

Thomas Arvel Leek

July 22, 1932 ~ June 2, 2021

Thomas Arvel Leek, 88, passed away June 2, 2021, at his home in Murray, Utah, from causes incident to cancer. Tom was born July 22, 1932, in North Salt Lake to Arvel George and Autie Delois Bradshaw Leek. His educated and accomplished ways belie a humble beginning in a home with no indoor plumbing or other amenities. Yet it was in this environment that, as the oldest of six children, he quickly learned the value of hard work and discipline that were hallmark attributes throughout his accomplished and productive life.

Aside from household chores, early jobs began at age 10 earning 25 cents an hour picking up twigs in a neighbor's orchard. Impressed with Tom's work ethic, Mr. Kramer offered him a job planting seeds, transplanting seedlings and caring for plants as they matured. This early involvement with the soil spawned a lifetime love of nature within Tom. He later worked with his brother, Duane, weeding and topping onions for nearby farmers and eventually sold the Deseret News on street corners in downtown Salt Lake City. He remembered the day World War II ended, selling out of his papers multiple times while people celebrated in the streets.

Tom's father, Arvel, had ended his formal education in the eighth grade so he could help provide for his widowed mother. He was ambitious, intelligent, resourceful, and innovative with an inquiring mind – attributes that were passed along and readily evident in Tom. Autie was a talented homemaker who was deft at managing a household on a frugal budget during the Great Depression and beyond. She was known for her good cooking, especially southern-fried chicken, cornbread, and brownies. Both parents had innate wit and wisdom that contributed to a fun-loving and close-knit family environment.

From an early age, Tom demonstrated a gift for drawing and other forms of artistic expression that flourished throughout his life and led to an accomplished career as an award-winning watercolorist and professor of art at Southern Utah University, Weber State, and the University of Utah. His foray into the art world happened in elementary school when he was selected to create an original Valentine's Day box for collecting valentines from members of his class. He was the recognized leader for his design and craftsmanship, and his sixth-grade teacher, Ruth Cox, told Tom: "Tommy, when you go to college, be sure that you major in art." He had no clue what a "major" was and little conception of college. But his acumen and love for learning was kindled in those early years and burned brightly until his death. He would read a book or so a week on a variety of subjects in recent years and was especially fond of historic and cultural works. As a youngster, Tom's intellect enabled him to skip the third and seventh grades due to his test scores. He graduated from Jordan High School in 1949 at age 16. It was as a Beetdigger that Tom met the vivacious Janet Milne. Their relationship blossomed after high school as Tom joined the U.S. Navy and subsequently served four years on the destroyer escort USS Alvin C. Cockrell from January 1952-56. During this stretch, Tom and Jan were married June 8, 1953, in the Salt Lake Temple. They lived in San

Diego, California, where Tom was stationed prior to his discharge and the couple's relocation to Chicago. There in 1960 he graduated from the University of Chicago in liberal arts and also received a BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago. Tom received an MFA from Brigham Young University in 1961 and did additional post-graduate work at UCLA and the University of Iowa. His artistic talents continued to develop and deepen after he accepted a faculty position at College of Southern Utah (now Southern Utah University).

Tom's immense knowledge of art history and ability to create across multiple media made him a credible and respected teacher. Watercolors became his primary medium, and as a member of the Utah Watercolor Society his depictions of Southern Utah landscapes and other works received much acclaim and numerous awards. He painted a wide variety of subjects, both realistic and abstract. Tom founded and curated the Braithwaite Fine Arts Gallery at SUU and was instrumental in the development of an outstanding visual-arts program at the institution.

After retiring there, he taught at Weber State and the University of Utah. In addition to a love of art and culture, Tom had a passion for tennis, travel, classy cars, fine cuisine, and especially his family.

He is survived by children Tom (Becky) Leek of Taylorsville, Utah; Shauna (Michael) Cannon of Rexburg, Idaho; Brian Leek of Riverton, Utah; seven grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren; sister Glena Stelter; sisters-in-law Lucy Leek and Patricia Condie; brother-in-law Richard Milne; and his special friend of nine years Ruth Gonnet. Tom was preceded in death by his wife, Janet; grandson Jason Leek; parents Arvel and Autie; and siblings Duane, Dale, Randy, and Laura Leek Stephens. Family and friends will miss Tom's wit, wisdom and gentlemanly ways and are grateful for the exceptional care he received from Intermountain Homecare & Hospice and other medical caregivers.

At Tom's request, a private celebration of life will be held for family and a few close friends. Interment will be in the Larkin Sunset Gardens Cemetery. Please share your favorite memory of Tom with his family at larkincares.com.