



John Irby Thomas

April 2, 1948 - February 19, 2022

Legacy of Love

SUNRISE – April 2, 1948

John Irby Thomas was born in Philadelphia (Neshoba County), Mississippi. He was the second of four children born to Murphy and Lorece Drake Thomas. As a military brat, he was educated in multiple states and overseas. He attended elementary school in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Sapporo, Hakkaido, Japan and Columbus, Ohio. Junior high school years were spent in Columbus and Smyrna, Tennessee. Irby completed his education in Hampton, Virginia, graduating from George P. Phenix High School in 1966, and Hampton Institute (University) in 1970.

He earned his Masters Degree from Golden Gate University in 1990. Following his graduation from Hampton Institute, Irby received his commission in the United States Army and served this nation proudly. His duty stations within the U.S. included the states of Virginia and Colorado, and overseas the countries of Germany and South Korea. He retired after 21 years during his last duty station at Fort Lee, Virginia, and began working for the Department of Defense, retiring from the DOD in 2013.

While attending Hampton, Irby met his soul mate and love of his life, Berthel B. Ross. They were married July 3, 1971, and celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2021. They were blessed with a son, Andre D. Thomas; two daughters, Katrina Y. Thomas, and Shawn (Letitia) China (Andrew); three grandchildren, Myles J. Thomas, Kinley G. China and Ava N. China.

Irby was truly a family man. He was the family travel agent and cruise director. He enjoyed hosting family for holiday dinners, cookouts and sleepovers. Outside of his wife and family, Irby was passionate about cruising, the Oakland (Las Vegas) Raiders, his Hampton University Pirates and his fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. He considered his parents his greatest inspiration and felt that his greatest accomplishments were his marriage to Bert,

his children and grandchildren, and his military career. In his own words, he wanted to be remembered for “who I was” and if he could live his life over again he would “change nothing”.

“What we once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes part of us.”

SET - February 19, 2021

Saturday morning, February 19, 2022, Irby transitioned to be with family and loved ones that had gone on before him. He was predeceased in death by his parents, Murphy and Lorece Drake Thomas; his brothers, Gerald Thomas and Otis Murphy Thomas; son, Andre D. Thomas and daughter, Katrina Y. Thomas; his cousin who was like a brother to him, Johnnie E. Drake; his second parents, Curtis and Bertha Ross. He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Berthel R. Thomas; daughter, Shawn China (Andrew); grandson, Myles J. Thomas; granddaughters, Kinley G. and Ava N. China; sisters, Elaine Thomas, Audrey Y. Ross, Valeria R. Turner (Al), and Vera Drake; brothers, Curtis “Mike” Ross, Jr. (Alma), Donald Ross, Sr. (Yolanda) and Thomas “Tom Tom” Barnes (Terri); his life-long friend, college roommate and Frat brother, Thomas “Tommy” Seldon, close friends Will and Faye Jennings; Jeffrey Winston, lifelong friend, and the General’s Group: Janette Johnson, Dianne Suber and Portia Bachman; a host of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

Growing up, Irby affiliated with the Baptist faith, but attended the military Protestant chapel on base. He was baptised in the Baptist faith at New Grafton Baptist Church in Hampton, Virginia, and remained a member there until his transfer to Germany. Irby’s only wish when it comes to expressing religious beliefs is that people know he believed in God. “What we once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes part of us.”

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 1. 9:30 AM - 4:30 PM (ET)

March Funeral Home-Laburnum Ave.
2110 E. Laburnum Ave.
Richmond, VA 23222

Family Hour

MAR 1. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

March Funeral Home-Laburnum Ave.
2110 E. Laburnum Ave.
Richmond, VA 23222

Mask-Required Graveside Service

MAR 2. 1:00 PM (ET)

Forest Lawn Cemetery
4000 Pilots Lane
Richmond, VA 23222

Tribute Wall

GC

“ I first met John in Pyeongtaek, South Korea in 1980 when we both served in the US Army and I was given the Command of the 60 Transportation Company of the 69th Transportation Bn from DA when it was initially promised to him by the 19th Support Command. After our tour there, we both were assigned to the Transportation School Staff at Fort Eustis, Va and our families stayed in contact with each other until we both retired from the military and his recent unfortunate passing. He will definitely be missed by all and his friendship will forever be ingrained in our memories until we meet again in our afterlife. Amen.



George Christopher - March 02 at 01:32 AM



“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of John Irby Thomas.



March 01 at 02:19 PM

SF

“ Sean Clark and family purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of John Irby Thomas.



Sean Clark and family - March 01 at 12:59 PM

NO

“ My sincerest condolences to Irby's family and friends and loved ones. My prayers are with you. Irby was a friend to my uncle Alfred Austin and future brother-in-law Leon McCadden. He and some other friends would come to Richmond and visit with our family some weekends. It was always a fun time. Not having seen him in many years it was great seeing him at my mother's visitation in 2011.
The great thing about memories is that they keep alive the special ways people touch our lives. May your memories be a source of joy and comfort to you.

Nona - March 01 at 11:02 AM

DF

“ The first time i met my brother Irby i was 6 or 7 years old had no idea how happy he would make my sister and be a great dad and big brother to me and the rest of the family the only thing i knew is the he had a cool car...and he would let me shift the gears in his Camaro ss that was enough to welcome him to the family...Thanks for all the man talks and the kindness you extended to my honey Yolanda and the guys as well..thanks for the fishing trips and the vacation time, the thick steaks and great company..thank you for being a prime example of a man among men...



Donald & Yolanda Ross & Family - March 01 at 06:49 AM

DR

“ Donald Sr. & Yolanda & Durell Ross purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of John Irby Thomas.



Donald Sr. & Yolanda & Durell Ross - February 28 at 11:46 PM

LM

“ Linda McCurnin purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of John Irby Thomas.



Linda McCurnin - February 28 at 08:28 PM



“ Days of Sunshine Bouquet was purchased for the family of John Irby Thomas.



February 27 at 05:47 PM

DT

“ Dearest Berthel, Elaine and to the Thomas and Ross family members, please know that we were deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Irby. Sending prayers for God's faithful love to bring comfort to your hearts. With Heartfelt Sympathy Love, the Tucker family Helen, Demetria, Cynthia, Shelton and the Johnson family- Marcia and Joseph



Demetria Tucker - February 27 at 05:21 PM

SR

“ I remember when I first met Irby. I thought he was he tough like a big grizzly bear. I found him to be a loveable teddy bear. Irby was tough in the outside but tender on the inside. Irby cooked many delicious meals. Irby was serious but one of the most gentle compassionate, caring brother in love. I will miss our talks . I never heard Irby complain. I saw him in pain. Irby loved Bert, Irby loved Myles. Irby loved Elaine. Irby loved family and Irby loved bacon. RIP, John Irby Thomas.

Sister in love, Alma Ross - February 26 at 11:47 AM

HC

“ My cousin was one of the nicest people I will every know. Irby spent a lot of his free time remodeling my house for me an did an excellent job too. He had a heart of gold an I will miss him. Take your rest, Lord knows you have earned it. You will be forever in my❤️

Hazel Cheatham-butts - February 25 at 07:37 PM

AR

“ I will miss you. I've known you for over 50 years. You were my sister's best friend, lifelong partner, and of course, the love of her life. I spent many days and nights with you just visiting and resting from my travels. I have many fond memories of our cruises together and all the family events you graciously hosted. I have lost a brother. Rest peacefully. Know that I will be there for Bert.

Audrey Y. Ross - February 24 at 09:18 PM



“ Beautiful Dreams was purchased for the family of John Irby Thomas.



February 24 at 06:35 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of John Irby Thomas.*



February 24 at 05:31 PM

JS

“ *Jerome & Pat Noble, Columbia, SC purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of John Irby Thomas.*



Jerome & Pat Noble, Columbia, SC - February 24 at 05:06 PM

TB

“ *Terrie D Barnes lit a candle in memory of John Irby Thomas*



Terrie D Barnes - February 24 at 03:01 PM

LI

“ *Lillian, Clarence, Bill, Doris, Norm, & Edna purchased the Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray for the family of John Irby Thomas.*



Lillian, Clarence, Bill, Doris, Norm, & Edna - February 24 at 02:23 PM

BT

“ *Barnes, Thomas lit a candle in memory of John Irby Thomas*



Barnes, Thomas - February 24 at 02:18 PM

TB

“ *" One heartfelt memory is when we first met Irby my brother Curtis Ross and I (Tom-Tom). We decided to let him know that we were the protector of our sisters, so we decided to teach him a lesson that no man would mistreat our sisters, or they would have to deal with us. We decide to give a small example of what will happen to him if he violates our sisters. He was like a gentle giant teddy bear. By him being a gentle giant teddy bear I was to take his legs and Mikey would take the upper body and we would wrestle him down in the grass, " how so ever " Irby didn't get the memo. He used me like a tool to wrap Mikey up and laid him down in the grass and me (Tom-Tom) on top of Mikey. We will love forever and remember all of the good times.*

P.S. Guess who saved us from the gentle giant and the abuse that he was putting on us, his one true love Bert.

Love

Tom-Tom & Terrie

Thomas Barnes - February 24 at 02:15 PM



“ *We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.*

March Funeral Homes - February 24 at 09:56 AM