

Dreams Do Come True

5 February 2017

I first met Tom Kelly 28 years ago while standing on a pier in Traverse City watching the tall ships sail in the harbor. I casually said out loud, "It would be so cool to have my students be able to sail on a vessel like one of those." Tom Kelly, whom I did not know, was standing next to me and began explaining about his dream of having students sail in the bay while doing science experiments. He, like myself, was a science teacher. He went on to explain that he taught at Traverse City Junior High, but was about to take a sabbatical to follow his dream. Over the years I watched this dream evolve as I sailed aboard the *Malabar* (once with the first female captain), the *Manitou* and *Inland Seas*. It wasn't just learning the science or learning to sail that kept me coming back, it was learning *from* the sailing.

My maiden voyage with my class was aboard the *Malabar*; we were shuttled from the Traverse Tall Ship Co. offices across the street to board the schooner. Roger Bottoms was the captain and Tom was the lead instructor. The trip was magical. Tom told us that all our scientific findings would be for the benefit of the Great Lakes and our data would be recorded and used by the DNR. Most of my students had never been on a sailing vessel before so Tom made this trip special for them, taking time to explain every detail about the schooner and lots of hands-on science. For \$20.00 a student's no field trip could have compared!

It wasn't too long and Tom left his teaching position at the junior high and he became the full time director of *Inland Seas*. The program went from a May through June program to a Fall, Spring, Summer program. It seemed that Tom, along with Kim Biocchi, actually were *Inland Seas*. Every time I called or came to Traverse City one of them was always there to help with anything that needed to be done. Grant writing, public speaking benefits, the teaching of instructors, and the expansion of the schooner programs.

Tom suggested that I take my class to see the schooner *Madeline* being built and so I did several years in a row. One time when we were there they were pouring cement into the hull. Then there was a lesson on displacement and water buoyancy taught by Tom to my class. This wasn't planned; he was just a natural teacher who had a passion and lived with a purpose to always involve students in learning.

When the schooner *Inland Seas* was dedicated in 1994 another dream came true. Tom had always said that he wanted a vessel that people could see and recognize so the schooner *Inland Seas* was perfect; it had red sails and a green hull. Now *Inland Seas* owned their own schooner and along with the *Manitou* thousands of students could have a science experience while sailing. My students would report to me that they had been to Suttons Bay in the summer and sure enough Mr. Kelly was out sailing the *Inland Seas*. He always seemed to be in his element.

Next, in 2001, there was the purchase of the Northern Lumber Co. in Suttons Bay and the Inland Seas Education Center was put in place. Now students could take classes “on land.” Tom continued to get kids excited about science and the Great Lakes; he always said he wanted to inspire kids to come away with some kind of inspiration...to have a dream of their own.

In 2013 while my students were at the Education Center I sat down with Tom and he told me he was going to retire. I just couldn't imagine Inland Seas without him! We reminisced about the many trips that we had been on. There were ones with TV newscasters from our local ABC affiliate, our local newspaper reporters, school board members from our district, grant foundations members, and many more who had made their first voyage all because of Tom Kelly. No matter the weather.... gale winds when we couldn't go sailing, sails when everyone came back sunburned, too cold, too hot....but through it all Tom would say, “This is what it is all about....to respect the Great Lakes, to serve.”

This spring I will be sailing for the 28th time, but it really is because of Tom Kelly. If only all of us could dream as he did, our world would certainly be a better place; ecologically and otherwise.

Respectfully submitted,

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