

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

LAWRENCE G. THOMAS

(1909 - 1996)

Professor Emeritus Lawrence Gregg Thomas, known internationally as a leader in the field of philosophy of education, died February 17, 1996. A memorial service was held at the Stanford Faculty Club on March 24, 1996.

Professor Thomas was born June 6, 1909, in Urbana, Illinois, and began his relationship with the School of Education early on, receiving both his bachelor's degree in 1930 and his master's degree in 1931 from Stanford, and his Ph.D. in Education from Yale University. Professor Thomas began his career as a high school teacher of civics and English. In addition to his tenure at Stanford beginning in 1939, he served at several other institutions, including the University of California-Berkeley, Yale, Lone Mountain College, New College of San Francisco, and Air Command Staff School. He also taught at L'Universidad d'Oriente in Venezuela, and the University of Tokyo, Japan. He was a Fulbright Scholar in Uruguay, a Carnegie visiting professor at the University of Hawaii, and a researcher at the East-West Center in Hawaii. He retired with the rank of Professor Emeritus in 1974.

In addition to his role as Professor of Education, he served in leadership roles in many organizations, among them the Philosophy of Education Society, of which he was a founding member and second president (1955-56); the Far Western Philosophy of Education Society which he also helped to organize and served as president (1954-55); and the American Educational Research Association. Professor Thomas was an active participant in the local community: He was a member of the Palo Alto Youth Coordinating Council for several years; he sang with two local choruses, the SUSE Chorus and the Goldenaires; and he was an avid supporter of Palo Alto's Theatreworks. He was also a founding member of the Palo Alto Coop.

Larry Thomas inspired many people. "Larry Thomas was a teacher's teacher- he loved teaching and he made his students love it, too. He loved to stretch our minds as he linked theoretical positions with practical decisions, and showed us how philosophical views were connected to particular policies and practices," commented Michael Katz, Professor Thomas' last doctoral student, and now a professor at San Jose State University. "When I think of what made Larry Thomas such a special role model for me, I think of a hyphenated expression: 'scholar-gentleman.' That's what Larry Thomas was for me: a scholar-gentleman, a person of enormous good will, of generous spirit, of kindness, grace, wit, and charm."

Stanford Professor Nel Noddings, also a Thomas doctoral student, remembers him as a "genius at teaching." "As a teacher, he had a way of listening to and gently prodding so that we led the class exactly where he wanted to go--even though he often complained that we never got around to 'Thomas' stuff. As an advisor, he was so thorough and considerate that the routine academic procedures seemed simple," Noddings recalls. "Always interested, always available, always respectful, he set an example hard to match, one I'm still trying to live up to. He was a gentle man, a supportive colleague, and an inspiring teacher." Hobert Burns, former provost at San Jose State University, has described what Larry meant to him. After a baccalaureate in political theory at Stanford, what need could he have had for philosophy of education in his graduate program? Writes Burns: "It took me a long time, perhaps as many as two or three lectures in Larry's class, to realize that in four years of undergraduate coursework, I'd never experienced such great teaching, never heard such stimulating ideas and, apart from certain experiences in World War II, never had my life and my intentions for life, changed so dramatically and so quickly. The hell with political science and law school; I wanted to become just what Larry was: a professor of philosophy of education." To this, Katz and Noddings say, "Amen."

As long ago as 1972, when Noddings and Katz were his students, Thomas was working on an article with the tentative title, "Living as an Art Form." Noddings remembers being enormously impressed by the good cheer and optimism with which Thomas faced the prospect of his own death.

Professor Thomas was predeceased by a son, David. He is survived by his wife, Evelyn, his son, Patrick, his brother, Frank, three grandchildren, and generations of grateful students.

Nel Noddings
Denis Phillips
Fannie Shaftel