

## **Obituary for George E. Thomas, February 1918 - May 9, 2018**

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The life and contributions of George E. Thomas, who died at Cornwall Manor in Cornwall PA on May 9, 2018, are more than the basic facts of his life – although there are many. George was the husband of Carmel M. Thomas, father of twin sons, George and John, grandfather of Kate, Colby, Merribeth, and Parker and great-grandfather to 4 great-grandchildren.

His life began with his birth on February 5, 1918 in a tiny house on Mitchell Street in Philadelphia's Roxborough neighborhood, reached the western Pacific on the USS Appalachian, flagship of the US invasion forces of Japan at the end of World War II and continued into a ministry lasting 80 years that reached across much of the western hemisphere. Dad's college years were spent at Dickinson College (class of 1939) and began his membership in the Philadelphia Methodist Conference. His theological training at Drew connected him to a wider world of ideas that engaged him for the next 78 years. At Drew he met his future wife, Carmel DeSantis, a violinist and artist in all dimensions of her life — and his. They were married amid the turmoil of World War II which was marked by dad's enlistment in the summer of 1943 in the US Navy chaplains' corps. Posted to San Francisco they became proud parents of twin sons. Soon after, Dad shipped out on the invasion forces of Japan. The war ended with dad having the opportunity to visit the bombed sites of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, sights which remained with him throughout his life.

After a brief post-Navy stint as a Methodist minister in Berwyn, PA, George returned to the Navy and served as chaplain at posts as diverse as Guam in the South Pacific and Argentina, Newfoundland in the north Atlantic and many naval bases in between, including Chincoteague, where they met the famous pony, "Misty;" Brunswick NAS was another high point that introduced the family to Maine and friendship with arctic explorers, Donald and Miriam McMillan. Along the way, the Navy recognized George's abilities and sent him for a year of advanced training in pastoral counseling at Harvard University Divinity School in 1949. Dad's year at Harvard brought him important historical insights that enriched his sermons many of which focused on lives of creative and gifted men and women who could be models for contemporary life. Lincoln became a particular focus now passed on to granddaughter Kate who is writing a play about Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

In 1964, George retired from the Navy to begin his next life chapter as chaplain at the Pennington School in New Jersey. His wife, Carmel, used the time there to study at UPenn and then Rider College where her musician's ear found the pleasures of the French language. After six years at Pennington made memorable by their brilliant student, playwright Bill Mastrosimone, the couple headed to the Perkiomen School, a

struggling boarding school north of Philadelphia. There they were part of its transformation, enriching and energizing its curriculum and its programs, George as chaplain and religious studies teacher, and Carmel teaching French and music. The couple's love of the Perkiomen School has since resulted in their endowing annual prizes in their names that award students who excel in subjects George and Carmel taught in religious studies, modern languages and music.

During their time in Pennsburg, PA, they also found time to restore an 18th century house on Main Street which they surrounded with a Japanese garden that bridged back to dad's formative Navy experiences in Japan. In Pennsburg they formed a community of friends, colleagues and students whose lives they enriched with their talents as congenial hosts of many festive dinner and garden parties which contributed to the life of the school and the spirit of the academic community.

Dad's retirement began in 1985 but he continued his devotion and ministry to friends and colleagues while adding grandchildren, great-grandchildren and his sons' wives to his circle of admirers. He also finally confessed to his great love for fishing, a love from his childhood that he resisted in order to meet the needs of his family. When he retired, he joined his son George in treks to Montana where he battled giant trout, to Nova Scotia where he hooked and landed an Atlantic salmon on a fly, and hundreds of trips to the New Jersey shore where he was often high hook.

Like so many great models, dad's children followed in his footsteps while extending his path. George has become a widely published historian and teacher and with his wife Susan Nigra Snyder directs a program at dad's alma mater, Harvard University; John, began his career as a minister and for the past 40 years has worked in non-profit strategy and advancement, a career which he shares with his wife Valerie.

George and Carmel spent their final years together at Cornwall Manor. His beloved wife Carmel preceded him in death in 2011. In these recent years he has been assisted by his angel, Paula Sherman, who has cared for him and become like a family member. Throughout the years since Carmel's death, George continued to be fully engaged with the lives and activities of his family. However, as alluded to before, these facts are not the sum of the man, George. He was beloved for his wisdom, his unconditional love and acceptance of all people, his genuine warmth and his authenticity. Living well for 100 years is inspiration enough but what made him so richly loved was his ability to relate with grace and love to everyone whom he knew or met. His smile, his kind eyes and his ability to connect are what so many will remember. This richness and depth of spirit continued to animate George and energize others who came to love and even revere him.

Through all 100 years dad loved life and life has loved him back.

At the request of the Thomas Family, gifts in memory of Chaplain George E. Thomas may be directed toward the Carmel M. "Midge" and Chaplain George E. Thomas Scholarship Awards Fund, c/o The Office of Alumni and Development, Perkiomen School, [200 Seminary Street, Pennsburg, PA 18073](#).