

Greg Alvin Howell: Storyteller

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Anyone who ever met him, knew that Greg Howell was a storyteller! Greg's stories were much more though; they were a part of who he was and what he brought to the world. Greg's stories were not self-serving or boastful, although Greg had plenty to brag about. They were more like a gift. To hear a story from Greg was like receiving a special present and watching him unwrap it right in front of you.

I first met Greg in 2005, when he was still the president of the Lean Construction Institute and of Lean Project Consulting, the company that I am now fortunate enough to lead. I had learned about lean as part of my MBA, and contacted Greg and Glenn Ballard to see if this magic management approach could actually be applied to construction. To them, the answer was obvious, even then. For me, it took some time to realize the true power of lean thinking in design and construction, or in any other endeavor for that matter.

Working with Greg, I learned a lot about lean principles and philosophy, and even more about people, relationships, and how to take care of others. I learned how to challenge people without making them feel threatened, and I learned how a network of commitments unlocks a team's potential and creates new possibilities that would be otherwise impossible.

Although Greg had already lived a lifetime of adventures when we met, I was not robbed of the opportunity to share his experiences through his stories. I watched him as a teenager delivering pianos for his father's company in Arizona. I watched him play rugby in college, and again as a guest of the team many years later. I was with him when he found his first love, and lost her on the day he proposed marriage. I watched as he led a navy construction battalion building mountain roads in the jungle. I was there when he learned about leadership from a selfless commanding officer. I watched him build his time-lapse photography business - and get swindled out of it all by his business partner. I was there when he met Dana and knew he'd found the one. I was there when he and Glenn decided, "we really ought to do what we really ought to do," and started LCI and LeanProject. I even rode beside him in his Busaru, an over-powered off-road modified VW Microbus with a Subaru engine. I expect that most people reading this were there for these adventures as well - and probably many others. Greg's stories were his way of sharing his adventures, struggles, and victories. They were his gift to anyone who was ready to listen.

As Greg's memory weakened, he taught me something else. He knew what was happening to him, and often apologized for repeating himself, or retelling stories. For me, hearing Greg tell a story was almost more special once you realized he was giving you the

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same gift again. Watching him unwrap it before your eyes was such a treat, even when the contents were no longer a surprise.

Yet, he never tried to hide his difficulties, or pretend everything was OK. Sharing the story of his condition was just another way for him to include you in his journey, without polish or adornment, just to be there with him like you were for every other leg of the trip. While others may want to remember Greg in his younger days, his grace and beauty during this time of his life may be the part that left the most lasting impression on me. I could only hope to be so giving, open and honest during my lifetime.

So, I'll end with just a simple thanks to Greg. Thank you, Greg, for everything you've done for so many of us, and for leaving us with a story we will never forget.

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Gregory Alvin Howell (Greg Howell) passed away peacefully on June 15, 2020 at home in Ketchum, Idaho. He was born February 3, 1943 in Springfield, Missouri to Alvin Hinshaw Howell and Joyce Howell, née Gregory. He lived in Independence, Missouri before moving to Scottsdale, Arizona when he was in high school. Greg studied construction engineering at Stanford, was a member of the ATO fraternity, and played on the university rugby team. After he graduated in 1965, Greg joined the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander in the Civil Engineering Corps and commanded Mobile Construction Battalion 11, better known as the Seabees. He served in Vietnam in Dong Ha and then led a group of 12 Navy men in a kind of Peace Corp role in northern Thailand for one year. After returning to the U.S. he served as Aide to Admiral Robert Wooding. Among his duties was recruiting on university campuses in full dress uniform amidst the rising protests against the war in Viet Nam.

In 1972, after leaving the Navy, Greg worked with Paolo Soleri at Arcosanti for a while, then returned to Stanford for a Master's in Construction Engineering. Two of his instructors, Henry Parker and Clark Oglesby, had just authored a book on construction productivity improvement. Their teaching inspired Greg to explore more fully how to improve construction work methods, and in 1989, Greg joined his mentors as author of Construction Productivity Improvement. After graduating in 1973, he started working at Timelapse, Inc. in Mountain View, CA. Greg eventually took over the company and hired his future wife, Dana Langhorne, as office manager.

In 1986, Greg moved from California to Albuquerque, where he held the position of Visiting Professor, funded by the New Mexico AGC, in the construction program at the University of New Mexico. In 1997 he left the University and moved to Ketchum, Idaho. He founded the Lean Construction Institute with Glenn Ballard to work with construction industry companies to develop and deploy Lean thinking and practice. In 2001, he founded Lean Project Consulting with Hal Macomber.