

## Remembering David Thomasma

Although space limitations do not permit including all the responses received after the passing of David Thomasma, some representative expressions are included below. As these remembrances attest, Edmund Pellegrino spoke for all of us when he said at David's memorial service, "It has been said that we die only when forgotten; if so, David will live a long time. He remains a presence for his family, friends, collaborators, and all who met him."

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I respected Dave; I liked him. I don't think I've ever met a man whose output was so prodigious and whose modesty was so natural. I remember saying to him that he wrote more papers than Louis L'Amour had written books "and that's a lot of writing, Dave." He smiled, thought, and said to me, "Yes, but you've been in *Reader's Digest*, Tom." It was pure Dave, really: amusing and friendly and more than willing to give the other person more than his or her due. And Dave was that rare scholar, a person who could admit he was wrong, or that new arguments had changed his mind. From time to time I'd read a paper of his that said, "Well, I've been thinking about this and maybe I need to change my mind." It's a large man who can admit such things, a fine man who does it without thinking.

*Tom Koch*  
*The Hospital for Sick Children*  
*Toronto, Canada*

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Over the years that Dave worked at Loyola, he created something really rare—a community of professionals who knew how to reason and decide very difficult human issues. Loyola graduates were able to speak in terms that immediately differentiated them from others, graduates of other schools.

You could tell which of the residents came up through Loyola by the way they evaluated and responded to the humanistically and ethically essential points of patient care.

Of course, it was not only upon Loyola students where Dave made an impact but also—hugely—upon the faculty who were privileged to work with him. He always found ways to draw us into work that was important, and despite his own academic prominence, he treated us with respect, as intellectual equals—though we were not—as though our thoughts might contain the germ of an idea that could be expanded. Of course, it was Dave who saw how to expand those thoughts.

When Dave first came to Loyola he set a new standard, such that everyone wanted to try to grow in the direction of being able to live up to it, and everyone wanted to work with him, to be in his courses, to be chosen as a teacher in his program, to have him discuss a patient—but he was so humble, and so "normal" for a great professor! We really felt he was a very special friend, not just a renowned professor. Over the years, of course, those first reactions were repeatedly reconfirmed by his loyalty, his personal loving concern, his advocacy for his friends—by his being there.

Not only locally, but nationally and internationally, I believe Dave had the

same effect on people. He drew a community of earnest people together to work on serious issues, both through the force of his writing, and his personal gifts, and also as a leader in editorial work. Dave really lived right, and he had an enormous impact on a very great number of people, of whom I am one.

*Sue Braithwaite*  
*University of North Carolina*  
*Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

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Here on the other side of the ocean, the news of David's death hit us like a bomb. With many of you I want to express my deep sorrow in losing this wonderful giant of friendliness and first-rate philosopher of medicine. Like many of you, I owe him very much in teaching and intellectual luggage, but most of all his enduring loyalty and support in times of need.

*Gerrit Kimsma*  
*Vrije University of Amsterdam*  
*The Netherlands*

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It is a deep loss to all of his many friends, and a profound loss to bioethics as well. Dave was more than a first-rate scholar and pioneer thinker. He nurtured others with a generosity of spirit that I have rarely seen. He was a great human being, and he will be keenly missed.

*Chris Hackler*  
*Division of Medical Humanities*  
*University of Arkansas Medical*  
*School*  
*Little Rock, Arkansas*

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David Thomasma was my patient, my teacher, my colleague, and my friend.

I'll miss his visits and my interaction with him immensely. But, as with all good people we encounter in life, he remains with us at Loyola through the memory of his joyful demeanor, his thoughtful insights in the classroom and the bedside, and the volumes of his academic work.

As a patient, Dave was faced with the significant challenges that complications of diabetes will bring. In particular, he was frustrated with the limitations on his mobility that the disease imposed, but he never gave in to it. He had a profound purpose in life to learn and teach what was good and right in the care of our patients, both here at Loyola, and on the international scene. He exhibited a purpose to live, love, and laugh with the people around him, and especially to share the joy of life with his family. Although his disease put up barriers to his ability to pursue these purposes, he always found the fortitude to circumvent these barriers rather than be halted by them.

As a teacher, he sought to facilitate discovery rather than demand the rote accumulation of facts and theories. His background in ethics and philosophy was enormous. He's written far more on these subjects than most of us have ever read. He could have easily occupied time in the classroom with prolonged monologues. He chose instead to stimulate thought and encourage his students and protégés to search their own experience to make conclusions about ethical principles in the conduct of their patient care. He truly encouraged us to work at learning what we ought to do for our patients, and not just what we are able to do.

*Ronald A. Sage*  
*Orthopaedic Surgery and*  
*Rehabilitation*  
*Stritch School of Medicine*  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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As you are more than aware, Professor Thomasma earned the respect and admiration of all of those with whom he came into contact, and the members of the University of California, Davis, Health System Bioethics Consultation Committee are no exception. Dave helped to shape the face of humane healthcare ethics both in this country and abroad. His influence is felt—tacitly or explicitly—in the very structure and function of ethics committees today, and he will be sorely missed.

David H. Wisner  
*Hospital Bioethics Consultation  
Committee  
University of California, Davis*

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David Thomasma was a giver, a sharer, a priestly person who gave Christianity a good name. And in death he is and was a *baal shemov*—the keeper of a good name.

I met David Thomasma years ago over the telephone. His slow and steady speech, his quality of undefended optimism revealed a cultured naiveté—a kind of direct communication that comes from the soul of a person who has crossed the many streams of life, heard and seen it all, and felt comfortable in the morality of his own skin. Very quickly in listening to David, even without meeting him face to face, one became aware of the fact that he admired the virtues of honesty, friendship, and intellectualism based on a sincere humanistic impulse. In his quiet and unassuming way, David let you know that he expected the best of you but regardless of what your religion, race, gender, or social background meant to you personally. His belief was so thorough and replete of conscience that he demanded of you not

only to account for yourself but to take responsibility for others—to take the extra step in every case and in every way that allowed your friendship with him to be replenished and remain meaningful.

Some months later, when I had the opportunity to greet David and experience him as a full-bodied American, the course of our friendship took on an ever-deeper dimension. To laugh, talk, walk, and sample life in all its foibles and simple pleasures was a walk down the avenue, which anyone who knew David would never want to do without his presence. Whether in the domain of music or art, recounting a passage of his philosophical heritage, a tender glance upon an historic landscape in Tuscany, in contemplation of cows grazing the meadows of the eastern township in Quebec, or in the joy of observing David consume a delectable morsel in an exquisite culinary capital, one simply could not get enough of David.

David Weisstub  
*University of Montreal School of  
Medicine  
Montreal, Canada*

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I will remember Dave as a very *un*-common fellow whose writings had great intellectual impact on ethics in medicine—but whose loving, self-effacing demeanor created a powerful example of being true to Christian ideals in the often petty and brutal academic world. As a result, Dave had a positive effect on numerous colleagues and protégés.

Henry Perkins  
*Center for Ethics and the  
Humanities in Health Care  
University of Texas Health Science  
Center  
San Antonio, Texas*

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One of the greatest privileges of my life was the opportunity to train in ethics under this great man—I saw him cry at the bedside of all—and to him all patients were beloved family—and all were embraced with his enormous love and compassion. Dave Thomasma was a giant of a man in every important measure of life.

*Maureen L. Gill  
Drane & Fryer Law Firm  
Chicago, Illinois*

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One of the most remarkable characteristics of David was his gift to make friends. Being indisputably one of the leaders of bioethics and a famous, extremely productive scientist, he was in the first place a very fine human being. I personally experienced how he could stimulate his colleagues to develop their talents, to make the best out of a negative assessment, and to never lose hope and inspiration.

*Henk ten Have  
The European Society for Philosophy  
of Medicine and Health Care  
Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

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David was a big presence—in body, in spirit, in intellect, and in generosity to everyone he encountered. He thought big thoughts, reaching out into the universe of love, suffered loudly when he was hurt, gave away so much of himself at times he could hardly stand up for fatigue, and demanded the best out of everyone, for our own good.

*Ruth Purtilo  
Center for Health Policy and Ethics  
Creighton University  
Omaha, Nebraska*

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He was a true inspiration to all who knew or even met him briefly, and he is already missed by his many fans and admirers. I learned a great deal from him professionally, at least as much about professionalism and style and grace as of ethical substance.

*Paul J. Reitemeier  
White River Junction, Vermont*

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He was a wonderful friend, colleague, and human being. He was always generous, kind, and supportive of the work of junior scholars like myself. I only hope to emulate his goodness.

*Virginia Ashby Sharpe  
Center for Science and the Public  
Interest  
Washington, D.C.*

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We would like to join with you to share your profound sorrow for the loss of a friend and one of the greatest figures of contemporary bioethics.

*Raphael Celis  
University of Lausanne, Switzerland*

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“Al het Beste!” These are the words with which Dave would always close his letters to me, stubbornly overriding the advice from a real Dutchman that he should write “Alle Goeds!” David Thomasma was proud of his Dutch heritage. So he learned the language, went to visit often, and took a keen interest in the bioethical developments overseas. One of his 24 books was specifically devoted to euthanasia in the Netherlands. I only got to know Dave when he was already a giant in

the world of bioethics, and I just came peeking around the corner in the late 1980s. His quarters at Loyola University Chicago were small in those days, but he readily welcomed me to become a fellow in his Department of Medical Humanities. In fact, his quarters were so small that I had to fight over a desk with yet another fellow whom he had invited to come from Texas. Linda Scheirton and I finally solved the problem by getting married, and ever since Dave took credit for bringing us together. Indeed, everybody at our Center for Health Policy and Ethics at one point or another has been influenced by David Thomasma. With over 300 publications, it is simply impossible not to have been affected by his ideas and ideals. He was one of the consultants who helped establish our Center. He was one of the makers of American bioethics. But on April 25, Dave was suddenly and unexpectedly called back by his own Maker. We will miss you, Dave. Al het Beste!

*Jos V. M. Welie*  
*Center for Health Policy and Ethics*  
*and Department of Community*  
*and Preventive Dentistry*  
*Creighton University Medical Center*  
*Omaha, Nebraska*

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He was the center of a community of people that he created over the years, and I greatly appreciate having been part of it and having known him. In my 50 years I have not met anyone who has earned so much love and respect from his fellows as Dave. I turned to Robert Burns for an epitaph that Dave might have appreciated—although I can imagine that he might have complained about getting a “used” epitaph!

An honest man here lies at rest  
As e'er God with his image blest.  
The friend of man, the friend of  
truth;  
The friend of Age, the guide of Youth:  
Few hearts like his with virtue  
warmed,  
Few heads with knowledge so  
informed:  
If there's another world, he lives in  
bliss;  
If there is none, he made the best of  
this.

*Malcolm MacPherson-Smith*  
*Southeastern Virginia Training*  
*Center*  
*Chesapeake, Virginia*