



Robert Duane Thomas

July 7, 1951 - January 1, 2024

Robert 'Duane' Thomas, 72, of Grove, Oklahoma, passed away early in the morning on January 1, 2024, sharing one final New Years Eve celebration at the lake with his three beloved daughters.

Duane was born on July 7, 1951, to Bob and Marjorie Thomas in Miami, Oklahoma. After Duane graduated from Fairland High School, he studied at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College, received a bachelor's degree from Missouri Southern State University, followed by a master's degree at Northeastern State University. He received his Superintendent's certification in 1993.

Duane dedicated his career to education where he spent nearly fifty years as an educator, basketball coach and superintendent. Duane was revered not only for his skills as a superintendent but also as a women's high school basketball coach. He found tremendous success coaching at many area schools including the Afton Lady Eagles and Bluejacket Lady Chieftains, winning a total of 482 games over his career. Under his guidance, the Lady Chieftains became a near permanent resident of the state basketball tournament with fourteen appearances in fifteen years. Win or lose, Duane (Coach Thomas to many) always knew that coaching, no different than teaching, was about preparing others to succeed and valued that above all.

In 1973, Duane met Linda Chambers and took her catfishing for their first date. The date went so well that Duane immediately took Linda for breakfast at a café where his sister, Brenda, waited tables. Duane and Linda married three years later in 1976 and had three daughters, Jeni Nunn, Kari Hoffman Clem, and Lani Stone. Duane loved spending time with his daughters whether it was helping them learn back handsprings, working to improve their free throws, or teaching them to drive.

Throughout his life, Duane loved to be outdoors, tending the garden at his parents' home, fishing with his brother Choo and friends, or quail hunting on cold winter mornings. He was an avid Oklahoma Sooners and St. Louis Cardinals fan, and rarely missed a game. Mostly though, he was a loving father, caring brother, mentor, and lifelong friend to many, with an infectious, larger-than-life personality. Wherever he was and whatever he did, he made everyone feel like family.

Duane was predeceased by his mother Marjorie Thomas and father Bob Thomas, sister

Colleen Thomas, brother-in-law Poncho Shortt, and son-in-law Robert Hoffman. He is survived by his sister Brenda Shortt of Bentonville, Arkansas, brother Choo Thomas and sister-in-law Susan Thomas of Grove, Oklahoma, daughter Jeni Nunn and son-in-law Hunter Nunn of Dallas, Texas, daughter Kari Hoffman Clem and son-in-law Jason Clem of Choctaw, Oklahoma, daughter Lani Stone of Choctaw, Oklahoma, and many loving nieces and nephews. He is also survived by four fun and lovable grandchildren: Acie Hoffman, Canon Stone, Crew Stone, and Emersyn Hoffman.

Visitation will be Thursday, January 4, 2024, from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at Brown Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service in Miami, Oklahoma.

Funeral services will be held at the Fairland High School Gym on Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. with a graveside service to follow.

The family requests that in lieu of flowers please make a donation in the name of Coach Thomas to the Fairland, Bluejacket, Afton, or Gravette Public Schools Enrichment Foundations or the NEO Football Program.

Friends and family may send the family notes of encouragement by viewing Mr. Thomas' Tribute Page at www.brown-winters.com.

Cemetery Details

Fairland Cemetery

Fairland, OK 74343

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 4. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Brown-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service
5 B Street NW
Miami, OK 74354
(918) 542-3311
info@brown-winters.com
<https://www.brown-winters.com>

Celebration of Life

JAN 5. 10:00 AM (CT)

Fairland Public Schools Gym
202 West Washington Ave.
Fairland, OK 74343
<http://www.fairlandowls.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *Brown-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service created a Tribute Video in memory of Robert Duane Thomas*



Brown-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service - January 04, 2024 at 01:26 PM

CS

Beautiful tribute 😊

Carla Smith - January 04, 2024 at 05:46 PM



“ *208 files added to the album Life Tributes*



Brown-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service - January 04, 2024 at 11:49 AM

PB

I was so saddened to hear about the passing of Coach Thomas. I met him at as a very awkward preteen girl who decided to play basketball at this new school. He was so very encouraging and I was so grateful for not only his ability to help me in the sport, but most of all being my friend and seeing my potential. Much prayers and love to this family. Thank y'all for sharing him with so many!

Pam Beeler-Culver - January 12, 2024 at 09:12 AM

CB

“ *Cecily, Lexy, Emily & Butch purchased the Be My Love Bouquet with Red Roses for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.*



Cecily, Lexy, Emily & Butch - January 04, 2024 at 10:26 AM

CB

“ Cecily, Lexy, Emily & Butch planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Robert Duane Thomas.

Cecily, Lexy, Emily & Butch - January 04, 2024 at 10:26 AM



“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 04, 2024 at 09:44 AM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 03, 2024 at 07:20 PM

TP

“ The Pratts planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Robert Duane Thomas.

The Pratts - January 03, 2024 at 07:20 PM



“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 03, 2024 at 02:45 PM



“ Serenity Wreath was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 03, 2024 at 11:43 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 03, 2024 at 11:14 AM



“ Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 03, 2024 at 10:32 AM

TS

“ Thru Tubing Solutions planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Robert Duane Thomas.

Thru Tubing Solutions - January 03, 2024 at 10:32 AM

JP

“ Coach Thomas was my coach at Miami High School. We always gave him a hard time about how his shooting style was unusual - he brought the ball across his face to shoot. One day I jokingly said “Coach, how can you teach us to shoot with the ball coming straight up over my right knee, when you do something completely different?”. He grabbed a ball and shot a three pointer with his form, and nailed it. He said “because I make them”!!

He was one of my favorite coaches in my life. He taught me about perseverance and respect. Made us give 100% effort so we would represent our school well. I love him and will miss that smile!

Jason Pogue - January 02, 2024 at 11:32 PM

S(

“ Coach Thomas - probably the most influential men in my life. I never thought we would be playing for a state tournament but he got us there. He pushed us hard and taught us discipline and I am so deeply sorrowed to hear of his passing. I pray his family finds comfort in this hard time and will hold his memory at the highest esteem

Sam Vargas (VanOtterloo) - January 02, 2024 at 09:08 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Robert Duane Thomas.

January 02, 2024 at 06:48 PM

K(

“ Coach Thomas was my Gravette High coach for 2 years. He whipped us into shape and had us playing at State my senior year. He was an amazing coach with all sorts of sayings that would make us cracking up later, but at the time you knew you were in trouble: "My grandma could out dribble you. Is the floor on fire?" I remember when we first started with him, he called me Sugar Bear because I had on UCA shorts and it was all he called me from that time forward. He was a great coach but also a good man. He would let us players come into his office during the day and just vent or hang out for a few minutes to escape high school for just a while. He will be missed.

Kaitlynn Williams (Britton) - January 02, 2024 at 05:29 PM



Yes! He had those Duaneisms for years - "mother could make that"

Kari Hoffman Clem - January 02, 2024 at 06:45 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 02, 2024 at 01:13 PM

TP

“ The Hannas & Paulette purchased the Days of Sunshine Bouquet for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



The Hannas & Paulette - January 02, 2024 at 08:16 AM

TP

“ The Hannas & Paulette planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Robert Duane Thomas.

The Hannas & Paulette - January 02, 2024 at 08:16 AM

CB

“ My first day as a sophomore at Afton High School, I was 5'8” and of course as a “Johnson” was expected to walk on the basketball court and be a stud. Truth be told, I had moved in from a big city, where I had never played one minute of organized basketball. Coach Thomas started practice and I was down on the forward end where he was intently watching if I could play. After about 5 grueling and likely disappointing minutes, he hollered at Coach Bendure, who was on the other end of the court with the defensive players ... and said “Coach, I’ve got a guard for you.” He never let me try to shoot a ball again. He obviously knew my “talent” should be used elsewhere and he didn’t need that big of a project!

As my first real coach, I am one of many that can say we would have run to the ends of the earth for this amazing man! He made us want to be better. He expected us to give 100% each and every day, and if you didn’t, you knew you could be replaced by someone that would. He was tough, which made us tougher. We played our hearts out, so he would not be disappointed in our efforts. He would praise our accomplishments, and instilled in us a desire to win, and grow, and point out that there is no I in team! I learned what it meant to play with heart! Thank you Coach for your influence; it has carried with me all of my life. You meant so much to so many, and we are all better for having you in our lives. You will be missed here on earth, but we shall meet again in heaven, where anyone who says “yeah” will be running laps around the pearly gates if they are in earshot of you. We are sad because of missing you, but I am grateful you are no longer in pain. Until we meet again ... ❤️❤️

Chrisie Johnson Brockman - January 01, 2024 at 10:36 PM



This is so spot on of him, thank you for sharing!

Kari Hoffman Clem - January 01, 2024 at 11:00 PM

JL

After working at Picher Elementary School I decided I wanted to finish my degree and become a teacher. I was an "older" graduate and I knew it was going to be hard to get a job. I called Mr. Thomas at home because I heard there was going to be an opening at Bluejacket. I will be forever grateful he gave me my first job.

Jo Lewis - January 02, 2024 at 10:00 AM



“ Love's Journey was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.



January 01, 2024 at 08:01 PM



“ *Beautiful Dreams was purchased for the family of Robert Duane Thomas.*



January 01, 2024 at 07:45 PM