



Mark Winslow Potter '48

October 27, 1929 — December 9, 1995

At Taft, where Mark Potter spent forty-five of his sixty-six years, he was only known as “Potter,” a term of great endearment. Why only the last name? I think it was our way of recognizing that the essence of the man was the schoolboy within. A boy coursing with creativity, curiosity, and enthusiasm, and physical to his very core.



In Potter's Art Room, teaching.



As enthusiastic on the ice as in the studio, Mark continued to play in alumni hockey games, often with two of his sons.

I must confess to anger that this Potter was taken from us so early. He seemed eternal. Paradoxically, all of us also looked forward to the next phase of Potter's life knowing that he would live to be eighty or more. He was to be our marker, showing us how to delight in old age. Instead, he is gone. Taken at the peak of his game, as he would have said, as a husband, father, teacher, and friend to us all. It is impossible to imagine how we will fill that void.

John Gardner once wrote that in any era there are only a few people who make you feel better about yourself by being in their presence, by being who they are. Mark Potter was one of those rare individuals.

Born into a somewhat Victorian family, Mark was alone a lot early in life. He found himself sledding and skating on the ponds, thriving in the beauty of nature and in his own being. By the time he entered Taft in the fall of 1945, the essence of the boy was emerging. Plunging into all that the school offered, Potter established the patterns that would guide him through Taft and Yale. A class leader, fine student, gifted singer in the Oriocos even as he would be in the Whiffs, gifted athlete, devoted hockey player, beloved by all for his enthusiasms for everything he did and for all with whom he worked, played, and created.

After Yale came the CIA, courting Bobbie Baldwin, work-

ing with Gray Mattern, and then heeding Paul Cruikshank's call to return to Taft, to teach art and to become Woodbury's resident artist. And so he has been for the past forty-one years.

We know many Potters. Potter the family man, delighting in each of his family, glowing in the joy of their presence and quietly proud of their remarkable accomplishments.

Potter the outdoors man, loving the land, especially the Adirondaks and "Brandreth," the Weekepeemee, dying Connecticut farms and their farmers. Potter, ever struggling to preserve wildlife and nature as it should be, a friend of the bear.

Potter the physical being, most at home on the ice with his Yale teammates, with the Senile Six, alone deeking imaginary opponents on Taft's pond pretending it was the Montreal Forum, or playing with his sons in the alumni game, a feat never to be equalled again.

Potter the competitor on the courts, ever improving, ever setting up his opponent with compliments early on, ever certain that this would be his best year ever.

Potter, never losing, though sometimes the body let him down, or time ran out.

Potter the artist, recording beautiful scenes to inspire us and future generations, capturing the essence of individuals great



Potter taught art at Taft for so long, and so well, that alumni artists are often referred to as Potter's Painters. Here, Mark greets David Armstrong '65 when one of his paintings is given to the school.



Putting up an exhibit of his work in Woodbury.

and small for their families and for generations yet to come.

Potter the character, ever yodeling in the halls of Taft, sketching in faculty meetings, asking the headmaster to help him jump-start cars illegally parked on campus, exercising squatters' rights in the study hall for over two decades, splurging for sixty-nine cents worth of gas to get home.

Potter, exhorting kids not to throw stones on the emergent ice of the pond, not to smoke in his art room, not to litter the campus.

Potter, invariably loved and respected for who he was.

Potter the teacher, finding goodness in those forgotten by others, finding creative impulses in students whose lives had been barren before, teaching us all so much about the power of encouragement and care.

Potter the friend, always there, delighting in our triumphs, urging us on, finding joy and strength in us and never expecting anything in return. In his toughest moments this fall, he was always concerned for others first. He delighted in our plans for improving and beautifying our campus. He thrilled at football victories over Hotchkiss. He worried about his protégé David Armstrong's ['65] own fight against illness, and the very night Mark died, he was triumphant because his grandson had just made a select hockey team.

To the end, Potter lived a unique life. He lived for the moment and for others. In a film just made about the school, Potter was featured, and in it I think he inadvertently declared his philosophy of life. He said, "I am very hands on. I do not sneak up with little tiny details. I like the idea of walloping the picture, of being courageous." And so Potter was, with paintings and with life.

I close with words written by Ken Rush '67 in the *Taft Bulletin* just two years ago. "I guess when all is said and done, the reason I teach is because I came into contact with a great teacher when I was a miserable failure of a student. That teacher gave me something that I can now, after twenty years of starts and stops, give back. So why do I teach? Because a teacher, Mark Potter, made so much possible in my life."

And so he did for each of us. We will miss him terribly in the years ahead. There will never be another Potter, and we will never forget.

— Lance R. Odden

On Alumni Weekend, there will be an alumni show of both Mark's paintings and those of his students. Those interested in exhibiting their work should contact the headmaster.