

# Remembering **TOM CLANCY**

A Dear Friend and Mentor

BY AVA ROOSEVELT

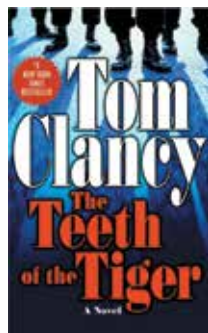


Of all of you who tirelessly listened to my laments and shared tales and hardships of becoming a published novelist, it was Tom Clancy who influenced and encouraged me the most to become a writer. His methods were as unconventional as his technically detailed espionage and military science crime fiction and non-fiction novels, hundreds of millions of which were sold during his epic career. Seventeen of his creations became best sellers and more than 100 million copies of his books are in print today.

Tom's fiction works, *The Hunt for Red October*, *Patriot Games*, *Clear and Present Danger*, and *The Sum of All Fears* became commercially successful films and are as notable as their formidable titles. Alec Baldwin's, Harrison Ford's and Ben Affleck's

portrayals of Jack Ryan, Clancy's most famous fictional character, influenced their careers, and watching these movies never gets old.

Tom's ability to articulate good from bad was legendary. His characters, even at their most evil, stood for something. "Remember, Hollywood people make the mafia look like choir boys," Tom warned me. I wish I had asked him more when I could do so.



## THE DAY I MET TOM CLANCY

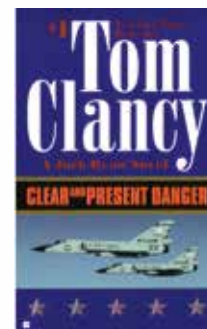
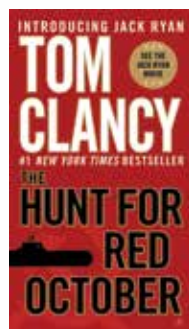
I met Tom, a close friend of my late husband Bill Roosevelt, in Washington, D.C. in 2003, at a party celebrating the publication of *The Teeth of the Tiger*. We dined afterwards at 1789, Tom's favorite restaurant in Georgetown. The gathering became a monthly tradition, which lasted until the last year of Tom's life. I soon discovered that you didn't speak to Tom Clancy unless you knew what you were talking about. He was unforgiving when his time was wasted and – trust me – you

would not want to be on the receiving end of his wrath. Tom was shy, but the breadth of his knowledge was vast and made him one of the most fascinating and powerful people I've ever met. He constantly thrived for accuracy as demonstrated in his novels and many dinners which I attended in his company. Sharing and staying up-to-date with his friends from the FBI was a treat for a layperson like me, a priceless insight of how Tom 'worked'.

"Fiction must be based on fact," Tom insisted. He was a 'sponge' for anything new, squeezing every last drop of knowledge (that was to be had) from an unsuspecting dinner guest.

## WHAT WE HAD IN COMMON

Once we established that the Second World War was a period in history that both Tom and I loved, I felt comfortable sharing stories of post-war Poland. Being born there, I thought I knew something, yet he would always amaze





me at the depth of his awareness from the American, Soviet and British perspective. I learned early on in our friendship to come prepared if I wanted to participate in Tom's impromptu think-tank. In 1997, after receiving an unprecedented \$25 million advance for his new book titled, *Dead or Alive*, Tom was hard at work. However, the events of 9/11 changed the publisher's focus and Tom's novel was put on the back burner. It took years, until 2012 when the book was finally published.

Despite it becoming a major best seller, the process seemed to have taken a toll on Tom's creativity and his spirit. Even though he professed that he didn't care and that the fee justified the publisher's demands, I know in my heart that the experience changed him. The master of popular fiction, the man who created Jack Ryan and John Clark, the most unforgettable characters of techno-thriller genre, became indifferent. But Tom Clancy's legacy will live on.



### A TOUGH CRITIC

When I told him I started to write *The Racing Heart*, my first novel, Tom laughed.

"You socialites! You'll never finish! Writing is hard, few have the stomach for the rejections."

"So, if I complete my manuscript will you read it?" I asked.

"No."

"How about one chapter?"

"One page."

"Will you give me a quote?"

"Let's see how good you are. Better still, forget about it."

"I can't Tom, it's in my blood."

I was mad at him for testing my resolve. Little did he know that being taken for granted gave me the boost of adrenaline that catapulted me into a 695 page manuscript six years later. Once he believed I was serious, he would say during our dinners in Georgetown, pointing at a room full of patrons, "If writing was easy, all of these people would be writing best sellers. Be prepared for years of hard labor."



Ava Roosevelt chats with legendary author Tom Clancy.

### THE REAGAN INFLUENCE

Legend has it that President Ronald Reagan was responsible for making *The Hunt for Red October*, Tom's first and little known novel published in 1984, into a worldwide bestseller by confessing on Johnny Carson to staying up all night to finish it.

"Make your novel an all-nighter," Tom kept reminding me.

Of all my platonic friendships, Tom's was the most passionate, as through the years he let me peel the layers of his complex person-

ality to allow me insight into an all-American male, a patriot with a heart the size of Texas, a part owner of the Baltimore Orioles, no less. Tom never picked up a tab but was always there for me to lend 'shop-related' advice. He was a master listener, with a keen sense of how to make you feel understood. Tom's written words have changed lives. He changed mine by believing in me. I never forget the day I FedEx-ed the final draft of my novel to his house in Maryland. With trepidation, I wondered if he would keep his promise.

"For a girlie book, *The Racing Heart* is all right. I am proud of you, babe," Tom emailed a few days later.

Vintage Tom, sadly no more. ●

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You'll never finish!  
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few have the  
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— Tom Clancy**