



Robert Lee Thetford

July 17, 1924 - September 12, 2014

With the dignity and grace he displayed throughout his life, Robert Lee Thetford, 90, peacefully died of age-related causes on Friday, Sept. 12, 2014, in his Corvallis home, surrounded by his children.

He remained vibrant, intellectually engaged and deeply considerate of his family and community until the end.

Bob was born July 17, 1924, in Herrin, Illinois, to Jesse D. Thetford and Edna E. Brown, the youngest of four children. In 1928, the family moved to Mills, New Mexico, where Jesse operated the Thetford Ranch on his older brother's homestead property.

Despite the hardscrabble life, Bob fondly recalled his boyhood years on the ranch, especially being allowed to run barefoot after May 1, riding horses with his brother Jack, and seeing his first movie, "King Kong," on a school field trip. He also displayed the early development of his prodigious intellect by winning many Harding County elocution contest prize ribbons as a young schoolboy. By 1935, the Dust Bowl and the Depression forced Jesse to quit ranching and move the family to the Pacific Northwest in search of work. After living for short periods in Idaho and Yakima, the family settled in Grays Harbor County, Washington. Bob attended schools in Ocosta and Hoquiam, graduating from Hoquiam High School in 1941.

He then worked as a clerk for the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps in Washington, D.C., and as a railroad police stenographer for Southern Pacific in Los Angeles before entering the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Due to his administrative skills and ability to type over 100 words per minute on a manual typewriter, Bob was advanced to Yeoman 3rd Class upon graduation from boot camp. He was assigned as communications clerk aboard the USS Broadwater (APA-139), an attack transport that hauled Army infantrymen and Navy Seabees in South Pacific island-hopping campaigns. Bob's ship disembarked some of the first occupation troops at Yokohama shortly after the Japanese surrendered in 1945. He soberly recalled serving as ship's courier in port, carrying mail and dispatches in a jeep to Gen. MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters via a Yokohama leveled by U.S. bombing, while armed only with a .45-caliber pistol.

In 1946, as a Yeoman 2nd Class awaiting discharge at Naval Station Tacoma, Bob met his future wife, Arline M. Redfield, on a blind date at a morning church service. In 1947, the newly married couple moved to McMinnville to attend Linfield College. Bob was a proud Theta Chi and graduated in 1950 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In 1956, he earned a master's degree in education at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

In 1950, Bob began his 36-year teaching and school administration career at Curry County's Langlois High School. His pleasant years there cemented his lifelong special love for the people and places of the Southern Oregon Coast. He completed subsequent enjoyable teaching stints at Portland's Wilson High School and Central High School in Independence.

In 1960, Bob found his educational home with the wonderful Corvallis School District family, first at Western View Middle School, then Corvallis High School. In 1971, he left CHS to start Crescent Valley High School with two other former CHS educators. He was vice principal of CVHS until retirement in 1986.

As a teacher of English, speech and journalism, and as a school administrator, "Mr. T" was respected and beloved by thousands of students. He fervently believed that the occasion to teach and inspire young men and women to learn, grow and reach their fullest potential was a calling and privilege of the highest order. He proudly coached many speech and debate

teams and Hi-Q contestants to countless interscholastic victories.

Bob also won accolades as a dramatic actor in several local community theater productions.

For many years after retirement, Bob and Arline loved traveling in their RV. The couple visited every state in the union, and spent many winters in the California desert. They hiked together twice to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and, in 1994, Bob hiked the canyon rim to rim with his son, Tom, and grandson, Jesse, just 10 days before his 70th birthday.

At age 86, he traveled by train with family to Washington, D.C., to see the World War II Memorial. Bob always was proud of his naval service, and was astounded to be allowed to hold and read in the U.S. Archives the original WW II Deck Log of his ship, the Broadwater. He had personally typed every page of that log during the war.

In 2011, Bob visited the long-abandoned Thetford Ranch in New Mexico, locating the exact site of the old homestead by memory after so many decades.

Bob was preceded in death by his wife, Arline, in 2007; and a son, Richard, in 1956. He is survived by six children, Tom (Gloria) Thetford of Salem, Terri Thetford of Corvallis, Twyla (Garth) Delamarter of Bend, Tamsin (Gary) Gilbert of Portland, Tina (Jim) Chase of McMinnville and Trisha (Doug) Ferguson of Eugene.

Survivors also include 16 grandchildren, Jesse (Katie) Thetford, Jean Thetford, Rebecca Sklaris, Alex Sklaris, Jeremy (Judie) Delamarter, Curtis (Tina) Delamarter, Nick Delamarter, Danielle Delamarter, Jordan (Christine) Gilbert, Molly Gilbert, Andrew (Rae) Seistrup, Jill Seistrup, Anna (Daniel) York, Teddy Patana, Cole Ferguson and Carly Ferguson; and six great-grandchildren, Jazmin, Jevan, Aislyn, Cannon, Harlon and Alexis Delamarter. A celebration of Bob's life will take place at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20, at Calvin Presbyterian Church, 1736 N.W. Dixon St., Corvallis. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts can be made to Benton Hospice Service, 2350 N.W.

Professional Drive, Corvallis, OR 97330; or SafeHaven Humane Society,
33071 Highway 34 S.E., Albany, OR 97321.

Tribute Wall



“ *Lisa Doucet lit a candle in memory of Robert Lee Thetford*



Lisa Doucet - October 08, 2014 at 05:00 AM

AM

“ *My good friend, Joanie C. (who was in Tom's class and was a college roommate of mine), sent me your father's obituary. I am so sorry for your loss. My brother John and I have many fond memories of family gatherings of the Thetfords, Hargands, Hoovers, and Floods during our time in Langlois. Your father was a wonderful man and I'm sure was much loved by family and friends.*

Ann Flood Meyer - Santa Fe, NM

Ann Meyer - September 29, 2014 at 08:18 PM

AM

“ *My good friend Joanie C. (who was in Tom's class and was a roommate of mine in college) sent me your father's obituary. I am so sorry for your loss. My brother, John, and I have many fond memories of family gatherings of the Thetfords, Hargands, Hoovers and Floods during our time in Langlois. Your father was a wonderful man and I'm sure was much loved by family and friends.*

Ann Flood Meyer - Santa Fe, NM

Ann Meyer - September 29, 2014 at 08:04 PM

MC

“ I remember student teaching while your Dad was at Corvallis High School. He made sure we all helped judge student speech competition. A great experience. Our thoughts are with your family. We do know you have many wonderful memories to enjoy.
Merrily and Dave Cook. Bend,OR

Merrily Cook - September 20, 2014 at 03:21 PM

“ I attended Corvallis High School from 1966-1969 and was fortunate to have Mr. Thetford for a teacher all three years. Indeed, by the time I graduated those in my class who had become close to Mt. T actually called him by the endearment of Uncle Bob. Like so many of the best things about him he would simply smile at this seeming lapse of decorum and somehow make us all feel as though we were sharing a special moment. For the two years I was on the school newspaper he advised the Hi-O-Scope office was the center of my universe. Before school, during lunch, or well after the final bell it was always a place kids could go and feel welcomed. There could be a Knowledge Bowl practice in one corner, a group finalizing stories for the newspaper in another, and several just hanging out. At the center of everything would be this balding bespectacled adult who emanated warmth and humor and never failed to provide direction when required or give his charges some rare space when he perceived it was needed.

For the past forty years I have had my own high school classes to teach and clubs to advise and sports to coach. During that time I have worked with hundreds of wonderful colleagues, got to know well thousands of kids in the classroom or on the playing field, and genuinely looked forward to every day of my career. There is no person in my life, however, who had nearly the influence on the kind of teacher I tried to be or way I tried to be open to my students than Uncle Bob. When my sister-in-law Karin Krakauer sent me the obit from the Gazette Times, knowing I would want to know of Mr. T's passing, the profundity I felt after reading it and beginning to grasp the scope of his love and wisdom was genuinely cathartic. We all grieve his loss, but the life he led and inspiration he provided for living life well lives on in all of us who were lucky enough to come into his orbit.

Bill Costello

Bill Costello - September 19, 2014 at 10:31 PM

DD

“ *The Thetfords were great neighbors and good friends for many years. Dave and I would like to be present for his memorial service but we will not be able to come. Please know that we are praying for all of you at this difficult time. I know your folks would want you to remain close as a family. We have many good memories of both your parents. They were good people-the kind we will never forget.*
Love Bev & Dave Dezotell

Dave and Bev Dezotell - September 19, 2014 at 10:31 PM