



## Thomas Mark Zillig

November 17, 1965 - December 22, 2025

Thomas Mark Zillig was born in Ainsworth, Nebraska, to Eugene Leslie and Neva Arlene (Harlan) Zillig. He graduated from Neligh-Oakdale High School in 1984 and earned his degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Nebraska in 1989. His career took him from Lawrence, Kansas, where he worked as an engineer for Kohlman Systems Research Inc., to Terre Haute, Indiana, where he helped build a factory for Sony Digital Audio Disc Corporation, and eventually to the Kansas City area, where he spent years working in computer networking and security.

Tom was a man of many passions and considerable talents. In middle school, he discovered drumming and never looked back, playing in bands throughout college and beyond. When he bought his home in Overland Park, Kansas, in 1996, he installed a high-end drum kit in the basement—a choice that surprised no one who knew him.

That same year, he photographed his niece Alexandria's first portrait session. The resulting image—a cherished little girl posed on a purple blanket—remained on display in Gene and Neva's china hutch, a piece of furniture Tom had designed and built himself.

Tom was extraordinarily generous with his time and skill. He helped his brother Brian and sister-in-law Lisa refinish the wood floors in their first home

and crafted them a queen-size bed joined with dovetails, a testament to his craftsmanship and care. He loved extreme sports, fishing, cooking, and above all, drumming.

As a teenager, he performed Bob Seger's "Turn the Page" at a high school talent show, lip-syncing under dramatic lighting. Years later, the song's lyric about a lonesome stretch of highway east of Omaha would echo in memory when he and Brian broke down in that very spot, sitting for hours in a flat-faced yellow minivan, eating Easter candy and waiting for Mom and Dad to tow them home.

Tom had a special way with his nieces and nephews—always playful, always engaged. He adored the children of his brother Brian, Alexandria and Liam, and spoke often—sometimes fiercely, sometimes tenderly—about his optimism for their future and for the future of the family they represent.

Alexandria remembers how, when she and Liam were little, Tom would encourage them to punch him in the stomach, promising it would not hurt because he would exhale at just the right moment. As a child, she was amazed that he seemed invincible. Looking back, she understands it as another way he showed his love—being silly and inviting their laughter.

With Liam, that hope often took the shape of water and patience. Along the south edge of Neligh, where the Elkhorn River moves past the hanging bridge—his childhood honey-hole—Tom once watched the ignition of Liam's own love of fishing with the landing of a tiny channel catfish at Penn Lake, sometime around 2006. It was an ordinary catch, but to Tom it marked something larger: the quiet passing of a passion from one generation to the next.

Tom was a devoted son during his parents' years of declining health and did

everything he could to care for his older brother Bob during the difficult period leading up to Bob's death in 2021—another profound loss Tom carried with him. He was married for more than twenty years to Tamara Haetten and was stepfather to Sami and Katie. A big man who loved big dogs, he never quite recovered from losing his beloved SkyDog two decades earlier. Loss was like that for Tom.

Among his favorite things were the novel *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean and the movie *The Blues Brothers*. He was fiercely protective of the people he loved, sometimes to a fault.

Tom's final years were difficult. His struggles seemed to deepen and darken the way varnish sometimes does on old wood. But underneath, that creative, hardworking, ingenious, loving, and generous son, brother, uncle, and friend remained visible to those who knew where to look. His absence will be keenly felt by all who loved him.

Some stories do not resolve cleanly; they stop mid-sentence, like a song cut short on a lonesome stretch of highway—but the melody remains in those who knew it by heart.

In accordance with Tom's wishes, his family will honor him in a way connected to the waters and landscapes he loved.

Tom is survived by his brothers Ron (Valerie) Bussinger, Dale (Suzie) Bussinger, and Brian (Lisa) Pytlik Zillig, and many nieces and nephews.

# Tribute Wall

PS

“ *To all the Zillig clan  
I'm lifting you all up in my prayers and energy. I'm deeply sorry for  
the loss of Mark. I pray he is free of the burdens of this world. May  
he rest in peace.*

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**Peter Scherr** - February 23 at 01:27 PM

PS

*I came back to edit! Not Mark, but Tom, obviously.  
I conflated his first and middle names.  
Much love, regardless.*

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**Peter Scherr** - March 03 at 11:22 AM