



## James Alexander Craig Thom

May 26, 1933 - January 30, 2023

James Alexander Thom was born in 1933, the son of Dr. Jay W. and Dr. Julia S. Thom of Gosport. He will be remembered by many as the Mark Twain of Owen County, Indiana. Jim was far too humble, and honored Twain far too highly to claim that title when addressed as such, but all those who knew him well will testify to his brilliant wit, his puns, and his excellent writing, including historical novels, many of which focused on the lives of the midwest indigenous tribes. He was a writer's writer, an artist in wood and ink, but more than that, he was a multi-faceted man who, with his loving wife, Dark Rain Thom, discovered what it means to be a human being and walk sacredly upon the earth.

He died in his self-built cabin, constructed of old hand-hewn logs, on the land he loved. The cabin stands as a testament to Jim's artful appreciation of labor, balance, and living in harmony with the earth. Jim was truly a Renaissance man, blending many talents into a life of beauty and wisdom. The patience and pursuit of perfection so evident in his woodworking was perhaps even more beautifully expressed in his wordsmithing. Great writers do not accept the false maxim that any word will do. Rather they seek the right word. As a woodworker strives to allow the grain of the wood to shine, so does a wordsmith strive to follow the grain of a thought to its perfect expression. Never satisfied with slipshod construction, he sought the perfect conveyance of thought to the reader, so much so that one walks stealthily with Mary Engles in *Follow the River* on her trek through the forest along the Ohio, or

bravely fights with Tecumseh along the Maumee in Panther in the Sky. You simply can't pick up a book of Jim's authorship that is not well worth the reading.

Jim was a U.S. Marine veteran having served in the Korean War, after which he became a committed peacemaker and outspoken critic of Presidents who pursued war. His letters to the Herald Times during the Iraq Wars of both Bushes and the chaos of the Trump years were satirical gems of the highest order. In addition to writing in times of war, he found a source of solace in the sculpting of wood into expressions of serenity. If there is a special watering hole for writers and artists in the afterlife, Jim is sipping scotch (Laphroaig) with Kurt Vonnegut and Howard Zinn, fellow veterans-turned-peacemakers with whom he shared close friendships.

In his final days on earth, he was supported by a group of neighbors, friends, and relatives who loved him dearly, and by Dark Rain Thom, the woman he loved and credited for his writing so well and living so long. She and his niece, Cinda, were at his side as he took his last breath, as was his friend and minister, Bill Breeden. Our world was made more beautiful by Jim Thom's presence. His journey to the other side camp was blessed by the singing of the tribal women of the Shawnee, a people he loved, and by whom he was known as "Sunset Watcher."

The beautiful body that housed his spirit lay on the deck of his cabin in a coffin made by Trappist monks. He was visited by family, friends, squirrels, birds by day, and raccoons by night. His final departure from home was in the back of a '96 Ford F250 pickup followed by a procession of cars. In keeping with his wishes, cremation rights were accorded at Allen Funeral Home and Crematory with Dark Rain, family and friends in attendance.

In addition to his parents Jim was preceded in death by his sister Julia, brothers John and Bob, and niece Julia.

Jim is survived by his wife Dark Rain Thom, nieces Julie Clemons Brault, Pamela Clemons Gutierrez, Cinda Clemons Farkas; nephews Thor Clemons, Alen Clemons, and Jeff Thom. Shawnee daughters: Laurie Hiltibran

(Manukimae-“Spring”) and Laurel Jay (Maticia-“Speaks with Trees”). Special Shawnee Friends: Desawin Ballard, Many Horses, Stands Between Joe DiMaggio, Yahma “Butch” Shepherd. Special friends: Sam, Carol, and Lori Clark, Dick Cady, Wendell Berry, Dennis Neary, Ken Carstens, Charlotte Zeitlow, Bill and Glenda Breeden, Robert Meitus and Carrie Newcomer, “Strats” Stratigos, Paul and Jackie Stogsdill family, Sara and Tim Couch, Bridgette and Charlie Savage, Scott Sanders, Patty Hon, Jaime Sweany, Jenny Stankiewicz, Anna Marie, John Sugden, Linda Chapman, Steve May, Lane Booker Mike Leonard, Dennis Reardon, Dan Carpenter, George Saunders, Bob Hammel and many others. He is also survived by his writing, an enduring gift for generations to come.

A celebration of the life of James Alexander Thom will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington, IN on his 90th birthdate, May 28, 2023. Details will be announced at a later date.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory have been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences, photos and memories may be shared with family and friends at [www.allencares.com](http://www.allencares.com)

# Tribute Wall



“ I was walking the trail to Donaldson cave at Spring Mill when I passed a man & his wife & I thought...who is that?..Later I realized it was James Alexander Thom & Dark Rain! Never met them but I've read & re-read his books many times....my favorite author

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**Lisa Webb** - December 06, 2025 at 07:07 PM

AD

“ I miss you more than you know, and I got an Archy and Mehitabel tattoo in your memory. I miss our talks and your stories and your tender heart and care. I will never forget you for as long as I live. May love and peace be with Dark Rain and all who loved you.

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**Annie DeRolf** - May 23, 2024 at 02:11 PM

SC

“ I was a fan of Jim's books for years before I was lucky enough to meet him and call him friend. He was selfless in his sharing, helping me frame my historical writing with his brilliant insight. I loved the stories he shared during our visits in his wonderful cabin. My regret is that I didn't make this connection until the last few years. His wit and wisdom were gifts he shared with so many. I feel blessed to have been one. I think of him often in the quiet times. -- Susan Crandall

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**Susan Crandall** - June 05, 2023 at 06:46 PM

GE

“ I had read a few of James' earlier novels when I tracked him down in the late 1980's, asking if I could do a feature story on him for WTHI-TV in Terre Haute. He was a quiet, private person, and said, "Well, anyone who can manage to find me deserves to be allowed to do the interview." I was so flattered by his kindness, and of course, deeply impressed by his lifestyle in the woods of rural Monroe County. He and Dark Rain became friends of my wife and me, and we were thrilled when we were invited to dinner at their cabin in the 1990's. I have never known a kinder couple. Jim valued human decency and our religious and political beliefs were nearly identical. I miss you greatly, Jim, and Dark Rain, if you are reading this, please know Rita and I miss you, too, and wish you only the best. Thank you so much for sharing your amazing lives and for being our friends. George and Rita Eisele.

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**George Eisele** - May 19, 2023 at 11:13 PM

DN

“ 1 file added to the album *Jim and Dark Rain*



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**DENNIS R NEARY** - May 18, 2023 at 03:57 PM

DM

“ Mr Thom, you don't know me, and I don't "know" you...except through your books. Met you at a Lewis & Clark event in Charlottesville 2003. So impressed with your kind and quiet soul that had so much to share with your written words. Love those words, love you for them. Thank you for all of the knowledge and pleasure you have given me. I very much hope you are loving your next chapter. My respect to you, Dark Rain~ Diana

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**Diana Marchibroda** - May 12, 2023 at 10:37 AM

DM

“ I am sending prayers for all of Dr Thom's family. He was the kindest person I have ever had the pleasure of knowing though it was only through emails. I am still in awe that he would take the time to write to me and just talk about all his books. I have read them all, some he signed for me, and they are my "treasures". Dark Rain my heart goes out to you. My husband of almost 65 years passed away on Feb. 6 . so I am feeling very sad now. Dr Thom brightened many days as my husband wasted away from Alzheimers. For that I will be forever grateful. May your memories ease your sorrow and bring you happiness.

Most Sincerely,

Danielle McNeely, Clearwater, Florida.

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**Danielle McNeely** - March 24, 2023 at 02:53 AM

TA

“ My grandmother, who passed away in 2006, gave me *Follow the River* & told me that we were somehow related to Mr. Thom. My mother became ill a couple of years ago & in the months before her passing, we enjoyed reading other Thom novels. I'm sadden to learn of his passing & grateful for the legacy he left behind. Peace to him, his family & loved ones.

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**Tara** - February 19, 2023 at 01:45 AM

RR

“ As a nurse, I have had the honor of meeting and taking care of many patients and their families and friends. Mr. Thom is one person who touched my heart. He had a beautiful soul. His amazing spirit was almost tangible. I will never forget him or the love that his family and friends showed him...

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**Rebecca Jones, RN** - February 15, 2023 at 06:38 AM

JA

“ I met Jim Thom when he attended a performance of my play, "The Prosecution of Judge Waite," starring two of his friends, Gladys DeVane and Bill Breeden. There was definitely a meeting of the minds about the Supreme Court's fraudulent pursuit of corporate personhood in behalf of the 19th century railroad czars. He was a towering figure in the community whose loss I will feel personally. My wife and I extend our sympathy to his widow.

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**James Allison** - February 14, 2023 at 01:26 PM

DH

“ I've read every book he has written. I cherish the memory of each one. I met him once when he signed a book for me. He was a great gift to the world. Godspeed.

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**Denise Hayden** - February 12, 2023 at 07:39 PM

DF

“As an eager student attending IU, I had a teacher that took the time to interview each one of his students to find out what brought us to his class.

*As I shared my love of writing, he asked why Journalism? It was an easy question to answer. As a child, I had read a story in Reader's Digest about a young reporter covering the police beat for the Indianapolis Star. The story was entitled, "The Perfect Picture." I described the tough decision the reporter needed to make as he had witnessed both the worst day of someone's life and his own big moment with a camera ready!*

*With happy tears in my eyes, I was excited to tell of the reporter's true heart and soul winning out. As I finished, my teacher turned his chair toward a filing cabinet, sifted through some folders, and revealed that he was that young reporter! James Alexander Thom was my inspiration and moral compass for the writer I aspired to become!*

*A silence lingered as I composed myself. I do recall thanking him as I fought back more tears. His example of kindness, creativity, respect, and honesty has made all of us better humans.*

*Thank you for being genuine.*

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**Dinah F.** - February 12, 2023 at 05:56 PM

PN

“I met Jim at the post office when he came in to mail his manuscripts many years ago. Then I met Dark Rain. Truly two beautiful people. Jim, you will be missed by many.

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**Patricia New** - February 12, 2023 at 12:59 PM

MC

“ Saddened to learn of the passing of this incredible author. I met Mr Thom at a Bloomington print shop many years ago, an unmistakable figure. He had recently married Dark Rain. He was so gracious and spoke with me at length. I had read all of his books at least once this point and was anxious for the next publication. I always have a hard time finishing his work, because I simply do not want the story to end. Am currently rereading Saint Patrick's Battalion because it has a sequel in Fire in the Water which I will reread next. It may take me a long while to reach the end. God Bless him. He is already missed.

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**Michael Carter** - February 12, 2023 at 12:19 PM

DR

“ I watched Jim stride out of the Spencer Evening World office in 1975 and said, "Wow." It was the beginning of a long friendship. Write on, my friend, in a new dimension. You may have glimpsed the secret before, but now you know it. ~~Dixie

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**Dixie Richardson** - February 11, 2023 at 06:21 PM

PC

“ Mr. Thom was one of the nicest men I have ever met. I was always happy to see him and sometimes his wife at the Bloomington VA Clinic. He will be deeply missed by all that had the pleasure of meeting him. Prayers to his wife and family.

*Pam Carr*

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**Pam Carr** - February 10, 2023 at 01:04 PM

MS

*Mr. Thom and I never met but when I read Long Knife it was the beginning of an odyssey that included reading all his books, joining the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, attending their annual meetings throughout the United States, and researching Native American tribes their histories, and their warriors. Thank you James for enriching my life in countless ways. Your love of history, and your great literary talent, was a gift to all who now share your passion.*

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**Maria Smith** - July 25, 2023 at 04:07 PM

JC

*Just today I told a friend about my favorite author...James A. Thom. I hadn't heard anything about him for a long time, so I checked up on him to sadly find out that he had passed away. I Loved his books.... "From Sea to Shining Sea" will always be my very favorite one. I'm so glad I got to meet him a couple of times. He was a wonderfully kind person with a great talent for writing historical novels. Joanna Coleman Feb.4, 2025*

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**Joanna Coleman** - February 04, 2025 at 05:29 PM