

Memorial for Tom Hollocher

Thomas Clyde Hollocher, Jr was born to Thomas, Sr and Catharine Emma (Bernhard) Hollocher in Norristown, PA and grew up in East-Norristown Township, a semi-rural community about 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia.

Tom received his BS in Chemistry from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in 1953, followed by a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from The University of Rochester in 1958. After a three-year postdoctoral fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis, Tom joined the faculty at Brandeis in September of 1961 as an Assistant Professor in the Biochemistry Department where he taught for 38 years. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1968 and full Professor in 1981.

Tom's research focused on enzymology of the global nitrogen cycle, particularly with respect to bacterial denitrification reactions involving nitrate, nitrite, and notably nitric oxide. This foundational work was appreciated early on for its impact on agriculture, but its broad significance in biology wasn't fully appreciated until later with the discovery by others of nitric oxide as a cardiovascular signaling molecule in mammals. This led Science magazine to declare nitric oxide "Molecule of the Year" in 1992. Tom's early work was ahead of its time and enjoyed renewed interest among scientists who were studying the mammalian cardiovascular signaling pathway.

Tom retired in 1999, but as Professor emeritus he wasn't quite ready to hang up his pipettes. He began a series of studies lasting ten years on the chemistry and mineralogy of fossilization mechanisms for the earliest dinosaurs dating back 250 million years ago. The studies involved a collaboration with one of his sons, who is a geologist, and expeditions, with his wife, to dig sites in the Ischigualasto Formation of northwestern Argentina as well as trips to the badlands of the western United States. This research always struck a chord with me; I mean what boomer baby didn't grow up with scores of toy Tyrannosaurs and Triceratops dispersed across the swampy Late Cretaceous landscape of their bedrooms. I never tired of hearing stories from the digs on Tom's return.

All told, Tom has over 100 scientific publications from both his interest in the nitrogen cycle and paleontology, underscoring a highly productive and impactful career.

Tom had a lifelong passion for travel, mountain climbing, gardening, and support of his community. Remarkably, he climbed Mount Monadnock over 100 times, and ascended with friends and family all of the 4000-foot peaks in New Hampshire and most in Maine.

Thomas Hollocher passed away late last year on November 3rd, 2022 at the age of 91. He is survived by his wife Pamela, his children Kurt, Bruce, and Susan, and their families including eight grandchildren.

Tom was an active member of the Biochemistry Department. Even late in retirement, he would reliably attend our Department Faculty Lunch seminars, held every three weeks, in which one member would present their latest research in informal chalk talk format. He was there throughout last fall, up until his death. He was a great colleague, and we will miss him.