

# Tom Wolfe & My Way

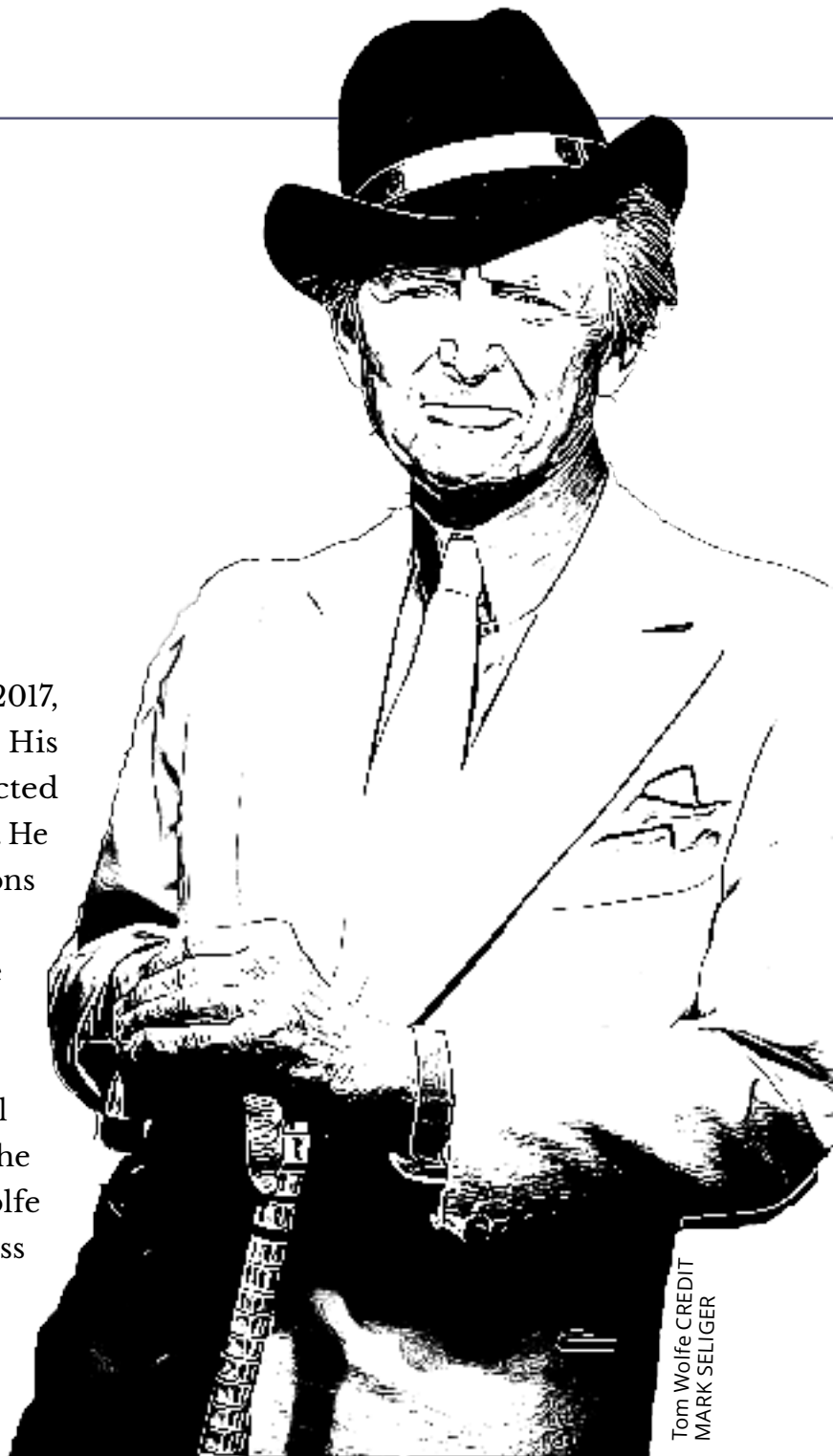
Terry Beard

Author Tom Wolfe passed away, in May 2017, at age 88. We can learn much from him. His dissertation at Yale University was rejected because of his attention-getting writing style. He didn't conform to the mores and expectations of the Yale elite.

Wolfe had his own writing style. He began his journalism career in Springfield, Massachusetts, working for the Union News. In 1962, he went to work for the International Herald Tribune, in New York City. There he found his voice as a social chronicler. Wolfe specialized in lacerating the pretentiousness of others. He called it like it was.

I am intrigued by Wolfe's writing style. I feel empowered too. Once we find our voices, we have the confidence to communicate, to share what we see in our own unique style, and what we glean living our daily lives. Wolfe found his voice at The International Herald Tribune. And like many of you, I have found my voice at Toastmasters.

Borrowing a page out of Wolfe's writing style, I am pleased to chronicle a story which stopped me in my tracks. A straight forward story about the social fabric which is prevalent in our all-too-competitive society. People put people down rather than giving them "put ups." All too



Tom Wolfe CREDIT  
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often, there is a lack of kudos and celebration expressed—making sure that no one gets ahead of us. To keep people feeling not good enough so they do not surpass us.

Several weeks ago, a guest at the Portland Rotary Toastmaster Club, where I am a member, introduced himself. Our guest "Robert" mentioned that he had discovered our club on the internet, and that this was his first Toastmaster meeting.

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Along with my fellow Toastmasters, I thought, “wow, that’s cool.” We have been discovered online! We gave Robert a huge applause for joining us at the meeting, and for taking the first step to find his voice.

The time came for Table Topics, which is when we Toastmasters and guests go around the room, one person at a time, standing up and responding to a topic proposed by the Table Topics Master. When it was Robert’s turn to participate, he passed. No one skipped a beat or drew attention to his decision to take a “pass.”

When the meeting was over, I wondered “will our guest return?” I could relate to Robert, I had empathy for him. The first time I attended Toastmasters, 18 years ago, I too passed on participating in Table Topics. I went back the second week only because my Toastmaster sponsor insisted. Because someone cared enough to take me by the hand to the Toastmaster safe harbor the following week, I returned. Many don’t!

After the meeting, I rode down the elevator with Robert. Just moments before our elevator ride arrived at the reception level, my fellow Toastmasters enthusiastically thanked him for attending and welcomed him to return. I am proud of my Toastmaster colleagues. Everyone authentically expresses their support and encouragement toward their fellow Toastmasters and our guests.

Before Robert walked down the street, off to work, alone in his own thoughts about the meeting, I asked him if he had a moment. Immediately, Robert said, “Yes!” As we walked, I gave him my elevator pitch on the value of Toastmasters. After we arrived at my car, I

handed him a copy of my book *Squelched*.

*Squelched* shares with its readers my path, my joyride, and yes, scary as it was at times bathed in the sweat of my heebee jeebees to overcome glossophobia (the fear of public speaking).

I wanted to make certain that Robert knew that we were a safe harbor Toastmaster Club, and that we would enjoy supporting and encouraging him on his new adventure.

The following week, Robert returned to Toastmasters. A few weeks after he began attending regularly (and participating in Table Topics), I asked him out for lunch.

At lunch, Robert volunteered, “I read your book and it was a very good read.” After reading *Squelched* he told me about his own glossophobia. Robert realized that he will find his voice too as a member of our safe harbor Toastmaster Club. He shared with me that Toastmasters had opened up a completely new world for him. I assured him during our conversation that I would be available to assist him on his journey, and that my fellow Toastmasters would be there, too.

Robert shared with me in depth much of what he had thought about and learned since he joined Toastmasters. One salient point he mentioned stopped me in my tracks. As our conversation rolled on, Robert said he had shared his wonderful experience “so far” in Toastmasters with some folks. A few asked, “why would you want to join Toastmasters?”

Tom Wolfe, thank you for standing up and saying what you believed. Through your example I am empowered to speak up to what I believe—in my own voice! I told Robert that those people dissing his new adventure were presumptuous and pretentious. Robert readily agreed. We have

far too much squelching in our society.

Robert's eyes have been opened wider as he finds his voice in the new world of Toastmasters. He is learning more about the people around him and wondering if they are really "with" him. Will they celebrate him in his new adventure? We Toastmasters will.

One doesn't need to write a book to convince others to go and or return to Toastmasters. By taking time to consciously reach out and take somebody by the hand, we will make a huge difference in their life. We need to make the time to prepare for serendipitous moments. As Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

Today, I am eternally grateful that Dr. Richard took me by the hand and led me to the door of Toastmasters. By following Dr. Richard's great example, I am reminded daily that all of us had a Toastmaster sponsor. We owe our sponsors to pay it forward by sharing with others that with which we were gifted.

Each of us has a responsibility to reach out and help people find their voices through the ongoing process of developing public speaking skills. When we share the world of Toastmasters with others, we are also empowering them to develop higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Which in turn cures the societal cancer of glossophobia.

We find our voices, and in the process, develop connections to others in an awesome community and then we help others to find their voices. What goes around comes around.

As I have learned from Dr. Richard, by his

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example, I continue to make friends through Toastmasters. Robert, thank you for taking the first step on your Toastmasters' journey. I look forward to cultivating another great friendship.

It is all about the people!

*Terry Beard initially joined Arlington Club Toastmasters in 2001. He co-founded Portland Rotary Toastmasters in 2015.*

*Terry is the author of Squelched - Succeeding in Business and Life by Finding Your Voice, published in 2017 and available on Amazon.com. Visit his book website at [squelchedbook.com](http://squelchedbook.com). You can reach him at [terry@squelchedbook.com](mailto:terry@squelchedbook.com).*

