of St. Louis" award from the Mayor of St. Louis for his unparalleled pro bono efforts, Volunteer of the Year award from the St. Louis Effort for AIDS, a "Keeper of the Park" designation from Forest Park Forever, induction into the St. Louis Media and Advertising Hall of Fame, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the St. Louis Ad Club. In 2010, Tom and Jeanne lost their oldest child, Alex, in a car accident, while he was a graphic design and advertising student at Savannah College of Art and Design. Tom continued to lead Rodgers Townsend for several years, but was simultaneously called by Alex in several different directions. He wrote a book, *In This I Will Find Beauty*, chronicling the family's first year without Alex. He wrote a book of poetry relating to the loss, and he wrote and recorded numerous songs. He travelled to India. He took up oil painting. He continued to play piano alone and in various bands, something he had done seriously since high school. He and Jeanne started the Alex Townsend Memorial Foundation and the A-Town Get Down, an art and music festival in Savannah, Georgia, intended to inspire community and creativity and to celebrate the life of Alex Townsend ("A-Town") (www.a-towngetdown.org). In 2012, he founded

Pianos For People, a non-profit organization that provides free pianos and piano lessons to children and families with limited resources, giving these families equal access to the transformative power of music. In 2013, he took a sabbatical from R/T to teach advertising at SCAD for a semester in an effort to become part of the world and city that Alex had so loved. In sum, Tom powered his way through his enormous grief by bringing Alex's artistic and musical gifts to the masses. Finally, in 2014, he retired from R/T to devote himself full time to his philanthropic causes.

The Townsend's philanthropic causes grew and thrived, with Tom serving as Board President, and Jeanne as Vice President, for each. The A-Town Get Down has been recognized as one of Savannah's top festivals, and has provided thousands with the gift of art and music in its nearly ten year history. The Alex Townsend Memorial foundation has been used to fund initiatives at Oliverian School, the wonderful alternative boarding school Alex attended in New Hampshire, as well as an inspiring memorial courtyard and a scholarship fund at SCAD.

Pianos For People, which he dubbed "the happiest place on Earth," has sourced, serviced and delivered over 260 free pianos and served over 10,000 people through its South St. Louis and Ferguson, Missouri, piano schools. PFP was the recipient of the prestigious 2017 Arts and Education Arts Innovator of the Year award, the Monsanto "Grow St. Louis" award, and various local, national, and international awards for its marketing outreach. Tom and Jeanne were awarded Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from SCAD during its 2016 commencement ceremony for their work at SCAD and in Savannah. Tom also served for many years, did extensive pro bono work, and travelled the globe for Outreach International, a non-profit organization that provides sustainable solutions to help end extreme poverty around the world; served for many years on the Washington University Public Relations Advisory Board; did extensive pro bono work, and was a major donor and award recipient of The St. Louis Black Repertory Company; and

received awards from the mayor of Savannah for his work in that city. He was excited recently to receive an invitation to serve on the Board of Jazz St. Louis, and partnered with Grammy award-winning pianist Peter Martin in Mr. Martin's Open Studio, an online forum in which top jazz players teach their craft (openstudionetwork.com).

In September 2018, Tom was inexplicably shot in the face in an attempted carjacking near his home in Clayton. He spent months in BJC Hospital, having numerous life-saving and reconstructive surgeries. At the time of his passing, he was facing still more surgeries. In only the way he could, Tom used this experience to learn and grow, rather than to become angry and bitter. He became more determined than ever to make St. Louis better, and to fight the forces of evil here. In his typical fashion, he used his downtime, the time his surgeon instructed him to rest and remain close to home, to create. He spent hours upon hours in his nearby art studio, painting through his pain. Hooked up to his numerous IV infusions and even a feeding tube, he conceived and created The Healing Sessions, a project in which he collaborated with various local and national musicians, and gave a young filmmaker a rare opportunity, to demonstrate the healing power of music. (Thehealingsessions.org).

You led a magnificent life, Tom. You made the world an infinitely better place. You were blessed with immense talent, immense heart, and an immense capacity for giving and forgiving. Although you were taken from us far too early, you accomplished more in a given day than most people accomplish in a year, and more in one lifetime than most people could accomplish in ten.

You taught us everything we need to honor your tremendous life and legacy—seeing potential in everyone, using our God-given gifts to better the world, offering help and encouragement to anyone in need, genuinely believing in the inherent worth of every human being, taking every possible opportunity to learn from and show interest in absolutely anyone, living every day like it's our last, celebrating art and music because they are all that's left when words fail,

laughing at ourselves because humility is honorable, finding joy in the midst of sorrow and beauty in heartbreak, having a truly generous heart with no expectation for anything in return, being a faithful servant of God, never giving up hope, and believing fervently that love always wins.

Tom is survived by his wife and partner in life of 35 years, Jeanne Knowles Townsend; son Nathaniel (Nate) Townsend and daughter Laura Townsend Kerkhoven, each of whom he was so very proud; son-in-law Joseph Kerkhoven; siblings, Jim Townsend (Joan), Kit McRae (David), and Amanda Bristol (Mike); numerous nieces and nephews; and countless surrogate children, cousins, siblings-in-law, and friends. He is predeceased by his beloved son, Alexander Boone Townsend, and his loving parents, Dr. James Townsend and Catherine Brittain Townsend.

You touched and changed the very trajectory of more lives than you can possibly imagine. And through all of it, every bit of it, you placed your family above all else, and the good of others before your own good. We were nowhere near ready to lose you, so full of love and life you were, but we know you are at peace heading into your next adventure, and reuniting with your beautiful Alex.

A memorial celebration will be held in St. Louis next spring. Memorial contributions can be made to Pianos For People, www.pianosforpeople.org or the Alex Townsend Memorial Foundation (atownfoundation.org).

Tribute Wall



“ 2 files added to the album T



Wesley A. Morgan - February 21 at 03:31 PM



“ Kenneth McGhee lit a candle in memory of Thomas K Townsend



Kenneth McGhee - October 12, 2019 at 12:58 PM