



AAC Publications

TM Herbert, 1936–2024

On March 23, 2024, my hero passed away. TM Herbert was the quintessential Yosemite climber.

Born in Utah, TM grew up in Southern California, and found climbing in 1957, when he was in his early 20s, and it became his lifelong passion. He started at 5.0 at Tahquitz and worked his way up to the hardest grade at the time of 5.9.

TM moved to Berkeley, California, and spent much of the 1960s in Yosemite Valley. He had the great fortune to be one of the Golden Age climbers; it was an era when the walls had many unclimbed lines waiting for a team brave enough to attempt them prior to the advent of rescues. The first ascents of El Capitan's Muir Wall, with Yvon Chouinard in 1965, as well as the West Face of El Capitan in 1967, with Royal Robbins, were two of his finest achievements.

By 1969, he had graduated college and started a family with his wife, Jan. I was the eldest of their two boys. The family moved to the foothills of the Sierra, and TM worked as an elementary school teacher. Most weekends of the spring and fall were spent in Yosemite Valley, and during the summers we lived in either Tuolumne Meadows, where he guided for Yosemite Mountaineering School, or the Tetons in Wyoming. Christmas vacation was in Joshua Tree.

During the 1970s and '80s, TM climbed with the Stonemasters in the Valley, the last of his small tribe from the '50s and '60s to continue climbing. He kept climbing into the 2000s and continued the tradition of sitting around a campfire and telling stories. (See the video below of TM sharing campfire stories.) Every summer weekend, he would drive to Tuolumne, park at the guide school, and bivy in the back of his car. Throughout his 60s and into his mid-70s, he soloed South Crack on Stately Pleasure Dome, as well as Cathedral Peak. Hundreds of climbers have come up to me with the story of an old man with a hat and a great sense of humor who had passed them.

When TM stopped climbing, he continued to visit Tuolumne, hiking, bird-watching, and telling stories. Alzheimer's slowly set in, and he moved to an independent-living facility and then a group home. He continued his daily walks and maintained his jovial nature. Two weeks before his passing, he introduced me (his son) to the home's staff as his twin brother.

What does TM stand for? It is the name on his birth certificate. He would tell you it stood for "Tough Mother." I will tell you it stands for Tuolumne Meadows. He was an authentic Yosemite climber for over five decades. Hours before he passed, as I sat with him, he stared at a poster of Yosemite on the wall. He said, "That is the most beautiful place I have ever been." He talked about how much he loved being a Yosemite guide. I told him he was my hero. He will be dearly missed.

—Tom Herbert

Images



TM Herbert on the Muir Wall, El Capitan, in 1965.



Article Details

Author	Tom Herbert
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	353
Copyright Date	2025
Article Type	In memoriam