

Introduction to "Thomas"

What is there left for me to say about a man --- a social studies teacher --- who loved his subject, loved his students so much that he taught into his 90's? He influenced so many people, both students and fellow teachers, with his intelligence, his wit, his tranquility, his work ethic. I try to communicate some of that in the poem "Thomas."

It is a brief love song to a man I have unlimited respect for. A veteran of the navy in World War II, a humble man who avoided disclosing the medals he had received for his service (a fact that we who taught with him discovered after his passing), he was devoted to teaching the students who, in turn, cherished him as a national and natural treasure.

Soon after his passing, we who taught with him in a large room called the Study Center discussed how best to honor his memory. We had a bench inscribed and placed in the school courtyard for students and faculty to enjoy. We also felt that we needed a permanent reminder of his presence in the Study Center, so we created and had produced a plaque honoring his memory. The plaque (pictured on the next page, right before the poem) said so much with so few words. His pictured smile and focus spoke more than the words.

Frequently, from my seat at what we call the English Table, I find myself looking over to his plaque, solid on the wall fittingly behind the Social Studies Table. Seeing his likeness inspires me. Seeing his smile (at least to me it is a smile --- perhaps a little poetic license) warms me. I miss Tom but I treasure his memory.