

THOMAS SIDNEY WRIGHT
April 12, 1951 - August 26, 2019



On Monday, August 26, 2019, we lost our husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend.

Tom Wright was a regional sales manager for LSI Industries in Cincinnati Ohio. He traveled across the United States serving customers and making friends.

Tom was born on April 12, 1951, and grew up in south Texas, but also lived overseas in London and in North Africa. He hitch-hiked through Europe, Mexico, Central and South America. He worked for a French wine grower in France and experienced the staged coup of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 1969.

His college years were spent at Texas A&I, Kingsville. Between working and going to school, he traveled with a group of cavers exploring and mapping cave sites throughout Mexico and Central America. He was among the first of the American cavers to descend the 1,200-foot deep Sotano De Las Golondrinas, better known as the Cave of Swallows. It is one of the world's largest free-fall cave shafts and one of Mexico's 13 natural wonders. [Correction by Elliott: He was one of the team to descend El Sótano de El Barro, Querétaro, in 1972, the deepest pit in Mexico at 410 m, 1345 ft.]

He eventually earned college degrees in history and geography and a lifetime State of Texas Teaching Certificate from Texas A & I University.

In his working years, Tom was a high school teacher, museum director, a form carpenter for Brown and Root, a display builder for the Off-Shore Oil and Technology convention in Houston, and a salesman for graphics, signage and lighting. He was also the lead parade float driver for the annual Foley's department store Thanksgiving Day parade in downtown Houston every year that he lived in Houston.

In Houston, Tom developed close friendships while working part time as a river guide for Whitewater Experience. He spent many happy days on the rivers of Texas taking customers boating and camping on the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park, canoeing the Guadalupe and the San Marcos rivers. Tom and his river guide friends took other private trips on many rivers around the United States, including the Rogue River in Oregon and the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Tom had many interests, and specifically enjoyed woodworking.

He built cabinetry and furniture, but his favorite building projects involved wooden boats. He built and restored wooden canoes, kayaks, a sail boat, a row boat and built a pirogue with his grandson. Those of us close to him learned to love sanding and varnishing. He restored a little wooden motorboat called a Yellow Jacket built in the 1950's and took his grandchildren for rides around the lakes and rivers of Texas.

While living in Florida, Tom enjoyed sailing the 16' day-sailor he built, and camping on the beach and barrier islands off the west coast of Florida in the Gulf of Mexico. He entered and won awards for his boats at the Caladesi Island Wooden Boat Show the years he lived in Florida.

Tom was a Master Mason, taking his degrees at the Reagan Lodge in Houston. While in Florida, he became a Shriner and was a member of Egypt Temple which supported the Shriner Hospital for Children in Tampa. He was a member of the Oriental Band that participated in parades and other activities throughout the southeast.

As a descendant of an old South Texas ranching family, Tom also had interests in all things Texan – ranching, hunting, shooting, and Texas history. He delighted his friends and family with interesting stories and tidbits of Texas history. Most years while living in Texas he made a point to be at the Menger Hotel bar in San Antonio, across from the Alamo to toast Texas independence on March 2 each year.

In his teenage years, Tom worked for his uncle on an oil company hunting lease, helping to guide and entertain guests. Tom had the time and all the .22 ammunition he needed to become an excellent marksman. Tom participated in competition shooting for several years. He was in one of the first groups to be certified as a State of Texas CHL trainer.

He enjoyed teaching newcomers to the shooting sports how to be safe while having fun. Over the last 20 years, Tom put together a small cattle ranch in Mitchell County, Texas. He raised cattle, farmed, ranched and brought friends and family out to enjoy shooting, hunting and working cattle. He created a lifetime of memories for his beloved grandchildren at the ranch. They were his delight. Everywhere Tom lived, and with the people he met through work, and while involved in his various interests, he made lifelong friends.

The last two weeks of his life have been a wonderful time of visiting with old friends from river guide days, to customers and former customers, to his LSI family and others Tom met and connected with along the way. Especially important to him was getting to spend time with his family – his wife Penny, his brother Jeff, his step daughter Kristina, son-in-law Les, and each of his ten grandchildren: Kayla, Jacob, Trevor and Hannah, Samantha, Randy, Dustin, Audrey, Henry, Elizabeth and Clara, letting each of them know how special they were to him.

We will miss Tom's generosity and his love for helping and teaching others. Tom was always there to lend a helping hand and was always there when friends or family needed him. We will miss his boundless knowledge of history and the stories around many campfires, the silly songs and jokes with grandchildren. He will live on through each of our many happy memories of sharing life with him.

Dignity Memorial, 8/2/2022 <http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Thomas-Wright&lc=5075&pid=193761214&mid=8836771>

Tom Wright's Caving Career

William R. Elliott, 4 August 2022

Tom was in the caving scene from 1971-1976, starting at Texas A&I Grotto, then he moved to Austin. He went caving in Texas, Mexico, and Venezuela. He visited about 26 caves in all, some several times. Carol Russell recalls, “Years ago there was a caver named Tom who lived in the attic above Neal Morris' and Barbara Vinson's place... I looked him up on the internet and found it was indeed the same guy. I remembered he drew such wonderful pictures of elephants, some in seatslings and caving gear! Unfortunately he died [in 2019] the same year as Bill [Russell]. He seems to have lived a very full and happy life, and the obit talked about his young experiences caving in Mexico.”

Here is Terry Raines' photo of the El Sótano team, 1972. Tom is standing in the second row, second from the left, between Logan McNatt (first) and David Honea (third).



Tom Wright's Caves

Year	Country	State	Caves etc.	Num Caves
1971	Mexico	SLP	Montecillos System, Cueva de las Ratas, Cueva del León	3
1971	Mexico	NL	Pozo de Gavilan	1
1971	USA	Texas	Devil's Sinkhole, Fountain Cave, Wilson 's Cave	3
1971	USA	Texas	Surveyed six caves continuing the A&I survey of Real County.	6
1971	Mexico	NL	Bustamante Canyon, Poza de Gavilan	
1972	Mexico	QUE	Sótano de El Barro [El Sótano]	1
1972	Mexico	QUE	Sótano de El Barro [retrospective]	
1972	USA	Texas	Fern Cave, Punkin Cave, Deep Cave, Blow Hole Cave	4
1972	USA	Texas	Devil's Sinkhole [accidental death]	
1972	USA	Texas	Fern Cave, Punkin Cave, Deep Cave, Blow Hole Cave [same trip]	
1973	Mexico	NL	Cueva de Juan Amaro	1
1973	Venezuela		Cueva de Guacharo	1
1973	Mexico	NL	Gruta del Palmito, Cueva del Precipicio, Gruta de Carrizal	3
1973	USA	Texas	TSA BOG	
1973	USA	Texas	TSA BOG	
1973	Mexico	NL	Gruta del Palmito, Gruta de Carrizal	
1973	USA	Texas	A&I Body Roast, Padre Island	
1974	USA	Texas	TSA BOG	
1974	USA	Texas	TSA BOG	
1976	Mexico	NL	3 caves and a spring in the box canyon next to Bustamante Canyon	3
			TOTAL CAVES VISITED	26