



Ralph R Thornton

March 16, 1920 - July 17, 2020

Dr. Ralph Rees Thornton, 100, died of cancer on July 17, 2020, at the Compass Hospice wing of University of Maryland Shore Medical Center campus, just steps away from his home of the past 34 years on Brown Street. Born on March 16, 1920 near Armstrong Corner north of Middletown, in a home that still stands today, Ralph was the son of Eugene Thornton, Sr. and Louise Boulden Thornton.

He attended elementary school in Middletown, arriving daily in a horse-drawn buckboard driven by his slightly older brother, Gene, his beloved life-long friends—books—firmly clasped in his hands. The family moved to Chesapeake City and finally to the outskirts of Worton, where Ralph's father managed Andelot.

Ralph graduated Chestertown High School and Washington College (Class of 1940). Having distinguished himself as a scholar, Ralph was president of the honorary scholastic society. He participated in the Shakespeare Players, the historical, literary, and classical societies. He was the feature writer and managing editor for *The Elm*.

The caption under his senior photo read: "Red-headed Savant; lover of the classics; aesthetically intelligent with a distinct sense of humor." The same could be said of him every day for the rest of his life, though his red hair eventually faded into a cloud of white.

Following college, Ralph reported for the News Journal Company, Wilmington, until he enlisted in the Army in 1941 as a Warrant Officer.

Ralph was trained by the military to be an Italian linguist, but was sent to Japan—with no language training—as an intelligence analyst, helping to prepare reports read by General Douglas MacArthur.

When the war ended, Ralph lost so much weight, he wore his uniform into Chestertown his first day home to buy new clothes. He ran into the Head of the Washington College English Department and was hired on the spot, there in the haberdashery, to be an instructor.

He taught English from 1946 to 1950, obtaining his Masters of Arts from the University of Penn in 1953 and his PhD in English, with a specialty in the Restoration and 18th Century British Literature, in 1966 from the same institution.

While working on his advanced degree, Ralph briefly served as an assistant dean before joining the faculty at La Salle University. He retired as an Associate Professor of English in 1985 after teaching at LaSalle for 26 years. Along the way, he published two books, *The Wives' Excuse* (1973) and *The Maid's Last Prayer* (1978).

Ralph fell in love with his nurse during a hospital stay. Ralph and Louise Lawrie were married in 1960.

The couple loved to travel and did so frequently. They enjoyed a vacation home along a tributary near Rock Hall while they lived in Philadelphia, and after Dr. Thornton retired, they moved to Brown Street in Chestertown. Instrumental to founding the Friends of Miller Library in 1994, Dr. Thornton recently created a fellowship fund to support student research. In addition to his annual support to Washington College, Dr. Thornton also established two endowed scholarships at Washington College: the Edith Louise Lawrie Thornton Scholarship in memory of his wife who enjoyed a career in public health as a nurse and nursing instructor, and the Margaret Boulden Thornton Scholarship in memory of his sister who was a librarian for the National Archives and was once the highest ranking woman in Civil Service. He was also behind the creation of the Alumni Association's Award for Distinguished Teaching, as well as the Class of 1940 Scholarship.

Dr. Thornton was presented with the Alumni Service Award in 1995.

After Louise passed in 1998, Dr. Thornton remained active with college alumni activities and was an active member of the 1782 Society, his Thursday Coffee Group, a cardiac survivor exercise group, and a not-so-secret secret tongue in cheek Professor Moriarty Society. Dr. Thornton was a popular instructor at WC-ALL and a gracious host of Shrove Tuesday pancake parties, a tradition he and Louise began when he taught at LaSalle.

He and Mike, one of his many beloved Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, were such a fixture downtown Chestertown that they are featured in local artist Linda Hall's watercolor Fountain Park, his professorial corduroy slacks and red suspenders on full display.

A devoted alumnus, Dr. Thornton was a frequent visitor at the Alumni House, where friends and colleagues gathered last March to celebrate his 100th birthday.

In addition to his parents, Dr. Thornton is predeceased by his two sisters, Margaret Thornton, MLS and Marie Moreland, and by his brother, Eugene Thornton, Jr. He is survived by many nephews and nieces.

A private interment will be at Bethel Cemetery on July 27. A celebration of life is contemplated by the family post-COVID 19. Funeral arrangements were made by Marvin V. Williams, Jr. Funeral Director, Chestertown, MD. www.funeralhome.com

Those who wish to remember Dr. Thornton in a special way may make gifts in his memory to one of the College Funds listed above, to the American Cancer Society, or to the Kent County SPCA.

Cemetery Details

Bethel (Cecil)

312 Bethel Cemetery
Chesapeake City, MD

Previous Events

Graveside Service

JUL 27. 10:30 AM (ET)

Bethel (Cecil)
312 Bethel Cemetery
Chesapeake City, MD

Tribute Wall



“ *Ralph R Thornton*

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Ralph R Thornton*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Ralph R Thornton*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ *Ralph and his wife Louise were our friends and neighbors while they lived in Philadelphia. I could always count on Ralph for a neighborly chat outside in our common driveways. He, Louise and their dog Annie, held monthly birthday parties on the sidewalk in the summer for Annie which consisted of all you could eat ice cream for the neighborhood children, my own included. He loved raspberries, so he planted them in his tiny backyard that became one large raspberry patch. You would see the tops of the branches rustling and knew that Annie was somewhere under them in the yard. They bought daffodil or crocus bulbs and would plant them throughout Philadelphia, just for the satisfaction of brightening someone's day. Ralph loved his hometown. He reminisced often about it continued to receive the local news while he lived in Phila. He spoke of retiring there. He and Louise were a special type of people who truly loved and cared about their fellow man. He will be missed.*

Diana Bantel - January 17, 2022 at 06:44 PM

TB

“ *Thelma Bright lit a candle in memory of Ralph R Thornton*



Thelma Bright - July 23, 2020 at 04:10 PM

MP

“ *MARY PASE lit a candle in memory of Ralph R Thornton*



MARY PASE - July 22, 2020 at 04:11 PM

TF

“ *The Ruehrmund Family lit a candle in memory of Ralph R Thornton*



The Ruehrmund Family - July 22, 2020 at 08:52 AM

AS

“ *Mr. Ralph was very kind, intelligent man, and full of wisdom. He always gave my mother Ellen Anderson Miller good advice when she used to house clean for him and his wife. Mr. Ralph always gave me history lessons during my high school years and after years of schooling..Always enjoyed are chats when we would run into each other at grocery store, or Beverly's restaurant. Going to miss his advice.*



Anne Spray - July 21, 2020 at 04:28 PM