

Thaddeus W. Usowicz

October 2nd, 1943 - October 7th, 2015

Thaddeus Usowicz passed away unexpectedly, with his family at his side, on the night of October 7, 2015



from a severe infection. His biggest success was his family, he believed, so it is fitting that the last people with him were his son and wife. They are both forever grateful for the opportunities that Thaddeus gave them; their accomplishments are also his accomplishments. He will be missed and loved always.

Thaddeus was very proud of his Polish heritage. His father's family lived in Poland for hundreds of years until the events of World War Two displaced them. After the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, Thad's father was sent as a prisoner of war to a Soviet Gulag to work as a slave laborer in a lumber camp. His mother and her family were deported to Siberia as political prisoners simply for being the family of a Polish officer; two million other Poles shared this fate. Thad's family barely survived the hardships of starvation and extreme cold. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 Thaddeus's family, along with other prisoners, received a general amnesty from Stalin, in the hopes that former prisoners would help the Soviets defeat Hitler. At that point, Thad's family left Russia via Asia and

thence to the Middle East where many Poles joined the free Polish forces fighting with the British 8th Army against Hitler and Nazism. Thaddeus was born in a Polish refugee camp in Tel Aviv in 1943 after his parents were reunited. After the war ended, Thad's family immigrated to the United States in 1947 because it was too dangerous for most Poles to return to then-Communist controlled Poland, which had been ceded to the Soviets by "The Big Three" -- Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. With time, Thad's mother and father prospered and bought a house and settled in Bayonne, NJ. Thaddeus was very proud of the contributions that his family had made to freeing Europe from Nazi tyranny; not surprisingly he shared his family's resentment of the Soviets for not being able to return to a safe and free Poland after having fought with the Allies against Hitler in World War Two (Poland was the first to fight).

During childhood, Thaddeus excelled in Catholic schools, attended Marist High School where he ran track and field and received his nickname, "Spike", for the spiked cleats that runners wore. He studied at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (class of 1965) for 6 years where he received a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and was awarded two master's degrees in Management Science, Operations Research and Transportation Planning. At MIT and in Boston he made many life-long friends.

After finishing college, Thaddeus was drafted and served as a captain in the US Army's Ordnance Corps from 1969-1971. In Vietnam, he ran the largest supply operation for the US Army in the country and received a non-combatant's bronze star for his work in making his supply operation more efficient.

After leaving active service, he continued to be in the US Army Reserves for many years and retired with the rank of Major.

Thaddeus travelled behind the Iron Curtain to Poland in 1968 looking for relatives of his family that may have survived World War Two. While travelling, he stayed at a home of a childhood friend of his father's where he met Anna, his future wife. This would start a nearly five-decade-long relationship.

In 1974, after a 6-year long courtship, Thaddeus and Anna married. In 1987, they had their first son, Michał, whom Thaddeus said was his biggest accomplishment.

After settling in San Francisco, Thad worked with the transportation department for 5 years, providing cost analyses for BART as a Capital Improvements Program engineer. At that time, he worked on developing a BART connection to the San Francisco International Airport.

In the late 1980s Thad enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) and received another master's degree and a doctorate in Medical Information Science in 1991.

Thaddeus started working at San Francisco State University in 1983 and continued working there until he fell ill. At SFSU, he achieved the rank of tenured Associate Professor in the College of Business. There he is credited with many professional publications, participated in many international conferences, and was a guest lecturer in other countries. Two Fulbright scholarships were awarded to him for studies in Poland and Hungary. He received a Senior Fulbright Lecturer award and taught at the University of Pannonia in Veszprem, Hungary and the University of Economics, Poznań, Poland. He remembered his Fulbright time fondly as some of the happiest times in his teaching career. He was also active in the Northern California Chapter of the national Fulbright Association.

Thad was a member of Polish American Congress in Northern California and the Polish American Engineers Club, and the Polish Arts and Culture Foundation.

He is survived by his wife Anna and son Michał.

The funeral Mass to commemorate Thad's life will be held at the Nativity of Our Lord Church, 240 Fell Street (at Gough), San Francisco on October 24th, 2015 at 11am. A reception will be held at Cafe Delle Stelle, 395 Hayes Street (at Gough) from 12:30pm until 3:30pm.

Eulogy written by Elena Bosque, a close friend of Anna, Thad, and Mike for around 30 years. Unfortunately, she cannot be at the memorial service on October 24 in San Francisco to read it so we are posting it here for others to read.

Thoughts About Thaddeus Usowicz

When we leave home and start working in the world, we meet people, make friends, and our worlds broaden and become enriched. My world became enriched when I met Hania (Anna) and Thaddeus Usowicz.

I met Anna, in the mid 1980s, when she entered her Neonatology Fellowship in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Children's Hospital of San Francisco. I developed a friendship with this bright, hard-working, humble, humorous, shy doctor, and was soon invited into her home, where I met Thaddeus. We learn about people when we meet at work, or outside of work in a social place, but to be invited into the intimacy of one's home, to be introduced to one's family, is when one really learns about people. This act is a gift of trust.

When I entered the home of Anna and Thaddeus, I was, as many of you have been, enveloped with warmth. Just to meet Thaddeus, there was initial physical warmth when he gave a big bear hug. His hearty laughter, twinkling eyes, and immediate hospitality offered further comfort. Even the golden walls, art and artifacts, many books, computers, and surround-sound of all kinds of music (but mostly classical), in his home, made one feel enveloped by happiness.

I was privileged to be present at one of the most important moments in the lives of Anna and Thaddeus. I was present at the birth, of Michał. They were delighted! Thaddeus was such a proud, calm, involved, and accepting father. I observed that he was the soccer coach, gentle mentor, hands-off supporter of every activity. He was proud of everything that Michał has done, and, is doing right now, but I never saw him impose his own ideas. He nurtured.

I have many happy memories of time spent with Thaddeus, but one of my favorite times was when Michał was a pre-teen and my two sons were very young. My husband and I and our kids were invited for dinner, despite the risk and intrusion of small children, and our young boys were invited to play with Michał's Lego city that he had constructed all over the living room, to poor Michał's dismay. Thaddeus brought out his antique Polish swords and let our boys play with them, which they never forgot!

The same evening, Thaddeus proudly invited us to take part in Michał's first (of many, I expect) research studies, during which our blood pressure was taken before and after petting Michał's dog, a rescued German Shepherd mix. The dog was very nice, very loved, and very accepted into their beautiful home. The juxtaposition of the elegant home and the bounding dog could only be explained by love.

Over the years, I learned of Thaddeus' family's history, trials, and triumphs, but there was much that I did not know of him until I read his obituary. I knew that he had worked in transportation, but I did not know that he had contributed to the development of BART. I knew that he was in Vietnam, but I did not know of his medal. I knew that he lectured in Europe, but I did not know he was a Fulbright Scholar. His intellect was obvious, as was his humility. I also know that he has volunteered and supported many causes and community projects, but I probably only know about some of his efforts.

But what impressed me most was his optimism, especially during the last 15 years. Despite his trials, especially his health challenges, I was never aware of any change in his optimism about the possibilities in the world, for his family, or about his own happiness. I never, ever, once, heard him complain.

About a year and a half ago, my son, Owen, and I visited Anna and Thaddeus, but we did not realize that Thaddeus had just returned from the hospital after a cardiac procedure. He was worried about fixing a bad battery in the smoke detector, and begged us to stay for dinner. He never referred to his own concerns. He proceeded with normal life. He was actively engaged in conversation with my son about MIT, and my son was listening to his generous advice about engineering academics.

This past July, I spent a lovely day with Anna and Thaddeus at the De Young Museum, during which time Thaddeus asked us if we had noticed any of the exhibit since Anna and I were talking so much! He drove, walked slightly behind us through the park as we talked, happy to see his Hania happy. In late September, when I visited Thaddeus in the hospital, I apologized for not letting him talk enough.

In my opinion, based upon what I have observed from my special and privileged invitation into the lives of this wonderful, generous family, what is stated in the obituary is correct. Thaddeus was most proud of his family, Anna's family, and, especially, Anna and Michał. In the past few years, he did not complain, but one could tell that he was fatigued by the look in his eyes. But his eyes would light up, and twinkle, once again, whenever he mentioned Michał. I noticed this in July.

I have heard the quote that the best gift that the father can give to the child is to love the mother. I must say that, when, I think of Thaddeus, this thought is most prominent. One evening in their home, Thaddeus showed me a photo of Anna when he met her, when she was very young. She was, as now, very beautiful. Truly, Anna has not changed much, but whenever I watched Thaddeus look at Anna, I could see that all he saw was the 16 year-old Hania, who he met on his trip to Poland. He saw her unchanged, perfect, beloved.

Thaddeus will live on in his wife, his son, his friends, and his many students. This remarkable man will not be forgotten. His life was good.