



D. Diane Opie Thomas

November 21, 1939 - September 11, 2020

D. Diane Opie Thomas passed away, September 11, 2020 with her family at her side. Diane was born November 21, 1939, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to the late Eldon Opie and Dorothy Pooley Opie.

Diane grew up in the village of Scales Mound, Illinois. During her school years she was a fine athlete, pitching for the boy's baseball and softball teams in an era when her community had no female sports. She was also a promising pianist, playing duets with the church organist for Sunday worship at the Methodist church. She graduated Valedictorian, class of 1956 from Scales Mound High School matriculating to the University of Dubuque as a music major.

At the University of Dubuque, she was a member of the Concert Choir and the ingénue lead in "Down In The Valley". On March 2, 1957, she married F. William (Bill) Thomas, her high school sweetheart, of Warren, Illinois, who was also a music major at the University. During her four years at Dubuque, she gave birth to their first two children, Deborah and Tom, and graduated "cum laude" at age 20. Kathryn was born in 1961 during the Oregon years.

In 1960, upon both receiving Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, the family moved to Oregon, Illinois, where Bill began his teaching career. Diane taught private piano lessons in the home and was Bill's performance accompanist for the Oregon High School Choirs. Diane was soon teaching in the elementary school as well.

In 1967, Bill received a teaching assistantship at Northwestern University and the family moved to Evanston, Illinois. Their anticipated one year stay in Evanston evolved to three when Bill was employed by the New Trier High School music department. During this time, Diane continued graduate study at Northwestern and taught physical education in the demonstration school of the National College of Education in Evanston.

In 1970, Diane's family moved to Bristol, where Bill would serve as the choral director at

Sullins College and Diane as staff accompanist. She accompanied recitals, the choir and a number of Broadway Musicals during the six years before Sullins closed. Upon arriving in Bristol, Bill was appointed Director of Music at State Street United Methodist Church and Diane directed the childrens' choirs and accompanied the Youth Choir. She continued to be an active participant in SSUMC Chancel Choir, Handbell Choir and frequent accompanist.

Following the closure of Sullins College, Diane was employed as an elementary music teacher for the Bristol Virginia School System. For seven years she maintained a program loved by her many students at Van Pelt Elementary School. In 1981, she starred as Maria in Theater Bristol's production of The Sound of Music. In 1983, she was promoted to the position of choral director at Virginia High School. For nineteen years her students excelled in concerts and competitions, sending record numbers of students to District and All Virginia Choruses. In 1995, her Virginia High School Chorale auditioned for and was invited to perform at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and in 1996 she was a finalist for the Virginia Music Educator of the Year Award. In her role of music educator, Diane accompanied numerous nationally known choral directors at district choral events. After retirement from her high school position, Diane was a part-time accompanist for Emory & Henry College for six years.

She was a past member of the A! Magazine Editorial Committee, a member of PEO, The Bristol Music Club and Junior League, accompanying their "Follies" for many years. In 2016, Diane and her husband, Bill, were recipients of the Arts Alliance Mountain Empire Arts Achievement Award.

Diane was the epitome of positive thinking and kindness and never believed in anger. She always knew there was a better way to solve any problem. She was fully devoted to her family in which she attempted to instill this trait.

She is survived by her three children: Deborah Diane Thomas of Broomfield, Colorado, Thomas William "Tom" Thomas and wife, Kimberly Muench of Estes Park, Colorado, and Kathryn Kay Thomas of Yardley, Pennsylvania; two grandsons: James Thomas Moyer and William Muench Thomas; three great granddaughters: Kya, Myaira, and Khalani Burrell; a sister: Carolyn Opie Munro of Northbrook, Illinois; two special brothers-in-law: Robert J. Thomas and William J. Munro; and several nieces and nephews and grand nieces and nephews.

Diane was preceded in death by her husband of 62 years, F. William "Bill" Thomas; grandson Nychai Damone Burrell; and an infant grandson, Benjamin Rio Thomas.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to a college fund for Diane's descendants. To contribute, please contact Oakley-Cook Funeral Home or mail checks to Oakley-Cook Funeral Home, 2223 Volunteer Parkway, Bristol, TN 37620.

A service will be announced at a later date.

Arrangements especially for Mrs. Thomas and her family have been made through Oakley-Cook Funeral Home & Crematory.

Comments



“ We send our most heartfelt condolences on Diane's passing. We will miss her very much as we do Bill. We enjoyed getting to know both Diane and Bill through State Street Church over the many years we have belonged together. We always loved and appreciated Diane's and Bill's musical talents that were displayed so often at State Street. We also enjoyed getting to know them both on a more personal level through State Street's Supper Club Program. They were always fun and interesting to be with. May the Good Lord bless and keep Diane as she transitions to the next stage of her spiritual existence. And may He also Bless and watch over you of Diane's Family who remain and mourn her loss.

Sincerely,

-David & Becky Luther

David Luther - September 20, 2020 at 11:48 AM



“ Sending much love & prayers to you & family as you remember your remarkable mother, Diane.



Steven & Robin Massie Condy - September 15, 2020 at 07:36 AM



“ Tom, Debbie and Kathy,
I am saddened to hear of the passing of your dear mother. Diane was not only respected as a citizen of Bristol Virginia but was well loved and respected as a teacher in our school system. What a sweet spirit she had. May God give each of you and your family comfort and peace during your time of bereavement.

-Tyrone and Becky Foster

Bristol Virginia

Tyrone Foster - September 14, 2020 at 12:41 PM



“ Diane and Bill will always be loved and remembered for their tremendous contributions to the cultural arts of Bristol. We've indeed been blessed that Sullins College put the Thomas family among us and we are a much better place today thanks to them.

-Jim & Karen Warren
Bristol, Virginia

Jim Warren - September 14, 2020 at 10:49 AM



“ Tammy Jones - BVPS lit a candle in memory of D. Diane Opie Thomas



Tammy Jones - BVPS - September 14, 2020 at 09:16 AM



“ I will miss Diane--her smile, her interest in how life is going for you and your family, her many acts of kindness, and our many discussions of life in the church and the political landscape around us. It was our mutual involvement in the music world that brought us together 40 years ago. I always looked forward to being her roommate at district and state events. but I just enjoyed being around Diane. I made sure she had a banana and a glass of water at night.

Bill and Diane became close friends soon after Diane and I met. Meals were always a time of fellowship to look forward to, and their sharing of what was going on in their children's lives drew us together as close friends. Bill was our daughter's voice teacher for her four years in high school and probably was the major reason she got music scholarships at William & Mary even though she did not major in music.

When I was researching their background to give the introductory speech for their award at the 2016 Arts Alliance Achievement Award, I learned so much more about their professional backgrounds, but more than that I learned how much Diane influenced and inspired her students. She is leaving a legacy that they will talk about for years.

Wrenda Fuller - September 13, 2020 at 03:57 PM



“ My heart goes out to you all. Mrs. Thomas, Diane, was such a wonderful person. I spent so much time in and out of her house in high school. I loved the music that was everywhere in her house. Oh Tom, Kathy, and Debbie, your Mom was one of the best people I have known.

Virginia V Bonham - September 13, 2020 at 03:46 PM



“ Mrs. Thomas and Bill were the most influential people in my love for and development as a choral singer. She was my high school choir director and they both had given me private voice lessons for several years. They were outstanding musicians, with immeasurable God-given talents and wonderful people. I will always be indebted to them. Many prayers for her family during this time!

Meredith Bussey Doane - September 12, 2020 at 11:06 PM



“ Diane was a marvelous teacher and the best colleague one could have. She taught the students at Van Pelt Elementary so much about music but even more about how to conduct oneself when being with others. What a fine example of the Christian life she demonstrated each day!! I feel privileged to have worked with her. Her presence will be missed!

-Janice Thayer Rowland

Janice Thayer Rowland - September 13, 2020 at 07:43 PM



“ Sorry to learn of Diane's passing. We grew up and graduated from Scales Mound High School and later crossed paths at the University of Dubuque. I was told of her death by mutual friends, John and Jane Neve, also UD alums. Condolences to the family, and especially to sister Carolyn.

-Virginia Winters Somerville (Mrs. Thomas Somerville)

Virginia Somerville - September 28, 2020 at 08:25 PM