



IN MEMORIAM

Thomas Dow Wickens
Professor of Psychology, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1942-2012

Thomas Dow Wickens died December 16, 2012, in San Francisco, California, of ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease. He was born June 30, 1942, in Madison, WI, the son of Delos D. and Carol Dow Hedberg Wickens. It seems fitting that he first saw light in a university town (where his father taught briefly), since his life was largely to be spent in the embrace of the academy. After a brief period at the University of Wisconsin, Wick (as Tom's father was widely known) contributed to the war effort as an experimental psychologist, and then settled in Columbus, Ohio, where he was to spend the remainder of his career on the faculty of Ohio State University. Tom and his younger brother, Christopher, grew up nurtured by two psychologist parents and the greater university community.

Tom's mother, Carol, trained in and practiced clinical psychology, but she later became a de facto experimental psychologist, as well. She often worked with Wick in the laboratory and was a frequent co-author of his papers. With such an early immersion in academic psychology, it is hardly a surprise that both Tom and Chris became eminent professors of psychology, though neither intended to do so early in their careers. When Tom completed high school at the University School of Ohio State, he headed for Harvard, intending to specialize in mathematics. His undergraduate degree was indeed in mathematics (A.B., cum laude, 1964), but he switched to psychology for his graduate training. He enrolled in Brown University, a leading center of experimental psychology. By the time he earned his Ph.D. in 1968, Tom was a fully-fledged mathematical psychologist.

Mathematical psychologists work to understand and model complex behavior using the tools of mathematics. A successful model allows not only the explanation of data collected, but also quantitative prediction of the results to be expected from future experiments. Mathematical psychologists also often work to design new approaches and algorithms to be used in analyzing complex data sets. These tools can then be applied to many areas within the larger field of psychology. Tom's research touched on many topics, but he had particular interests in learning and memory and in the application of the theory of signal detectability to sensory processes. A brief perusal of his curriculum vitae, however, shows that his colleagues who worked in other fields often brought their problems to Tom, asking him to collaborate on one project or another. His publications thus span an exceptionally broad range of topics.

Following the completion of graduate training, Tom spent a year as a post-doctoral fellow with Richard Atkinson, then on the faculty of Stanford University. The next year (1969), Tom was appointed Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. He spent the next 33 years at UCLA, progressing up the academic ladder, teaching generations of students at every level, making many individual and collaborative contributions to the literature in his field, and generally enjoying life. His colleagues

appreciated not only his professional skills, but also his administrative ones. For many years, he served as Vice Chair of the UCLA Psychology Department.

During his early years at UCLA, Tom reconnected with Lucia (Cia) Bogatay, a friend and classmate from elementary and high school. Cia's father and Tom's were fellow professors at Ohio State, and their families were friends. Tom and Lucia married, still separated by half the length of California. While Tom was building his career at UCLA, Cia was establishing her architectural practice in San Francisco. For the next several years, the two of them commuted between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Both Tom and Cia developed a deep interest in and love of opera during this period. They became strong supporters of the Long Beach Opera Company and good friends of its director and his wife, Michael and Ellen Milenski, whom they later joined on several summer opera tours in Europe. A few years later, Tom and Cia began leading architectural tours focused on the villas of Palladio. While Cia provided the architectural expertise, Tom talked about the mathematical underpinnings of the work and historical ideas about the special character of certain mathematical relationships.

The difficulties produced by Tom and Lucia's geographical separation were solved when the Psychology Department at the University of California, Berkeley, wanting to hire a faculty member in Tom's area, offered him the position. I was Chair of the Berkeley Psychology Department at this time. When we began discussing what he would need to be offered to come to Berkeley, Tom's comment was, "This will be the easiest negotiation you've ever carried out." It was indeed, and he became a member of the UCB faculty in 2002. Within a couple of years of arriving on campus, he became a member of the Senate Committee on Computing, serving for 5 full years (2004-2009). He spent a year on the Task Force on UC Merced in 2008-09.

Tom's reputation as the colleague one could readily approach for help with difficult questions of experimental design or data analysis, irrespective of the subject of the research, was greatly appreciated by the Berkeley Psychology community. His willingness to entertain graduate student questions also became widely known. One former graduate student recalls asking Tom whether the analytic method she had used on a particular data set was appropriate. He agreed with her choice but also asked whether he could have a copy of the original data. She learned a few days later that Tom had wondered whether another complex method might be more revealing. However, rather than ask her to learn and carry out another (possibly unneeded) analysis, he did the work himself, afterwards assuring the student that her initial approach was sufficient. Tom's devotion to his teaching was well known and widely appreciated, both by students and by his colleagues.

Three years before his death on Dec. 16, 2012, Tom was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease), which gradually destroys motor function. Though his family and legion of friends were devastated, Tom used this dreadful fate as a way to teach us all how one should approach adversity. Over the period of several months, he lost the ability to walk, to feed himself, to swallow and even to talk, yet his determination to live fully did not falter. When he could no longer go out, he ordered recordings of obscure operas that he and Cia could watch and listen to. He entertained the parade of friends who came to visit when he could no longer go to them. When it became clear that he would have to stop teaching and retire, he scheduled one last advanced graduate seminar on mathematical models in psychology. He spent untold hours preparing handouts and slide presentations to supplement his failing speech. He continued to give until the very end.

Tom Wickens lived life with joy and great enthusiasm. He loved good music, good food, good wine, and good friends. He climbed mountains, hiked trails, swam, and traveled, all with gusto. He enjoyed being a professor, everything from grappling with a new research problem or preparing a lecture to sharing lunch at the Faculty Club with friends. He made great contributions to his field and his University, and he enriched the lives of all of his friends. It was a privilege and a joy to know him.

He is survived by his wife of 23 years, Lucia Bogatay and his brother, Christopher.

Karen K. De Valois