



# Joan Lynch Thomas

JUN 17, 1936 - APR 16, 2024



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# Joan Lynch Thomas

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Joan Lynch Thomas, a New York City girl whose next level nature to be kind, caring, generous and loving endeared her forever to anyone she met across her 87 years, and whose smile and laugh brightened every room she entered, passed away peacefully Monday, April 16 at her home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware after a brief illness, with her sons David and Andrew by her side. She was predeceased by her beloved husband Bob. It is impossible to calculate the loss felt by everyone who loved her and cared about her. To say she will be missed is the understatement of the millennium.

Joan's favorite color was yellow. Her favorite TV program was Antiques Road Show (with a side of Dateline), and perhaps her favorite guilty pleasure food (although there were many contenders), was Thrasher's French Fries, located just off Rehoboth's boardwalk. Joan was never late, always stylish and impeccably organized. She loved to laugh, and most recently enjoyed listening to Conan O'Brien's podcast, as well as watching Sebastian Maniscalco whenever his latest comedy bit popped up on her iPhone. She was a life-long movie buff going back to her childhood days when she collected autographed pictures after writing to the biggest movie stars of the day. Her most recent film favorites were modern day musicals: La La Land, A Star Is Born and Barbie, with Ryan Gosling, Bradley Cooper and Timothée Chalamet now pushing aside former favorites Cary Grant, Gary Cooper and Gregory Peck. Joan also loved listening to music, with those three movie soundtracks part of her large CD collection. If it was Christmastime, A Charlie Brown Christmas by Vince Guaraldi Trio was in heavy rotation. When it came to live music you might find Joan at a Sting concert at Manhattan's Beacon Theater, or catching live jazz at either Birdland or Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, or listening to the New York Philharmonic in Central Park or at Lincoln Center. She liked to say she "discovered" The Hot Sardines (a New Orleans style American jazz band) when she first heard them play in a tiny Upper West Side park, and she and Bob were definitely among the first to appreciate a largely unknown Harry Connick Jr. when they saw him perform as an 18-year-old in the Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel.



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Joan had a lifelong sense of adventure, with her travels taking her everywhere from Germany's Black Forest region to the festive streets of Argentina's Buenos Aires, to Antarctica's South Shetland Islands where she mingled with penguins. (This, after braving a more than rollicking high seas—emphasis on 'high'— crossing by ship of the famously turbulent Drake Passage.) But arguably Joan's favorite places in the world were her two idyllic screen porches, one on Park Avenue in Rehoboth Beach, and the other on Franklin Street in Shelbyville, Tennessee, (the childhood home of Bob.) Better places to enjoy the company of family and friends have yet to be discovered. Of all her loves, her love of her family was paramount. Joan deeply loved Bob, her twin sons David and Andrew, and her granddaughters, Shelby, Abigail and Chelsea, all of whom knew they had hit the jackpot to either call Joan their wife ('Babes'), mother ('Mom') or grandmother ('Grammy').

Joan Elizabeth Lynch was born June 17, 1936 on Staten Island to Gladys (Lingo) and Homer W. Lynch. Her father was a lawyer for Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company bank in Manhattan and her mother was a homemaker. Joan and her younger sister Judy grew up in the tree-lined neighborhood of Randall Manor on Staten Island's North Shore. Think Bedford Falls if George Bailey's fictional town in *It's a Wonderful Life* happened to be situated only a very short ferry ride from Manhattan. Joan had a decidedly happy childhood and enjoyed spending summers visiting her maternal grandmother in Rehoboth while working at Betty's Bake Shop and having lots of fun with her best beach girlfriend, Nancy. Joan's father's job on Park Avenue and frequent family outings to see Broadway shows, dine at restaurants and experience the city's myriad activities laid the groundwork for Joan's love of Manhattan (and the fact she would eventually call the iconic island her home for some 50 years.) While Joan was never much of a sports fan, the one exception was baseball. Her father was a lifelong Philadelphia Phillies fan, but Joan broke with family tradition and became a diehard New York Yankees fan. When she was 14, the Yankees and Phillies squared-off in the 1950 World Series, and Joan and her father were able to attend one of the games at Yankee Stadium. The Bronx Bombers of Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford would complete a four-game sweep of the Whiz Kids of Richie Ashburn and Robin Roberts, ensuring Joan family baseball bragging rights for years to come.

Joan was an honor student at Curtis High School and upon graduating, traveled up the Hudson to Poughkeepsie where she attended Vassar College. In four years at Vassar she made lifelong friends, and graduated with a degree in Political Science. Joan then headed back to New York City where she was hired as a researcher at Esquire Magazine on Madison Avenue and lived with a college girlfriend (and later with her sister Judy) in an apartment on Perry Street in Manhattan's



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Greenwich Village. It was an exciting time to work at Esquire, the frequent literary home of great writers the likes of Hemingway, Mailer, Wolfe and others. It was while at Esquire that a colleague set Joan up on a blind date with a future great writer, a young reporter at the New York Times by way of Yale and Shelbyville, Tennessee with the byline Robert McG. Thomas Jr. Joan and Bob's first date was in the Blue Room at the Algonquin Hotel, and it would be the first of many. The two were married February 24, 1962 in a ceremony on Staten Island. Joan and Bob would then find their own cozy Greenwich Village apartment, also on Perry Street, this one located in a shingled carriage house positioned in the back garden area of a three-story apartment building and accessed via a 20-foot-long arched brick passageway. (This cozy apartment setting in this particularly cozy neighborhood paved the way for 'cozy' being a lifelong Thomas family quest.)

In Manhattan, Joan and Bob enjoyed life in the city that never sleeps, and the Village offered many great spots to unwind. The pending arrival of twins would facilitate a move to a larger apartment. The young couple would soon decamp to the Upper West Side, where they settled into the third floor of a brownstone on West 77th Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, a stone's throw from Riverside Park. A short time later, David and Andrew were born, and Joan would take on the dynamic role of a mother raising two boys in New York City, and like everything she ever did, she was a natural. Joan would continue her education by taking classes at Bank Street College of Education and soon began a second career, this time as a nursery school teacher at the West End Collegiate Church. Joan's students adored her, and she and Bob would eventually become good friends with Norm and Sara, the parents of one of them. Norm would one day tell Joan that the Wall Street law firm where he was a partner was looking for exceptional individuals to join their team, and he believed she'd be a great asset. Joan soon embarked on her third (and longest) career, that as a paralegal at Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy. Like everything else, Joan excelled in her new role, and soon rose to be the Senior Legal Assistant in Milbank's litigation department, with an office on the 49th floor of One Chase Manhattan Plaza. Joan was a valuable cog in many major cases unfolding not only in Manhattan courtrooms, but also on the road in various cities around the country. She was both highly trusted by the partners and well-liked by her colleagues, one of whom praised Joan for "possessing an equanimity rare in big city corporate environments."

While Joan had been a 'Yankee' her entire life, it was Bob who introduced her to the South. Joan was instantly welcomed by his parents, Bob Sr. and Jane, as well as a legion of family and friends in Shelbyville and Nashville, who if they didn't coin the term 'Southern Hospitality,' certainly fortified it. Joan formed a life-long bond with Bob's sister, Carey Gates (Thomas) Hinds, as well as



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with her brother-in-law Bill, and Bob's cousins Susan and Mary Beth Thomas. A tradition of Horse Show parties in the summer and New Year's Eve parties in the winter was soon forged. Christmas in Shelbyville was always a festive and cozy time, and included the annual chopping down of a cedar Christmas tree in Bedford County, (one that had to "scrape the ceiling"), Joan's delicious Christmas Eve turkey dinner with all the fixins, followed by a Christmas Day meal at Aunt Sarah's featuring country ham (with jezebel sauce), homemade cornbread and macaroon pudding for desert. The unannounced 'drop in' at the house on Franklin Street was a near constant occurrence and not only expected, but always encouraged. Knox, Walter, Ellen, Bob Taylor and John were among the "Insiders," as well as Donna, Robert Floyd, Harold and Dawn, Pat and Mary, Billy and Joy, Jack and Anna Marie and Martin and Corabel. Camaraderie, conversation and laughs, whether on the screen porch in the summer or in the living room at Christmastime, often lasted until the wee hours.

Despite demanding jobs, Joan and Bob often found time for fun excursions beyond their regular visits to Rehoboth and Shelbyville. On occasion, a New York Times assignment might take Joan and Bob to Cooperstown (for Baseball Hall of Fame ceremonies). New Orleans, Savannah and Santa Fe were also among travel destinations. When the couple became empty-nesters, there were trips to Los Angeles to visit Andrew and to Aspen to visit David. Weekends in New Haven, Connecticut for Bob's Yale reunions were also part of their travel itinerary, as were numerous getaways to places like San Francisco, Chicago and Washington, DC for frequent Yale 'mini reunions.' After Bob's untimely passing in 2000, Joan maintained her lasting friendships with his classmates and their partners. At what would have been Bob's 50th reunion in New Haven, Joan was honored with an award "in recognition of distinguished service to the Yale College Class of 1961" for helping to organize (along with her friend Maysie) the attendance of the women who had also lost their husbands. Joan also enjoyed visiting with her Vassar crew whenever possible. Get-togethers with Sandy, Louisa, Sallie, Barbara, Lucia, Georgia and Marjorie might take place anywhere from Poughkeepsie to Manhattan to Philadelphia and Rehoboth. (And on occasion, via a Zoom call.)

If it was Sunday in Manhattan, you could be sure to find Joan attending service at Saint Thomas Church on 53rd Street & Fifth Avenue. Listening to the triumphant singing of the men and boys choir accompanied by the majestic sounds emanating from the thunderous pipe organ against a backdrop of stunning gothic architecture was a regular boost to Joan's spirituality. While Joan immensely enjoyed dining out with family and friends at the never-ending supply of restaurants in New York City (and later in Rehoboth,) she absolutely loved to cook, once enrolling in a



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prestigious cooking school in Manhattan to hone her already formidable culinary talents. Joan had a bookshelf full of cookbooks and kept files of recipes with detailed notes (“Andrew really liked this one,” “serve with creamed spinach,” “better with two teaspoons,” etc.) A better Reuben Sandwich has never been made. Her Meatloaf—legendary, her Chicken Tetrizzini— terrific. Joan’s Rigatoni with Meatballs and her ‘green on green’ Pasta with Peas never afforded any leftovers. A David Eyre’s Pancake was a special breakfast treat. Even the simpler food items prepared by Joan were exceptional, with one of David and Andrew’s P.S. 87 classmates once remarking he’d “never had a better grilled cheese in his life.” Those lucky enough to be gifted Joan’s seasoned oyster crackers every Christmas (including Della and her co-workers at the Rehoboth Beach Post Office) literally made her promise to never stop making them.

After Bob’s passing, Joan split her time between Manhattan and Rehoboth and continued to make yearly trips to Shelbyville every August for the annual Horse Show and to reconnect with family and friends. Travel remained a big part of Joan’s life, including an Alaska cruise with her sister, a first time trip to Paris with friends, and of course many memorable excursions with her sons and granddaughters. She loved exposing Shelby and Abby and Chelsea to new adventures, whether it be a Disney cruise to the Bahamas, trips to London and Rome, exploring glaciers in the Canadian Rockies or digging for dinosaurs in Colorado. Of course there were frequent trips to New York City, which became lifetime memory makers for her granddaughters. Joan was beyond proud and thrilled to see each of them transition into successful young adults, and she especially cherished how often she got to see Shelby and Abby, despite their increasingly busy lives. They loved surprising their Grammy with unannounced drop-ins, often toting the latest haul of goodies from Trader Joe’s or perhaps a dessert-like coffee drink from Starbucks. Regular trips to the nail salon for grandmother/granddaughter manicures and pedicures also became a favorite tradition. Abby especially took after Joan’s talents in the kitchen and enjoyed impromptu baking sessions with her grandmother, including making Christmas cookies that often disappeared before they had a chance to cool down. Joan’s influence on Shelby and Abby was immeasurable, and they never short-changed their Grammy when it came to repaying her with love and affection, and allowing her to share proudly in all their triumphs.

At a certain point, Joan gave up her Manhattan apartment and transitioned into making Rehoboth her full-time home, (albeit with frequent trips back to the Big Apple). With Andrew and his girls living so close by, as well as Joan’s nieces Denise (Jack) and Lauren (Bob), and of course sister Judy, Joan never lacked for good company. David and Vanessa were also frequent visitors from New York. Regardless of the season, Joan kept busy in Rehoboth, whether enjoying crab



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cakes at the home of her neighbors Tom and Charlie, attending an evening of Songs and Stories with her friend Meredith, catching up with her friend Battle in Georgetown, listening to live music at dusk at the bandstand or sipping a Negroni, expertly concocted by Matt, at the cozy bar at 1776 following a movie at Midway with Andrew, David and Vanessa. The instant joy inspired by a surprise delivery of the always hard to find Huntsman cheese by family friend Barb can not be discounted. Ditto having an occasional breakfast with David or Andrew at the Robin Hood where she could get her fix of Rapa scrapple. Certainly one of Joan's absolute favorite activities was gathering for a summer family cookout of hot dogs and hamburgers (with corn on the cob from Freeman's corn stand) on the screen porch after a day at the beach. The screen porch was also the site of the annual Lynch Family reunion with Joan's Aunt Libby and all of Joan's Sussex County cousins.

While Christmas had now shifted from Tennessee to Delaware, the traditions continued, with Andrew, David and Vanessa, and Shelby and Abby gathering for Christmas Eve dinner at Joan's, followed by an uplifting candlelight service at either All Saints' Church in Rehoboth or St. George's Chapel in Harbeson. A pre-Christmas visit to New York was often in the cards and included going to cozy restaurants with David and Vanessa and Andrew and his girls, as well as attending Broadway shows, seeing the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, and taking in the Radio City Christmas Spectacular (emphasis on 'spectacular') with the Rockettes.

Joan was great at staying in touch and while she had a MacBook and an iPhone and could send emails and texts with the best of Gen X or Gen Z, she was a longtime woman of letters and never stopped putting pen to paper. The thoughtful note was perhaps her specialty, but Easter cards, Valentine's Day cards or even Halloween cards with a note to her sons and granddaughters were de rigueur. She also imparted to them the fine (but increasingly vanishing) art of the thank you note. Come Christmastime, Joan would mail out a one-page holiday newsletter recapping her past year's highlights and adventures, and in turn, she would receive a trove of cards and photos and newsletters from family and a lifetime of friends. Joan would keep these missives in a straw basket emblazoned with a needlepoint 'Merry Christmas' on the front so she could easily share them with David and Andrew. (To read through all of them often took at least a couple of sittings.) In addition to Denise and Lauren, William (Jennifer), Gates (Brigid), Carey Martin (Brent) and Chris (Diana) can attest that their Aunt Joan never forgot a birthday or special occasion.

Joan was super smart and always informed. She never missed watching the local and national evening newscasts, enjoyed reading newspapers daily, and when David worked as an anchor at



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iHeart Radio, loved listening to all his newscasts. Joan's outward beauty was a perfect reflection of her inward beauty. She was the very definition of selfless with her capacity for giving never waning, whether that be with her time or philanthropy, or always being there for her sons and granddaughters. Joan never lost her love of children, and when the time arrived where her granddaughters were all grown up and the little ones of other family and friends had largely come of age, she obtained certification from the state of Delaware to volunteer on a weekly basis to read story books to toddlers at a local nursery school, one of the things she loved doing as a teacher in Manhattan. Of course she was a huge hit with the three- and four-year-olds. Whether riding a crowded subway in Manhattan or reading the Cape Gazette on Deauville Beach in Rehoboth, Joan always thrived. She was elegant, chic and hip all at the same time. If you were in her presence, you felt better. When you said goodbye to Joan, you were always thinking about the next time you might see her.

Joan loved being a couple with Bob, but when misfortune took him away far too early, her indomitable independence fortified by her faith enabled Joan to enjoy life to the fullest. The love she engendered from David and Andrew and her granddaughters was incalculable. They are comforted in knowing that Joan has now reunited with her Bob in Heaven, and they look forward to reuniting with her (and their Dad and GrandBob) at a later time. In the meantime, they will miss their Mom and Grammy dearly. Joan was insistent that when she passed she did not want an obituary. She was never one for fanfare or attention, and in many ways enjoyed a certain level of privacy. There is a degree of irony to Joan's wish due to the fact Bob achieved a great degree of literary acclaim for the Pulitzer Prize-nominated obituaries he wrote for The New York Times. While always wanting to honor Joan's wishes, David and Andrew wrestled with this one, but in the end felt their mother would forgive them this compromise of telling her story, albeit after some time had passed since she left us.

Per Joan's wishes, she was laid to rest next to Bob after a simple graveside service with beautiful flowers at Union Cemetery in Georgetown, Delaware. Donations in Joan's memory may be made to Saint Thomas Church, 1 West 53rd St, New York, NY 10019. Should any of Joan's family or friends ever find themselves strolling along Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, they can feel free to step inside Saint Thomas and light a candle in Joan's memory, and at the same time experience the breathtaking majesty and beauty of a place that brought so much peace and comfort and joy to Joan.

Please sign Joan's tribute wall at this site.



## Tribute Wall

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**Abby Thomas** posted:

Especially missing her during this Christmas time when we would usually be baking cookies and wrapping presents. Love you Grammy ☐

December 24 at 4:17 PM



**Mark Cushing** December 25 at 4:08 AM

I have great memories of Joan and I learned a few new things about her while reading her wonderful life story in her obituary. So, I'm glad David and Andrew decided to write it and I'm sure Joan wouldn't be upset. She is loved and missed by many, including me, and my trip to the Rehoboth Beach House this past summer was not the same without her. I'm definitely thinking of her today and my heartfelt condolences go out to everyone.



**Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium** shared an album called **Memories Album**.



December 24 at 5:58 AM



**David Pacheco** December 27 at 4:05 PM

What a wonderful tribute to a beautiful mom. David and Andrew were blessed to have such an adventurous mom.



## Media

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**Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium** shared a photo to the **Memories Album** album.

December 24 at 5:58 AM





# Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Joan by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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