

Thomas J. Rillo

August 28, 1927 - May 25, 2021

Thomas J. Rillo of Bloomington passed away on May 25, 2021. He was born August 28, 1927 in Summit, New Jersey to Theodore and Louise Rillo, who were Italian immigrants. Tom grew up in Summit and was a talented athlete - participating at the varsity level in football, basketball, and track. He was a state finalist in the javelin and discus. After high school in 1945, he entered the Army Air Corps and was trained in high altitude radar, eventually being assigned to a weather reconnaissance unit in Boca Raton, Florida. After surviving hurricanes and a plane crash, he moved on to attending Panzer College (now Montclair State University) in Montclair, New Jersey, majoring in Physical Education and Exercise Physiology. After graduation, Tom became a physical education teacher and coach at Summit and Millburn High Schools. His next teaching position was assistant professor and coach at Montclair State University, where he taught physical education classes and coached varsity soccer and wrestling. In addition, he taught outdoor education classes for teachers and accompanied college students to the New Jersey State School of Conservation for field experiences with an emphasis on outdoor teaching techniques. Later, Tom earned a master's degree from Seton Hall University and also did graduate studies in outdoor education at New York University. His time in New York City provided him the opportunity to meet anyone from notable Greenwich Village folk singers to Joseph Pilates. Tom earned a Ph.D degree from Southern Illinois University in Outdoor Education. This led to a return to New Jersey in 1967 and a professorship at

Glassboro State College (now Rowan University), along with being chair of the environmental education component of the science department. He was widely regarded as a pioneer in outdoor environmental education. In 1972, Tom accepted a full professorship at Indiana University. He taught both on campus and at Bradford Woods, the University's outdoor center. In 1980, he began spending summers at the American Wilderness Leadership School in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where he taught natural history, alpine ecology, outdoor teaching techniques, as well as outdoor recreation activities such as fly fishing, whitewater rafting, stress challenge activities, mountain trekking and climbing.

In 1992, Tom retired from Indiana University. He continued teaching at the American Wilderness Leadership School for 5 more summers. In retirement, he was a rehab personal trainer at the Monroe County YMCA for 10 years. He also was an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Indiana, writing for the various publications produced by the oblate office. He had a passion for writing poetry, especially with spiritual and outdoor themes.

Tom was preceded in death by his wife of 61 years, Joan - who passed away in February 2018. Survivors include son Thomas and his wife Dee, son Kevin and his friend Katherine Kase Ingram, daughter Kathleen and her husband Tim Gooldy, grandson Nicholas Rillo, granddaughter Kayla Rillo, brother John Rillo, niece Jackie Fligner (Mark), niece Linda Vega (Carlos), grandnephew Michael Vega.

Tom often said that his marriage to Joan was forged in heaven. Their lives were very compatible, and they assisted and supported each other in many endeavors, including 22 years of travel in retirement. Much of this travel was with the Prime Time travel program offered by Monroe Bank in Bloomington, Indiana. But they also traveled extensively on pilgrimages with the Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Tom and Joan were very active in Saint Charles Catholic Church. They both served as Eucharistic ministers, and Tom was a lector as well. They were leaders in the Cursillo movement and worked many retreats. Tom and Joan felt that their lives were a gift from God, and they did their best

to give their gift back to God through their service to others.

The Rillo siblings would like to especially thank Dee Rillo for the caregiving she provided to their parents over the years. Truly above and beyond what could be expected from a daughter-in-law. Also, heartfelt thanks to Jackie Strobel, our father's caregiver in his last year. We are so grateful that there are kind souls like both of you in this world.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at St. Charles Borromeo Church on Monday May 31, 2021 at 1:00PM, with Father Michael Keucher presiding. The Mass will be live-streamed at <https://youtu.be/JllsTE7uLTY>

Visitation will also be held Monday at the church from 11:00AM to 1:00PM.

Graveside services complete with Military Honors will be held Tuesday afternoon, June 1, 2021 at 3PM at Valhalla Memory Gardens.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in honor of Thomas J. Rillo to Saint Meinrad Archdiocese School of Theology, Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, IN (saintmeinrad.org).

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory 4155 South Old State Road 37 is handling the arrangements and online condolences, photos and memories may be shared with family and friends at www.allencares.com

Cemetery Details

Valhalla Memory Gardens

310 North Johnson Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47401

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 31. 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (ET)

St Charles Borromeo Church
2222 E 3rd St
Bloomington, IN 47401-5385
(812) 336-6846

Mass of Christian Burial

MAY 31. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (ET)

St Charles Borromeo Church
2222 E 3rd St
Bloomington, IN 47401-5385
(812) 336-6846

Graveside Service

JUN 1. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Valhalla Memory Gardens
310 North Johnson Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47401

Tribute Wall

DR

“ I am just seeing this page about Tom. I knew he had passed and my sincere condolences to his family. Recently, I received an award from the School of Public Health regarding my service to equity and social justice and thought about Tom which brought me here. I took two classes from Tom, his outdoor ventures through film, which was fascinating and the LBL course. We had many interactions outside his course, however, since I lived at Bradford Woods during my grad work and was around the department a lot. I would drop in and have chats with him when I saw him in his office. I was just finishing my Masters and was offered an opportunity to continue on with the Ph.D.. I wasn't sure and had a chat with Tom to see what he thought. Of course, he was very encouraging. He told me it was "the ultimate union card" and he was right. I left his office with no more doubt and that decision changed my life. Thanks, Tom and God Bless.

Don Rogers

Donald Rogers - December 16, 2024 at 03:12 PM

LU

“ Tom, Joan, and family were close neighbors of ours on Georgetown Rd. Tom Jr was the same age as my brother, Bob, Kevin and I were classmates, and Kathy and my sister Kris were good friends. Mom and Joan would go out running together -- I picked up that habit later as well! In addition, we all shared the love of swimming. Kevin always was buff with the exception of his chicken legs! Had to throw that in, Kevin! Don't skip leg day!! Tom and my mom both swam masters together and I'll never forget Tom's sense of humor. A vivid memory I still have to this day is seeing Tom in the grocery store. He sees us (Mom and I) and LOUDLY states to my mom, "I didn't recognize you with your clothes on!" - referencing the swimming in the pool of course, though also just wanting to see what kind of chuckle he could get from my mom. Always a smile and great man!

I miss seeing all of the Rillos -- and over the years have thought of you all greatly. Tom and Joan will be missed by all of us. My prayers are with your family.

Lise (Brown) Urbaczewski

Lise Urbaczewski - June 03, 2023 at 04:01 PM

MS

“ Dr. Rillo was my favorite professor in my graduate studies at IU. His love of the outdoors inspired me and his lectures were always entertaining. I will always remember him.

Mark Schnur - August 15, 2022 at 03:39 PM

DL

“ April 11, 2022: For some odd reason, in May 2021, I purchased and renovated a pole barn into a community recreation center for my neighborhood. What compelled me to do this I keep asking? Then Dr. Rillo popped in my mind and I have felt compelled to look up my absolute favorite IU professor and advisor. Then I discovered this obituary and had to write.

I chose Dr. Rillo as my advisor and would not accept anyone else and I was so glad I did. I am sorry I did not reach out sooner to inform him of how much he influenced me. I am 67 years old and starting a new chapter myself, with my college years channeling through me. Dr. Rillo will always be an influence.

Debbie Lane - April 11, 2022 at 11:35 AM

DJ

“ Over the past few years I made an earnest attempt to reach out to Dr. Rillo to have the joy of re-connecting with my former advisor and mentor at Indiana University. He worked on my behalf for several years until I graduated with my doctorate in 1976 from Indiana University. My regret is that I did not reconnect in time. One of the reasons I chose to earn both my masters and doctorate in the fields of parks and recreation management with an emphasis on outdoor education was because of his reputation. I thrived under his guidance and made sure that he was a member of my doctoral committee. Some of my fondest memories were the classes I took from him based at the IU Bradford Woods Outdoor Education Center. I still have my slide collection that he graciously shared with me of his mentor L.B. Sharpe, "father of outdoor education" with whom he had studied. I thrived under his leadership and will forever carry his memory as a gifted outdoor educator. Most of my professional career has been in the field of outdoor education both as a teacher, camp director, and university professor. He continues to inspire and guide my life and that is up to now, a blessing of 45 years. Thanks Dr. Rillo!!

Dr. Russel E. Bachert, Jr.

Dr. Russel E. Bachert, Jr. - July 29, 2021 at 12:39 AM

VB

“ I was fortunate to have many classes with Dr Rillo in the early 1980s and found in him a mentor and source of wonderful inspiration. Two years ago I was very lucky to reconnect with him along with three other classmates and we enjoyed several days with Dr Rillo. His love for the outdoors, the people he mentored, his church and faith were unwavering. I will always feel blessed he was a part of my life. I send my heartfelt condolences to the family.

Vicki Basman - June 05, 2021 at 03:49 AM

LW

“ I was on sabbatical from U of Ky Extension Service . Debating where to go to study for an MS in Outdoor Education,one of the faculty said “ study under Dr.Rillo!”.I chose IU. Best memory of Dr.Rillo was first day in class he went around the room and told something about each person! Last time I talked to him I was looking for Buffalo Tro recipe. Great man and teacher

Lowell Wagner - June 04, 2021 at 03:51 PM



“ I was happy to have known Dr. Rillo through his work at Indiana University and frequently crossed paths with him and Tom Jr. at the Y. What an inspiring and spirited man he was! His was a life well-lived My deepest sympathies to the family.

Cathy Meyer - June 02, 2021 at 12:03 PM

JF

“ Doc and I shared a day in Indianapolis together as we both decided at the same time to become Certified Weight Training instructors. we talked frequently at the Y over many years. Bright, curious, and never aging seemingly.
I wanted to extend my sympathies to the family but especially to Tom and Dee. Dee for all the '25 hours a day' work you've done. Tom - one of my three racquetball partners for years and years, never would speak to me between games as it spoiled his killer attitude but instantly fine after we were done. I miss playing with you, buddy. All the best things to you.

jonathan m fitch - May 31, 2021 at 02:30 PM

TU

“ I first met Thomas Rillo when I took his outdoor education class for teachers. That was 40 years ago, it was my last class for my masters degree and I was 8 months pregnant. I still remember things I learned in that class, used much of it in my teaching. It was a fascinating class for me since I grew up in Brooklyn, New York and knew nothing about the outdoors. I didn't know how nervous I made him since I was so pregnant until a few months later when I saw him at church. He was a fantastic educator. I am sorry for your loss and I would like you to know he made a wonderful difference in this world.

Trisha Ulrich - May 31, 2021 at 01:39 PM

MM

“ To Tom, Dee, and Nick (our former backyard neighbors in PRE) and all the Rillo family... sending our caring thoughts and sympathy for the loss of a very special man.
Sincerely, Melanie Miller & Michael Finger



Melanie Miller - May 30, 2021 at 09:10 PM

DG

“ What a truly delightful man. Smart, witty, gracious, and oh so physically fit. A superb athlete, accomplished outdoorsman , and gifted caring teacher. Proud to have been a fellow colleague at IU for many wonderful years. Dr Tom Rillo: A life so well lived.
Condolences to all family and friends.
David & Ellie Gallahue

david/Ellie Gallahue - May 30, 2021 at 03:17 PM

MJ

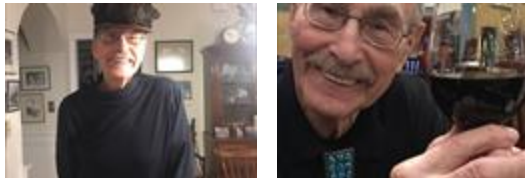
“ 2 files added to the album *Pictures of Tom*



Marian Janes - May 30, 2021 at 10:50 AM

MJ

“ 2 files added to the album *Memories Album*



Marian Janes - May 30, 2021 at 10:47 AM

PW

“ *I first met Dr. Rillo in 1980 as an undergraduate in the Rec. program at I.U. Over the years I was blessed to be able to assist Doc in many Buffalo Tro's at Bradford Woods and at many other locations. He was not only a professor to me but a mentor and friend. He will be sorely missed by all who had the pleasure to know him. His legacy lives on in the many outdoor educators he taught who were lucky enough to share his passion for teaching the appreciation of our outdoor environment. A life truly well lived.*

Philip V Wilson - May 30, 2021 at 10:44 AM

MY

As a professor at IU, Dr. Tom Rillo inspired as well as instructed students. Tom Rillo was my advisor and mentor, and was at his best leading hands-on outdoor recreation and education activities at Bradford Woods and at Land Between the Lakes. Many fond memories of Dr. Tom Rillo, who certainly earned the nickname "Captain Outdoors."

Mark Young - June 02, 2021 at 11:55 PM

NL

“ Dear Children,

Your father was a oblate brother of mine, I loved him and Joan very much. We kept in touch buy email, because of health issues he had, to stop coming to Oblate meeting. His books were great. He loved going to Saint Meinrad on retreat. He was pleasure to know.

*God Bless all all of you,
Nancy Lux*

NANCY LUX - May 29, 2021 at 02:30 PM

KR

“ *Tom was a very special person. We experienced a beautiful pilgrimage with Tom and Joan to the Holy Land and Rome. They were our sponsors for Cursillo and they made it a beautiful spiritual journey for us. We will always cherish their warm friendship. Our sincere sympathy to he Rillo family.*

Keith & Lorraine Richards

Keith Richards - May 29, 2021 at 12:12 PM

JO

“ Tom was a starter for our swim meets a Bloomington North. He was a great guy with love for life and for the church. Tom took me to my 1st weekend with the Cursillo movement. He and Joan prayed for me and my family over the years. A great man who helped many people find God. Will miss him. God Bless his soul and family. Jeff Owens

Jeff Owens - May 28, 2021 at 07:32 PM

LF

“ Linda, Carlos&Michael Vega, Jackie&Mark Fligner purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Thomas J. Rillo.



Linda, Carlos&Michael Vega, Jackie&Mark Fligner - May 28, 2021 at 04:20 PM

LR

“ Love, John Rillo purchased the Ocean Breeze Spray for the family of Thomas J. Rillo.



Love, John Rillo - May 28, 2021 at 04:11 PM

KR

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Kevin Rillo - May 28, 2021 at 09:41 AM

TG

“ Tom was a fantastic one of a kind individual who I held in very high regard. He and Joan were both a joy to be around and will really be missed by all who knew them both. They could both really tell a story (usually in great length and in great detail) It was always a pleasure to enjoy some beers (usually dark) and conversation with him whenever the chance arose. He really enjoyed life to the fullest and squeezed one hell of a lot into those 93 years. He was the best father in law a guy could ask for and I will surely miss him in the coming years. Tim Gooldy

Tim Gooldy - May 28, 2021 at 08:40 AM

KR

Tim - My dad loved you like son...not just as a son-in-law. I never had a visit with him where he didn't mention your name or recount a story about you. Thank you for all the times you shared a beer and meals with him. He truly enjoyed being in your life as well.

Kevin Rillo - June 03, 2021 at 09:59 AM

GF

“ Greg and Terry Franceschi purchased the Forever Beloved for the family of Thomas J. Rillo.



Greg and Terry Franceschi - May 27, 2021 at 11:12 PM

CM

“ I was one of Dr. Rillo's graduate students in the early 1980s. I LOVED his classes. I was fortunate to visit him in April 2019 with 4 of my former classmates. He was as committed to Outdoor Education as he had been all those years earlier. Dr. Rillo was charming, informative, enthusiastic, and overall delightful. He was such a special person. I was happy to leave Bloomington calling him my friend, not just my professor from long ago. I am so sorry for the family's loss, as well as for the loss those of us touched by him are experiencing.

Carolyn Maranca - May 27, 2021 at 09:31 PM

KR

“ 3 files added to the album Pictures of Tom



Kevin Rillo - May 27, 2021 at 04:04 PM

MJ

“*My sincere condolences to the Rillo family. While working at the NJ School of Conservation, I met Dr. Rillo by phone and was invited to pursue an advanced degree at IU, living at Bradford Woods. He quickly became a valued professor and mentor, and over time a beloved friend. Although widely regarded as a pioneer in outdoor environmental education I witnessed first hand Tom’s role on earth—that of servant, to our nation, our planet, mankind, and our God, as he ‘lived’ not only his life but his legacy, and then spent his latter days, recounting and documenting it all, in vivid detail.*

Dr. Rillo’s legacy is intimately woven into the fabric of SOC and the environmental movement that started here in NJ. It was here he met his beloved wife Joan. A few years ago a group of us visited him at his home. History came to life through his words. After two full days of recording, he still had more to say. Sometimes you know you are truly in the presence of someone special. We carried his stories in our grateful hearts back to NJ. They are even more treasured now.

My last call to Tom was to share some good news about our ability to reopen the School of Conservation and to thank him for his guidance in helping us do so. I will miss our conversations about things that really matter, like like-long learning and finding your passion and purpose. Mostly, we chatted a lot about faith and a life of service to God and others, a calling both he and Joan shared. I will carry these conversations in my heart and use these blessed memories to inspire and ignite hope in the world to the best of my ability.

I can just hear Him saying as he welcomes you home, ‘well done my faithful servant.’

Rest in peace my friend!

Marian Janes - May 27, 2021 at 02:06 PM

KR

“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



Kevin H Rillo - May 27, 2021 at 12:02 PM

CC

“ *Dr. Rillo was one of my favorite professors at IU. I was a Parks and Rec major and I loved his class in Outdoor Recreation. He stood out to me because you could tell he loved what he did. I am sorry for his passing. He was a very special person.*

Cheryl Crouch - May 27, 2021 at 08:39 AM