



Earlie Bee Thomas

December 11, 1945 - July 3, 2022

In 2019, Earlie Thomas quoted 2 Timothy 4:7 saying, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,’ and I intend to stay strong.” And he did.

On July 3, 2022, he finished well.

Born to Gertie Mae and Ray Thomas on December 11, 1945, and raised by Gertie Mae and Napoleon “Ren” Kinney in Denton, Texas, he was the sixth of eight children.

The family relocated to Denver in 1961, where Earlie graduated from Annunciation High School. An over-40-year association with Colorado State University began in 1967—first as a student/athlete, starting as a walk-on with the Rams and eventually becoming the captain of the football team; simultaneously, he earned his B. S. in Entomology. And, in the middle of all this, he married his favorite typist, Kathy, on August 1, 1969.

Earlie was drafted by the New York Jets in 1970; and in the same year, he proposed to Kathy once again: he would buy her “any electric typewriter she wanted,” if he could go to graduate school. He was the Jets’ starting right cornerback for the entirety of his career there, was runner-up for Rookie of the Year, and returned to Fort Collins each off-season to work towards his M. S. in

Entomology, which he completed in 1975. At the end of his fifth season with the Jets, he requested that he be traded to Denver—his 5-year-old son would be starting kindergarten in the fall and Earlie didn't want his son to have his school year disrupted by the moves between Colorado and New York. He played for the Broncos that 1975 season and retired the following year.

In the ensuing years, he owned two consulting firms—providing expertise to growers in four states; returned to CSU to work in Facilities Management and Industrial Sciences; and in 1995, accepted the position as the first full-time Director of the University's Environmental Health Services.

While an appetite for learning and a gift for creative and informed problem solving marked his professional careers, his true passion was coaching “the little guys” . . . and mentoring the bigger ones. For twenty summers, he coached the Fort Collins Track Club—boys and girls ages 8 to 18; and for at least thirty autumns, he coached JAA football teams. It is safe to say that, for at least forty years, there were very few CSU football players with hopes set on an NFL opportunity, who did not spend considerable time enjoying Earlie's mentorship. And, then, he decided to try his hand at community theater, preparing as only an elite athlete can, for roles with Bas Bleu Theatre and OpenStage.

A man of great faith and humility, he lived to care for and provide for his family, and to pour his life into virtually everyone whose path crossed his. Whether he was speaking at the graduation banquet for the NFL Commissioner's daughter, to an elementary classroom (“Big Daddy, would you please show your bugs to our school?”), to a gathering of prisoners, or a gym full of GIs, he shared his love of God by sharing his life with others.

Earlie is survived by four siblings—Earnest Williams, Jr. (Hui Suk), John Matt Williams (Meryle), David Williams (Mae), and Faye—and was preceded in

death by three siblings—Gertrude Rice, Ray Thomas, Jr., and Zackery Kinney. He loved unconditionally, protected, and provided for his wife of 52 years, Kathy, and their three sons—Garrett (Sonya), Ryan (Stephanie), and Jeramie (Jinny). Big Daddy adored, doted on, and would never say “no” to the “Gingerbread Gang”—his grandchildren Nichelle, Nina, Naishon, Riley, Imani, Isaak, Tommy, Rian, Jones, and Tsunami, and great-grandchildren Maya and Myles, with whom he leaves a legacy and a challenge to work hard, use the gifts He gave you to glorify Him, leave the results to Him, and to love all men as Christ has loved us. For him, the best vacations were the many times spent in Breckenridge and Hawai’i watching his sons, their wives, and the Gingerbread Gang create precious family memories. We can say with thankful confidence that, while Parkinson’s Disease took his body, it never touched his spirit!

Celebration of Life will be held 11 am, Monday, August 1, 2022 at Summitview Church, 1601 W. Drake Rd. Ft. Collins, CO 80525. live stream can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC98U4A8a0oAVZLpkg0GvarA>.

Donations in Earlie’s memory can be made to:

The Morris K. Udall Parkinson's Disease Research Center of Excellence
https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/neurology_neurosurgery/about_us/charitable_giving/neurology/index.html

G. R. I. T. Athletics
<https://gritathletics.com/>

Calvary Temple Christian Church
<https://www.calvarytemplecc.com/>

Loving Haiti

<https://www.lovinghaiti.org/>

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

AUG 1. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (MT)

Summitview Church
1601 W. Drake Rd.
Fort Collins, CO 80525

Tribute Wall

LM

“ I had the pleasure of meeting earlie Thomas on the panel at csu. He was working at environmental health services. Me at microbiology department. Really nice guy. Thoughts and prayers for his family and friends. Leeann Mitchell

LeeAnn Mitchell - March 21, 2025 at 08:41 AM

EP

“ One of the earliest memories our family shares after moving to Fort Collins is the Track Club for which Earlie was its guiding light. He was a competitor, but a gentle spirit that mentored the kids in the ways of achieving personal goals by beating personal records. FCTC members would not be surprised to have Earlie pay them a visit if he saw them working out at the CSU track during the day. His office was close by. We have been so fortunate to have had Earlie and Kathy as part of our lives and we wish Kathy and family the greatest of gratitude for your time, dedication, and devotion for our children, our family, and our community.

Blessings on you.

Ed and Barb Peyronnin - August 07, 2022 at 11:44 AM

VO

“ Dearest Kathy & Family,

I worked for decades at CSU with Earlie and also had the pleasure of working with Ryan @ PFA due to my work in law enforcement and emergency management.

Earlie was a man from humble beginnings, as was I, and so it was easy to recognize the badge that some of us wear of Perseverance, Tenacity, Empathy and Compassion! Adversity seems to either make or break you-Earlie just garnered more strength. Earlie learned resilience and shared his talents with the community as leaders usually do-they make the world a better place because they were here!

Leaders also empower others to be successful, as he did with his mentees and me. When I was assigned to the foothills lab as the security liaison-he offered me required training and also did so when I offered to do the BBP training for the police department and later housing staff.

Leaders must not sacrifice Integrity for the sake of personal or political gain. Earlie took the time to create a network and cultivated relationships so he could authentically balance and navigate safety and the ever present politics!

I hope we can take inspiration from Earlie's life and Walk Humbly, Act Justly and Embrace Mercy.

With Sympathy, Veronica Olivas

Veronica Olivas - August 02, 2022 at 03:29 PM

PM

“ Dear Kathy and Family,

Dale and I were so sorry to hear about Earlie. He was a great person and coach and always treated Jen with kindness and encouragement. We have fond memories of traveling with the Fort Collins Track Team all over the southwest and beyond.

We are thinking of you all;

Dale and Pat Marrou

P Marrou - August 02, 2022 at 01:52 PM

MI

“ Yesterday we were at the beach with some of my little grand nieces and nephews. From nowhere two beautiful butterflies came down and hung out in the cabana. I took the time to tell them about ET 45 and the bugs. I then told them that he played professional football. They wanted to see him ASAP. I said in time. I showed them his pictures from our visits and said that he was one of someone I hold so dear in my heart. I told them about Kathy and her cooking. The wanted to know why she never showed me how to cook. From the mouths of babs. I said he was teaching me to run backwards. He and Kathy gave us so much love. And it grew with this huge family. Love you.....

michaela - August 01, 2022 at 07:55 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Earlie Bee Thomas.*



August 01, 2022 at 01:05 PM

DF

“Dearest Kathy and Family, I can't express fully enough how much we all thought of Earlie. A truly exemplary man, gentle, loving, intelligent and dedicated, and the two of you were such a wonderful couple. I am so sorry that Bruce and I will be out of town for Earlie's celebration of life. We would have dearly loved to be there. Please know that our thoughts are with you.

With love, Bruce and Denise Freestone

Denise Freestone - July 27, 2022 at 03:22 PM

KM

“ *Kathy, Garrett, Ryan, Jeramie and families, I am so sorry to hear of Earlie's passing. I have so many positive memories from my interactions with Earlie.*

**Our relationship with the Thomas Family dates back 40+ years as Earlie and my dad (Larry) met in the hospital while Kathy was in labor with Jeramie and my mom with me (Kevin).*

**Earlie was quiet; when he spoke it was powerful.*

**Earlie's stare and reserved demeanor. It was hard for me to read what he was thinking.*

>JAA Football - Team Thomas vs. Team Marshall. I remember wanting to play well in order to impress Earlie. I played hard against Earlie's Teams, but I played with passion for Earlie. From junior high through high school, Jeramie and I played football together. In junior high, Earlie was an assistant coach / football advisor to our coaches.

Earlie enriched my life and I am so grateful for having known him.

My thoughts and prayers are with you all! Godspeed.

Kevin Marshall

Kevin Marshall - July 22, 2022 at 05:38 PM

DB

“ *Kathy and Family-- Years have passed since we walked together, but as are so many others, we have been enriched by Earlie's example. From 'back in the day' at First Christian 'till now, there's truly little need to echo the tributes being spoken of this Godly, gentle man. How uplifting it is to know the story told and the blessings recounted of Earlie are TRUE. We know full well you appreciate the legacy Earlie leaves; and in that legacy resides the Peace that passes all understanding. He walked in it... and so can you. Blessings!*

Dave and Betty Brown - July 20, 2022 at 06:33 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Earlie Bee Thomas.*



July 19, 2022 at 12:14 PM

DJ

“ *I was privileged to know Earlie while treating some of his football injuries (both with CSU and the New York Jets--he told me he had injured his elbow while tackling O.J.Simpson!). The last time we talked was after his wonderful acting performance at Bas Bleu theater, when we spent some time talking about the "old times." In his obituary, the Biblical phrase "I finished the race" was quoted. But Earlie didn't just "finish" the race--he WON it, and set some records along the way.*

Dr. Bob Johnson

Dr. Bob Johnson - July 18, 2022 at 06:35 PM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Earlie Bee Thomas.*



July 18, 2022 at 12:18 PM



“ *Sorry to hear about Earlie passsing he was a great man. my thoughts and prayers are with you. David Pearce*

DAVID PEARCE - July 17, 2022 at 07:29 PM



“ *Earlie Thomas was a truly elegant man. He's earned his rest.*

Mark Hanson - July 17, 2022 at 05:02 PM



“ *Sorry to hear of the passing of Earlie. When his 3 sons were at Lesher junior high I always enjoyed the meetings we had at back to school nights, Parent teacher conferences or at the sporting events the boys participated in. He was a good man and I am sure he will be missed. My thoughts and prayers are with you.
Jim Wertz*

jim wertz - July 17, 2022 at 04:40 PM

MR

“ I first met ET 45 when I was 7. My dad was very sick and and ET 45 and Kathy lived with us and they took care of me and my brother. What I loved the most was he would watch *The Electric Company* while taking one of his power naps. He would send the block out to find bugs. ET45 showed me so much about the bug world and how to respect it. He brought home a Tranchula and let it crawl up my arm. I found a praying mantis and brought it home only to have him show EVERYTHING about it. I call him ET 45 because he would make a killer bbq sauce.

ET45's life was cut too short. The world is a very empty place now but heaven is rocking with bug hunts, showing people how to run backwards and being with Christ.

Please pray for Kathy an ET's big family.

I was lucky to have had Kathy put the phone to his ear and I told him how much I loved him. He tried so hard to say it back but we understood each other.

And I always say that they have a true love story. Christ will help everyone get through this painful time.

So it is never goodbye. It is till we meet again in heaven.

I remember bike riding in Colorado on Easter Sunday. Horse riding and just feeling happy.

I can go on forever..... but that is not enough time. Love you and Kathy with all my heart

Michaela

michaela rudden - July 17, 2022 at 01:12 PM

CB

“ As I read through the story of his life I was reminded of the summer track times that he was the mentor for our oldest son, Russell A true inspiration for those young lives in always do your best believe in your self and be true to the person in your life that carries you through this challenge of life. Thanks to the Thomas family for sharing this man with all the young lives of Fort Collins. Russell and Jeramie were the same age and while different pieces of the track experience were being done the support was equal and training the same. Thanks for all those early lessons in life.
Charlene, Terry, Russell and Matthew Brown

Charlene K Brown - July 17, 2022 at 12:29 PM

MH

“ Earlie was such a special man! I knew him through the CSU Environmental Health & Safety program at CSU when I was in grad school and later when I was working in the field. He was a gentle, kind, and brilliant man and he will be greatly missed. Just want you to know that I am thinking and praying for all of you as you grieve his passing. What a blessing to the world he was!

Melanie Huibregtse - July 17, 2022 at 08:34 AM

PK

“ My condolences to all the family. I remember Earlie from coaching with him for the Fort Collins track club. Earlie made coaching fun but with good results on the track. He was usually smiling or laughing and that's how I will remember him
Patrick Kitchens

Patrick Kitchens - July 13, 2022 at 12:45 AM

PD

“ *Earlie Thomas was a beautiful, kind and caring gentleman. He truly was the epitome of; Let us make man to our image and likeness Gen. 1: 26 DRB. I offer my prayers and condolences to the Thomas family. God bless all.*

Peter J Dunphy

Peter J. Dunphy - July 12, 2022 at 07:51 PM

JB

“ *I have great memories of Earlie Thomas along with finding out the type of person he was. Of course he was a tremendous competitor, but also a great coach as you could tell in his sons accomplishments, especially in track and field. Earlie played on the same intramural adult basketball team with me in the 70's and I really enjoyed his friendship and competitiveness. We then followed our children in school events and then our grandchildren. Earlie was an unbelievable father, husband, and coach and one tremendous football player that I will always remember. He was definitely a mentor to a number of young men. Rest in Peace my good friend. My deepest sympathy and condolences to all of his family. God Bless. Jerry Brumit*

Jerry Brumit - July 12, 2022 at 04:26 PM

JM

Kathy and Family..... Our thoughts, Love and Prayers are sent to you that "The Joy of the Lord.....may continue to be your Strength for today..... and Hope for Tomorrow."

Jim and Eunice Michalka

Earlie was a Blessing and Inspiration to our Men's Group and Fellowship at E. Free..... he will always be remembered for the Fruits of the Spirit in his Life. Amen.

James Michalka - July 26, 2022 at 12:36 PM

LR

I first met Earlie when I was a freshman living in CSU's Aylesworth Hall in 1968. I've never been a football fan but you didn't need to be to have an interesting conversation with him. I remember his fascination with insects, an interest related to his major, and his gentle humor. Fifteen years later we would reconnect when as part of my job with University Communications I interviewed him about his job in environmental safety at CSU. By then I knew of his many athletic accomplishments but was reminded of the depth of his interests and the diversity of his skills. Years later I would see him performing on stage. Earlie was a contemporary Renaissance Man, a warm and authentic friend even with intermittent relationships. This community is better for having been blessed with his presence.

Liam Rooney - July 30, 2022 at 03:15 AM

DB

I worked with Earlie Thomas at CSU when our college had violations of hazardous material handling regulations with laboratories. I was always impressed with his professional demeanor and abilities to work out solutions that were effective for all involved. My sincere condolences to his family

Dennis Bogott - August 01, 2022 at 04:03 PM