



The Skinnie has lost a member of its family. On January 15, "Jack" Hammond, aka "The Puzzler," succumbed to leukemia at University of North Carolina Hospital Hospice in Chapel Hill.

Jack approached me in 2003, a month or two after we launched our magazine. He was an avid crossword puzzle solver who took his love an extra step and created puzzles of his own design. "Do you think your readers would be interested in a crossword puzzle?" Jack asked.

Being both a crossword enthusiast and a neophyte publisher in search of unique content, I responded predictably: "Sure."

Jack was smart, clever, and funny, three traits that don't coexist as often as you might expect. He was as dependable as he was kind. He produced puzzles for national dailies before redirecting his talents to benefit you and me. He was a lifelong IBMer, a Pitt Panther, a father, and a husband to Sally for many years.

Although Jack moved away from Skidaway several years ago, he continued to contribute to each Skinnie and remained in regular digital contact. When our creative director, Philip Schweier, emailed Jack to prompt him to send puzzle clues for the current issue, Sally sent us a sad surprise: "I am sorry to tell you, Jack has published his final Skinnie puzzle...We had a wonderful Christmas and then he entered the hospital on Jan 2nd. Wish I had a final puzzle with his tremendous wit, just like he kept the nurses and doctors entertained to the end along with Alison, Ashley, and myself...He was always so proud of the creative puzzles, allow he was indeed running dry after almost 20 years."

Allowed, indeed.

Philip forwarded Sally's message to me and attached a one-word expletive of his own. Not an expression of consternation regarding a scramble to fill space, but genuine shock and sadness to think that Jack is gone. Of all of us, Philip probably knew Jack best. I asked Philip to share a Jack-anecdote. Rather than a single story, he said, "He was great to work with. Always open to suggestion and ideas - fictional detectives, '60s sitcoms, and 1940s horror monsters were among the ideas he accepted from me. He sometimes wasn't sure what he wanted in terms of graphics or themes, and let me offer different options, and he seemed pleased and grateful for that - a true collaborator."

That's representative of the way Jack viewed his work with us: He was genuinely a part of a team.

I appreciate the effort Jack has expended for us and our readers. I am glad that I came to know him because of this magazine. And I am delighted that we were able to share a little piece of him with you for two decades. We'll miss him.



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