

Thomas Edward Thompson

Thomas Edward Thompson, Harry F. Byrd, Jr. Professor Emeritus and former Chairman of the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, died on November 16th, 2021, at the Martha Jefferson House in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The only son of Theron and Florence Thompson, Thomas was born on March 15, 1926, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After serving in the Army from 1944 to 1946, he attended Kalamazoo College and obtained his B.A. in 1949. Dr. Thompson received his Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Harvard University in 1955. Following postdoctoral fellowships in Sweden and England, in 1958 he became Assistant Professor and then Associate Professor of Physiological Chemistry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. In 1966, he joined the faculty of the University of Virginia as Professor and Chairman of the Department of Biochemistry. Dr. Thompson served as Department Chair until 1976 and continued to teach and conduct research in the department until his retirement in 1997.

Dr. Thompson's research concerned the biophysical study of the structure and functions of biological membranes with special emphases on the lipid bilayer component. He was also interested in the physical chemistry of phospholipids, lipid-proteins and macro-molecular interactions. He authored more than 200 scientific publications based on his studies and the work of over sixty post-doctoral fellows, graduate students, and faculty colleagues. He held both pre- and postdoctoral fellowships, a Career Development Award, and Merit Award from the National Institutes of Health. Among other honors he was President of the Biophysical Society in 1976, received the Macy Faculty Scholar Award, the K. C. Cole Award, The Alexander von Humboldt Prize, and the Avanti Award in Lipids. In 1999, he was elected a Fellow of the Biophysical Society and served as Editor of the Biophysical Journal from 1987 to 1992. A member of the editorial and advisory boards of a number of scientific journals, he also served as a scientific consultant to the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation for many years. He was a member of the Society of Fellows of the University of Virginia.

In addition to his scientific interests, Tom was devoted to his wife Maria-Michaela (Mike) Smits, whom he met and married while both pursued their doctorates. Their Greenwood home and table were a welcome gathering site

for family, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. Guests could count on a meal drawn from their garden's bounty, which Tom and Mike planned and tended together. Family ski, canoe, camping, and fishing trips were treasured events, as were department and neighborhood gatherings. Thompson holiday meals nearly always included graduate students and post-docs, and Tom maintained friendships across the nation and around the world. In later years Tom and Mike made annual trips to Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado to pursue their shared passion for fly fishing and the outdoors. A proud and adoring grandfather, he cherished the many talents of his sons, their wives, and grandchildren.

Dr. Thompson is survived by his wife of 68 years, Maria-Michaela Smits; three sons and their spouses, Stephen and Claire and daughter Amelia of Charlottesville; Christopher and Perrin and daughter Elizabeth of Portland, Oregon; and David and Margaret and children Henry and Rowan of Afton, Virginia. He was predeceased in 1980 by his oldest son Peter.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial contributions be made to the Ivy Creek Foundation (<https://ivycreekfoundation.org/>) or Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville (<https://www.cvillehabitat.org/>).