



Paul D Thomas

March 9, 1934 - October 27, 2023

Dr. Paul D. Thomas EdD, passed away on Friday, October 27, 2023, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, at the age of 89. He was born on March 9, 1934, in Atlanta, Texas, to the late Jesse and Martha Attaway Thomas.

Dr. Thomas is preceded in death by his parents, as well as his siblings, James Thomas, Almand Thomas, Melva Grisham, Valera Anderson, and Juanice Blauser.

He is survived by his loving spouse, Barbara Thomas, and his devoted children, Paula Welch and Russell Thomas (wife Irina). Additionally, Dr. Thomas leaves behind a legacy through his six adored grandchildren, several nieces and nephews, and a great-granddaughter.

With a career spanning 45 years, Dr. Thomas was a dedicated college professor who impacted countless lives through his teaching. He shared his knowledge at the University of Missouri, the University of North Texas, and North Central Texas College. In 1973, he relocated to Hot Springs, where he and his wife became members of the original faculty at what is now National Park College. He taught subjects ranging from mathematics and physics to

astronomy and even a unique physical education class inspired by his daily hike to work across Music Mountain.

Beyond the classroom, Dr. Thomas was known for his alter ego, "Puff the Magic Clown," who brought joy and laughter to students for over three decades. As a clown and magician, he selflessly performed more than 200 shows each year, donating all proceeds to scholarships for college students. Throughout his remarkable career, Dr. Thomas extended a helping hand to more than 650 college students, making their educational dreams a reality.

Pallbearers are Paul Welch, Kevin Godwin, Alexander "Sasha" Thomas, Russell Thomas, Brad Blausler, and Doug Blausler. Andre Williams and the compassionate staffs of Capital M Care Homes and Lake Hamilton Health and Rehab serve as honorary pallbearers.

A funeral service will be held Monday October 30, 2023 at 1 PM at Hot Springs Funeral Home, 1017 Central Ave., and will be available on tinyurl.com/paulthomasfuneral Burial will follow the service at Hollywood Cemetery.

Cemetery Details

Hollywood Cemetery

Hot Springs, AR

Previous Events

Funeral Service

OCT **30**. 1:00 PM (CT)

Hot Springs Funeral Home
1017 Central Avenue
Hot Springs, AR 71901
(501) 623-8820
hotspringsfh@sbcglobal.net
<https://hotspringsfh.com/>

Tribute Wall

LS

“ I had Mr. Thomas for college algebra and hiking at the community college. He was such a nice teacher and always entertained us with his funny stories and jokes. I am so glad I knew him.

Laura Smith - September 09, 2025 at 04:36 PM

AW

“ 1 file added to the album Paul



Andre Williams - November 11, 2023 at 04:25 PM

SB

“ I do remember Puff the Magic Clown from the late 70's and 80's.....making the dog shaped balloons.

Our lives crossed paths most recently at church. One fond memory that I have of Professor Thomas is that he would consistently request prayer..."for the abortion situation in America" He loved kids, their future and our community.

I can still see him enjoying complimentary popcorn at Atwoods as well.

Steve B - November 07, 2023 at 10:58 AM

GB

“ *I'm so sorry to hear about Paul. He was so sweet. I had him for college algebra. I know how much he will be missed. I used to see him walking around town all the time.*

Gena Barton - November 02, 2023 at 11:38 AM

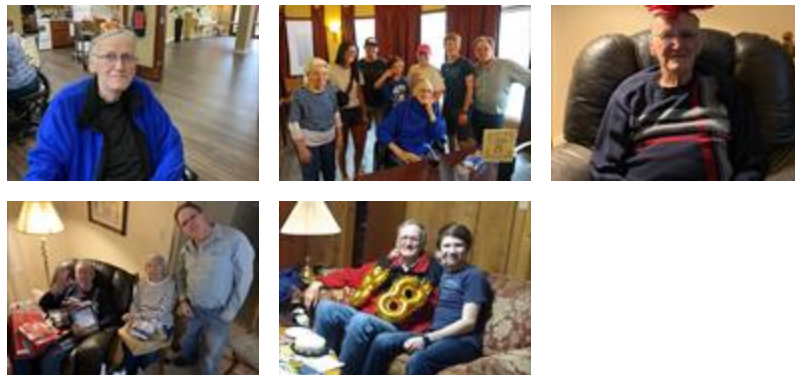
TM

“ *Sorry to hear about the passing of Mr. Paul Thomas. I will always remember him as Puff the magic clown and at the family reunions at Huffines Community Center making all the kids animal balloons. My Grandparents were James L & Lora Johnson from Atlanta, Texas. I am their oldest granddaughter Teresa Johnson Marin. My prayers and thoughts will be with you all.*

Teresa Johnson Marin - November 01, 2023 at 03:39 PM

IT

“ *70 files added to the album Paul*



Irina T. - November 01, 2023 at 01:38 PM

TS

“ Toni Steger lit a candle in memory of Paul Thomas



Toni Steger - November 01, 2023 at 10:00 AM

RA

“ I have never done this before but felt compelled due to what i feel is the passing of a great man. Like many other kids that grew up in the 70s i remember Puff the Magic Clown and always enjoyed the shows. Jump ahead to 1983 and a recent high school grad i enrolled at National Park and was luck enough to have an instructor by the name of Paul Thomas, not know he and PUFF were one and the same. I always hated math in school and barely passed Algebra but Paul had a different approach and it clicked. Fast forward again to around 2016 i ran into Paul at an auction. I said how are you Mr Thomas and he smiled and said i dont think i know you. I explained who i was and how we had met etc. We had a long pleasant conversation about him growing up in Texas etc and i shared with him how much i used to hate math and that now i use a lot of advanced math DAILY! He laughed and said funny how that happens in life! I ran into him several times over the last few years and ALWAYS had a smile and and how are you greeting. The world is a better place because of Paul and i mean that sincerely. Hopefully he will be entertaining the angels!

Randy S.

Randy - October 31, 2023 at 09:16 AM

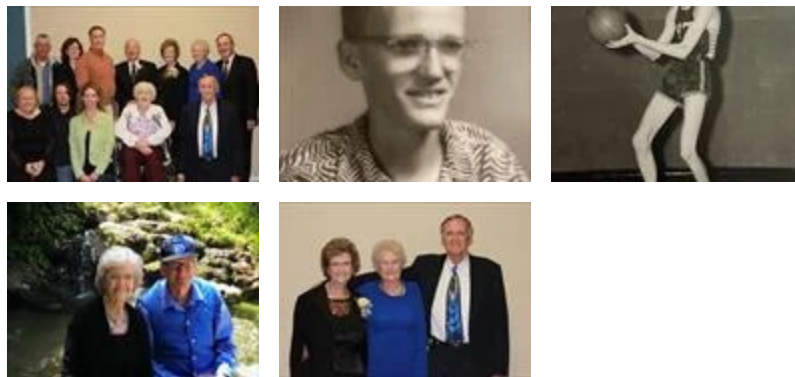


“ Great Uncle Paul, you will be missed. I have nothing but beautiful memories of you, especially during those family reunions where you played Puff. We were so blessed to have you. Rest in peace. —
Melissa

Melissa Widmaier - October 30, 2023 at 03:19 PM

BB

“ 7 files added to the tribute wall



Brad Blauser - October 30, 2023 at 02:17 PM

RF

“ Barbara, Paul, and Russell- thinking of you and sending you sincere condolences upon your loss. I have many memories of Paul: the hiking trail he pioneered; the Puff the Clown gig; his magic tricks and so many gags and jokes; the time he spent helping students; the book he wrote on JFK, and more. I was a student at Lakeside High School in 1974 when Paul came one day as Puff for our assembly. It cost 50 cents admission to go to the show of magic, balloon tying and all the other things he did for a full audience that day. Little did I know that he was donating that money for scholarships to then Garland County Community College. And little did I know that I would be the recipient of one of those \$100 scholarships-which at the time covered tuition for a full semester. I had no plans to go to college--about everyone else I knew was going to college somewhere and I was called into the counselor's office one day where Mr. Rucks told me I had the scholarship. I doubt I would have ever even gone to college had it not been for that and for Paul. As I prepare for my retirement and review my social security earnings after forty-four years of working, I am not bragging to say but am saying that \$100 of seed money has helped me earn over \$2,000,000 in my fortunate career--and I owe it all to Paul. He was an asset to our college and to our community, an academician, a scholar, and I always thought of him as a friend.

Roger Fox - October 30, 2023 at 12:56 PM

SB

“ I always enjoyed Paul's visits to Texarkana. I looked forward to hearing about his adventures, students, and funny anecdotes. I also admired his quick wit and anecdotes. He will always hold a special place in my heart!
My deepest sympathies to his loved ones.

Susan Barkman - October 30, 2023 at 12:42 PM

ES

“ *The Thomas family. Mary (Schwass) Lewis and I, Ed Schwass, send our deepest condolences on Dr Paul Thomas' passing. As a neighbor and friend, Paul was the best! He always had a smile and joke for us. I went on a few hikes with him and his college class, his knowledge of the trails and forest held everyone's interest. He will always be in our hearts and prayers. - Ed Schwass.*

Edward F Schwass - October 30, 2023 at 11:51 AM

MG

“ *I Was Privileged To Be A Recipient Of A Puff The Clown Scholarship In 1975.I Often Saw Him Walking InThe Parkingot At Kroger.He was A wonderful Man .Prayers for his Family.*

mary Goins - October 30, 2023 at 11:27 AM

BG

“ *Knowing that Mr. Thomas didn't drive and seeing him walking in the rain one day a few years ago, I stopped and offered him a ride home. He graciously accepted my offer. After, I called Barbara to let her know what I had done. She thanked me and let me know that it was getting difficult.*
I was honored to have been afforded that small experience of helping them.
With love and affection,
Barbara Guinn

Barbara Guinn - October 29, 2023 at 07:22 PM

BM

“ *Russ..sorry for your loss..may his memory be blessed.*

Barbara Morgan - October 29, 2023 at 12:06 PM

CQ

“ One of the best instructors I ever had! As a young married student and GCCC graduate, I had transferred to UALR but soon found out I was pregnant while commuting. They gave me permission to transfer 7 more credits from Garland County and I still needed College Algebra and Physical Science. Puff was my instructor in both classes that Fall. He worried every night that I was gonna give birth in class, lol, but he made sure and had me in good shape so I was not behind when I returned to class. A caring teacher but also the best math teacher I ever had. He made math fun and interesting. Sending my love and prayers to the family!

Candy Quast - October 29, 2023 at 03:07 AM

JR

“ I am so sorry for your loss. He was a sweet man. I first remember him from his clown days. He came to my elementary school. Later in life, I encountered him at the community college. He was always friendly and always funny. He will be missed. May God bring you peace and comfort in knowing that you will one day meet again.

Jennifer Richardson - October 29, 2023 at 12:56 AM