



## Martha Thomas

May 29, 1918 - September 19, 2011

Martha Atwood Thomas was born on May 29, 1918, to Elmer Ray Atwood and Alice Sigler Atwood in Pittsfield, Ill. She died on Sept. 19, 2011, at Pike County Memorial Hospital in Louisiana, with her family by her side. She was 93. The third oldest of six Atwood children, Martha attended Higbee High School in Pittsfield, graduating in the spring of 1936. She earned her degree from Gem City Business College in Quincy, Ill., then returned to Pittsfield where she worked at Zimmerman Pontiac and R.C. Gray Chevrolet before joining CIPS, Central Illinois Public Service. Martha became office manager at a time when few women held management positions. She met her future husband, Jay S. Thomas II of Pleasant Hill, Ill., when he was hired by CIPS in 1940. The war in Europe was escalating, and Jay joined the Fifth Air Force in May 1941. The couple was married on October 18 of that year in a double ceremony in Jefferson City, MO, with Martha's brother, Eldon Atwood, and his bride, Alberta Bullard. Because CIPS had a policy against employing married women, the marriage was kept a secret until the spring of 1942 when Martha began working for Production Credit Association in Pittsfield, eventually becoming assistant office manager. By that time, Jay was on active military duty. A first lieutenant, he served in the southeast Pacific theater of war from January 1942 until March 1945. Following his discharge from the service, the couple moved to Canton, MO, where Jay attended Culver Stockton College on the GI Bill. By the time he earned his bachelor's degree in May 1948, Martha and Jay had two children, Jan Atwood Thomas and Jay S. Thomas III. Two more children, Martha Ann Thomas and Joyce Rae Thomas, were born in the next few years as the family lived in Louisiana, where Jay managed the Wes Olson Pontiac dealership. After Jay worked for a year in Columbia at the MFA Insurance Home Office, Martha and Jay purchased the MFA agency in Louisiana, opening it on September 1, 1956. Martha worked part-time at the office but was mostly a stay-at-home mother until Joy started school. At that time she joined Jay full time at the agency, working by his side until his retirement in 1986. Their son Jay joined the firm in 1972. Martha served as office manager and bookkeeper until just last year when declining health prevented her from continuing. The business is still in operation at 117 North Fifth St. in Louisiana in a building constructed by Jay and Martha themselves in 1962. In the 1980s, Jay and Martha purchased an antique carousel which Jay restored.

The couple traveled with the carousel, enabling many people to experience the thrill of an old-time carnival ride. Martha was active in myriad organizations. She and Jay loved to square dance and were long-time members of the Pike Promenaders, dancing every Saturday night in Pittsfield for many years. She was a lifetime member of The Order of Eastern Star, earning her 50-year pin. She and Jay helped found Illiamo, the Illinois/Iowa/Missouri Travel Council, a group dedicated to raising tourism along the Mississippi River in the tri-state area. Together, they worked countless boat and travel shows in those three states, proving to be effective ambassadors and bringing many new visitors to the area. Martha was also a charter member of the Louisiana Historical Preservation Association, LHPA, which was originally founded in the 1970s to save the Lewis Buildings, three historic structures in the 400 block of Georgia St. in Louisiana. The group was successful, and those buildings are now occupied by local businesses. One of Martha's special loves was being a board member of the Nurses' Educational Fund, a group which grants scholarships to students wishing to train as LPN's or RN's. She was a long-time member of the Louisiana Chamber of Commerce and the Women's Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter in Clarksville. Jay, Martha, and Jay built and opened Thomas Apartments East and West in Louisiana on July 1, 1979, which continues to provide homes for senior citizens. Martha was a faithful member of the Centenary United Methodist Church in Louisiana, attending services up until the week before her death. The couple parted when Jay died on Easter Sunday, April 15, 1990. Martha is survived by her four children, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. Jan Thomas and husband Cameron Smith live in Murphysboro, IL, where they are glass blowers and artists. Jay Thomas III and wife Debbie live in Louisiana where they continue to operate the Thomas Insurance Agency begun 55 years ago by Martha and Jay. Ann Thomas Narramore and husband Jerry are retired from Ameren UE and live south of Louisiana. Joy Thomas Cleaver and husband Philip are residents of Edmond, OK, where Joy teaches high school English. Martha's grandchildren and great-grandchildren are Jay S. Thomas IV, wife Irma, and daughter Isabella of Louisiana; Molly Elizabeth Thomas McDaniels and husband Ryan of Columbia, MO; Lisa Ann Cleaver Fore, husband Gene, and sons Charlie and Wesley of Guthrie, OK; Angela Joy Cleaver Briel and husband David of Indianapolis, IN; and Rachel Elizabeth Thomas Moses, husband John, and daughter Grace Elizabeth of Liberty, MO. Funeral services were held at Centenary United Methodist Church in Louisiana on Friday, Sept. 23, 2011. Cremation was followed by a private family burial service.

# Comments

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“ I grew up in Louisiana and graduated from LHS in 1967. I remember your family very well. I get the Press Journal via email and keep up with what's going on in Louisiana. Reading the obit brought back a lot of memories. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

**Jim "Hurley" Jordan** - September 19, 2011 at 12:00 AM

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“ Shiver me tmibres, them's some great information.

**Debrah** - September 19, 2011 at 12:00 AM