

MARTHA RILEY BORN 21 MAY, 1932---DIED 28 NOVEMBER. 2018

Martha Anna Thomas was born, 21 May, 1932 in Sharon, Pennsylvania. Her mother was Vesta Lucille Randall. Martha's father, Ralph J. Thomas, lost his job at Westinghouse the day she was born. With his savings, he bought a farm so he could provide food for his family.

On 1 December 1933, Aunt Mildred Thomas, died, after giving birth, leaving four sons and a daughter. The five children were raised by Martha's family. So, Martha grew up with 5 cousins in her home in addition to her three sisters. The oldest, Dalton Thomas, was killed on 1 December, 1944 in Germany, during World War II. It was hard losing him. He was like a big brother to her.

Martha surrendered her life to Christ at an early age. At the age of 9, she felt called to be a missionary and started to prepare for that work. Martha graduated from Jamestown, Pennsylvania High School, class of 1950.

1950 to 1954 – she attended Chicago Evangelical Institute. To pay her way, she worked in factories, did house cleaning and baby-sitting. Worked at many jobs during her vacations. While at CEI, the School was moved to Iowa and the name was changed to Vennard College (Bible college). She graduated with a BA degree.

1955 to 1958 - she taught grade school in Hartford Ohio. She saved up money for Nurse's Training. She attended refresher courses at Greenville College in 1956 and 1957 where she met her future husband, Paul Riley.

1958 to 1961 - Nurse's Training at Meadville, PA, School of Nursing, earning her RN degree. 13 June, 1961, on her father's birthday, Martha married Paul Riley in her home Church (East Fallowfield Methodist Church) very near her home in Atlantic, Pennsylvania.

1961 to 1966 – Paul and Martha lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Paul trained to be a surgeon. She worked as a nurse in Butterworth and St. Mary's hospitals until daughter, Leora, was born. Attended Evangelical Covenant Church Sunday Mornings and the Free Methodist Church at night. Worked in both nurseries. Taught Bible Classes. Had two more daughters while there, Lorraine and Cynthia (Cindy).

1966 - Paul was drafted into the Army. Martha stayed with her parents in Mesa, Arizona, for first six weeks while Paul was taking basic training in San Antonio, Texas. Then moved to San Pedro, California where Paul was a Surgeon at Fort MacArthur Army Hospital. Had a lot of visitors. Had season tickets to Disneyland and Marineland. For the last nine months she was alone with her three girls while Paul was in Viet Nam. Met Paul in Hawaii where he had R&R. Was a member of Rolling Hills Covenant Church. Became friends with Lois Carlson, widow of Dr. Paul Carlson who had been killed by Terrorists in the Congo.

February, 1968 - Husband, Paul, returned from Viet Nam. Leora started first grade. They started preparing to go to Africa as missionaries. These preparations included joining the San Pedro Church of the Nazarene.

October, 1968 to December 31, 1984 – Paul and Martha were Nazarene missionary to Swaziland. Martha did many jobs in Swaziland - kept hospital statistics, sorted “box work” (used clothing and other items sent to the mission station), taught teen and children’s Sunday School at Living Waters Church of the Nazarene. She helped start that Church. Martha housed many volunteer groups and supervised sewing circles making hospital curtains and linens; groups of kids and teens doing assembly line gift-wrapping and bagging candy for the nursing students, “pill popping” (pushing the donated medications from their cards so they could be used in the hospital pharmacy).

Martha was a determined, hardworking, independent and caring woman. She was a talented cook, baker, seamstress, bargain-hunter and hostess. If you had a dishware pattern, she would look for it during her weekly thrift-store runs where she would drop off newspapers for them to wrap delicate items in. Martha was the type to give you the shirt off her back. Her daughters loved giggling with her, following behind her singing, “Leader of the Pack”, as she would stride ahead of them. Her strength of character and work ethic were commendable.

December, 1982 - Family settled in Riverside, California. Husband, Paul started working with two Nazarene Surgeons. Her three girls attended and graduated from Point Loma College. She worked as Assistant Pastor at Fontana Church of the Nazarene. During this time they attended the Arlington Avenue Church of the Nazarene. Also, taught Bible Studies and helped out at several Churches. Husband, Paul retired June 30, 2002. Paul and Martha joined the Palm Springs Nazarene Church where Paul’s niece’s husband pastored for a time.

At age of 80 she like two of her sisters, she started showing signs of senile dementia. Her husband, Paul, cared for her as long as he could. In August, 2018, she was placed in Gold Living Home Care, where she had excellent care. Martha died in her sleep on 28 November 2018.

She is preceded in death by her parents and three sisters. Her younger sister, Esther, just died 6 November, 2018. Older sisters, Ruth, died in 2009, and Jean died in 2013. Martha is survived by her husband, Paul, three daughters, nine grandchildren and three great granddaughters, and the last of her Thomas cousins, Bill Thomas. Her daughter, Cynthia sends flowers on Memorial Day, to be placed on Dalton Thomas’s grave in the American, WWII, Military Cemetery, in Margraten, Netherlands