



## Richard Harris Thomason

March 2, 1948 - November 18, 2019

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It seems impossible that one man could have achieved so much in just one lifetime, but Richard Harris Thomason—husband, father, Papa Dad, friend—was that kind of man.

Richard often said, “Remember, there is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don’t care who gets the credit.” The proof for this statement is evidenced by his life. He never needed or wanted recognition, and he was uncomfortable when he got it. He was asked to serve on dozens of boards and organizations in his lifetime, and it would seem hyperbolic to say that he was elected president or chairman of every single one, and yet he was. Richard did not applaud himself in life. He was humble and unassuming. He didn’t talk about who he was and what he did, and so we, his family, will celebrate him.

Consistent, steady, patient, intentional, witty, and brilliant—Richard led others through a quiet and gentle spirit. He would say, “There are two ways to raise kids: They can obey you because they fear you, or they can obey you because they respect you and want to follow your lead.” That’s the heart of who Richard was. He waited to be chosen; he waited to be asked; he waited to be recognized. This demeanor sometimes resulted in him being passed

over, but he never minded. He simply waited longer. He cared about the results and the experience, not whether he got the glory.

Richard's faith in Jesus was much like him—steady, sure and consistent, strong but gentle. It shone through his kindness and loyalty, and in his desire to serve others. His baritone voice will be deeply missed at family gatherings as we sing the doxology.

It would seem incongruous that such a gentle man could have such a love of risk and danger, yet Richard was fearless when it came to speed and ingenuity. He was sometimes asked why he drove so slowly around town, to which he always answered, "I ain't got nothin' to prove. If I wanna go fast, everyone will know it." And they did.

From dragsters to streamliners, waterskis to snow skis, dirt bikes to boats—the man loved speed. When he set out for victory, he pursued it relentlessly, totally undeterred by failure. He taught his lifelong companion and beloved wife, Linda, and their four children to ski. We clearly remember his admonition, "If ya ain't fallin', ya ain't learnin'." Richard showed us that a fall or a failure was just another milestone on the road to triumph.

Richard, along with his friends Ed Tradup, Brian Westerdahl and Jim Socci, set more than a dozen national and international land speed records with the Danny Boy Streamliner, one of which still stands. They designed, built and raced the fastest front-wheel drive car ever made that's been timed and recorded by the Federation International De L'Automobile. "We made every rookie mistake in the book," Richard said about those early years. He even called a relative who worked for Boeing, asking for help. He told Richard, "You're crazy. You're going to kill yourself." Then he gave them the only piece of advice he would offer. "He said, 'Make sure the center of gravity is ahead of the center of pressure.' That's all the help we got from Boeing," Richard said.

The Danny Boy broke down many times on the road to speed. But Richard would always say, “O ye of little faith,” and then he would try again, even after a horrific crash at 285 MPH.

In 1991, the Washington State House of Representatives adopted Resolution No. 91-4667, honoring the Danny Boy race team for their record-shattering accomplishments as the world’s fastest gasoline-powered car and for epitomizing “the spirit of resilience and perseverance by totally rebuilding the Danny Boy Streamliner after the car was destroyed in a 1989 crash.”

Richard was a lifetime member of the 200 MPH club, and the 300 MPH club chapter. He said of his racing, “It’s been quite a ride for us, the crew, our families and friends. We have been truly blessed, not only in our successes and failures, but by the people and the relationships we have made.”

In their time at the Bonneville Salt Flats, Richard and Ed helped bring Racers for Christ to the salt—a group that proclaims the power and message of the gospel to people participating in the world of motorsports. The team could often be seen praying together before a run and on Sunday mornings.

The Danny Boy was retired in 2009, the year after being inducted into the Dry Lakes Racing Hall of Fame, when Richard drove it across the salt at 348 MPH for the last time. But for Richard and Ed, this was just the next step toward building a bigger, faster streamliner—one that they planned to drive over 400 MPH. Richard won’t get to drive that car, but it is a testament to the kind of person he was that he did not consider age to be a deal-breaker on the road to achievement. He never considered “retirement” to be an acceptable choice, and how could it be, for such a man? On the contrary, with years of victories and failures under his belt, he had much wisdom to give to others.

Richard broke more than 45 bones in his body at one point or another in his life—racing motorcross, cars, skiing, or just generally living on the edge, as he loved to do. His pain tolerance was like none other, but you wouldn't catch him complaining. "Die quietly," wasn't just something he said to his kids.

Richard was born on March 2, 1948 in Wenatchee, WA. He was raised in a small logging community 10 miles up the Entiat River Valley. After he graduated Chelan High school, he spent his summers in Southeast Alaska working in the king crab industry. He attended the University of Washington and graduated with a degree in mining engineering. There Richard met the love of his life and wife of 50 years, Linda McCroskey. They were married in 1969. His engineering, mining, and blasting jobs carried them to Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, Washington and Alaska. Richard's father, Harris Thomason, had been in the apple farming business since the 1960s. He asked Richard if he wanted to try his hand at the family business for a year. He agreed and the rest is history.

Richard was a pioneer and leader in the apple industry. For nearly 50 years, Richard grew apples on the family farm started by his dad, Maverick Orchards. He loved the risk of adopting new varieties. In 1999, Richard was interviewed by the Los Angeles Times after he was one of the first growers in the nation to pull 70 acres of Red Delicious trees and replant 30 of them with Honeycrisp. At the time, this was such a risk that he was unsure he would be able to get financing to replant the rest. Richard was also one of the first growers in the Country to plant Fuji apples, so he might as well be one of the first to plant Honeycrisp apples. He knew that he might lose his shirt on that gamble. But as he would say, go big or go home.

If you asked how the year was going, he would say, "Well, this is my [45th, 46th, etc.] abnormal year! Meaning that every single year is abnormal. No two

growing seasons are the same.”

Richard had a long history with the Washington fruit industry. He was a board member and Chairman of the Washington Apple Commission for many years, and of the Northwest Horticultural Council, which focuses on national and international policy issues affecting growers and shippers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington, from 2014-2017. Richard also served as president and board member of the Washington Growers Clearing House Association and of the Okanogan Horticultural Association. He traveled to Washington D.C. countless times to meet with lawmakers and industry leaders, work with the Secretary of Agriculture, and to testify before Congress.

Richard traveled to many countries to learn about international farming practices, and to help farmers around the world adopt better farming, packing, and storage practices. His work and love of travel took him to Belgium, Hungary, Russia, Poland, USSR, Mexico, France, China, India, Thailand, Vietnam, England, Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, and all over the Caribbean.

Richard was a brilliant engineer. He designed and built his own automatic irrigation system for his orchard in the early 1980's, before such practices became widespread. It was because of this love of engineering that Richard hung up his active farming hat and put on his active engineering hat. He became head of refrigeration and plant engineer at Gebbers Farms, where he designed and fabricated new and innovative refrigeration protocols for CA storage using ozone to increase longevity for apples and cherries.

Growing up, Richard helped his father establish, build and run the Entiat Valley Ski Area and the Echo Valley Ski Area near Chelan. From watching his father's commitment, Richard learned that it takes people who are willing to work very hard in order to start something special. He carried this lesson throughout his life. Richard was instrumental in converting the Loup Loup Ski

Bowl from a struggling and nearly bankrupt commercial ski area into a successful non-profit organization.

Richard could take a room full of fractious, disagreeable, and headstrong people and quietly lead them to a solution and a compromise that would win the day. Where most people saw futility, Richard saw opportunity. It was this calm power of persuasion that was instrumental in the formation of the Loup Loup Ski Education Foundation and its eventual purchase of the assets and Conditional Use Permit from the US Forest Service. Richard was essential in winning community support for the 100 local business and individual guarantors that were needed to secure financing and construction of the quad chairlift at the Loup, which has been used and enjoyed by thousands of visitors. He served as the LLSEF board president for some 15 years and was, in many ways, the single person most responsible for what the Loup is today.

Richard had four children with Linda, the love of his life. If you want to know what it takes to be married for 50 years—just look at the photos of how they looked at one another on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. As for their children Adam, Alex, Amber, and Audrey, he would say, “Notice all the names begin with an A and the second letter is in alphabetical order. It was just a coincidence, not planned.” But he was methodical enough that we were never quite sure. He loved his sons-in-law, Cody (husband to Amber) and Matt (husband to Audrey), and his daughter-in-law Katy (wife to Alex) as his own.

Richard spent his life coaching his kids—from baseball and softball, to motor cross and of course, downhill ski racing. He mentored his first-born, Adam, in their project to plant and manage three acres of Fuji apples for Adam’s FFA Project. These were some of the first Fujis planted in the whole country, and Richard’s guidance ultimately spurred Adam on to become state FFA President and to receive his national FFA Degree. He coached his son, Alex, to become 2nd in the US and top 25 in the world for 18-year-olds for alpine

racing. He was a mentor and stand-in father to many kids during the skiing years. His math and engineering skills were legendary among his kids. He often helped them solve college-level calculus problems. He told his kids that he would never be surprised at anything they did or accomplished. That was how he told them he was proud. His quiet faith planted a seed in each of his children that has grown into a garden of mighty trees, weathering formidable storms.

Richard became Papa Dad for the first time in 2010 and was thrilled to hold 13 precious grand babies—beginning with Maverick (9), then Ihly (8), Harris (7), Xavier (7), Georgiana (5), Gus (5), Ophelia (5), Solon (4), Danica (3), Maxwell (2), Zandros (2), Hawkins (1) and Gabriella (5 months). His phone was full of photos of his grandkids. He was the mountain every child wanted to climb, literally. Each one of his kids and grandkids were familiar with bouncing on his knee and his “hurly burly trumpet twirly” jingle. He was soft-spoken and you sometimes had to lean in to hear his wit or one of his “Richard-isms,” of which there were many.

Richard passed away unexpectedly, but peacefully, in his sleep on the evening of November 18, 2019. He was a good man—a strong man who never gave up, and who changed the landscape in Okanogan County. A man beloved by his wife, who together raised strong, courageous sons and daughters. Richard is also survived by his niece, Angie (Steve) Zehnder, and their two children, Riley & Melanie. Dear Richard, you are deeply missed. A life well-lived and a man well-loved.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

NOV **24**. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (PT)

Brewster Seventh Day Adventist Church  
17 NW Hospital Way  
Brewster, WA 98812

## Graveside Service

NOV **25**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Entiat Cemetery  
5724 Cemetery Rd.  
Entiat, WA

# Tribute Wall



“ *Precht Rose Chapel and Barnes Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of Richard Harris Thomason*



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**Precht Rose Chapel and Barnes Chapel** - November 22, 2019 at 09:52 PM



“ *Richard Harris Thomason*

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January 29, 2023 at 08:49 AM



“ *Richard was a quit force, always positive and fair-minded. it's sad to know he's no longer with us. My condolences to Alex and the rest of the family.*

*Jim Cranney*

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**Jim Cranney** - November 27, 2019 at 05:46 PM



“ *I and my family were fortunate to have Richard as a friend. I am sure all that knew him will miss him very much. We had some fun snowmobile rides and great memories. A true gentleman. Doug and Kathie Pomrankey*

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**Douglas Pomrankey** - November 26, 2019 at 06:54 PM

LS

“ Sympathy to wonderful family of Richard Thomason. It was my pleasure to have Richard on my Board of the WA. Growers Clearing House. We are most appreciative of his many contributions for the benefit of the fruit industry. Leo and Pat Sax

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**Leo Sax** - November 26, 2019 at 12:31 PM

KG

“ Bob and I really enjoyed our long friendship and professional association with Richard. He was loved and will be dearly missed.

*Bob and Kathryn Grandy*

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**Kathryn Grandy** - November 24, 2019 at 11:28 AM

KR

“ I have known Richard and Linda for over 35 years. Together they shared a love affair that lasted over 50 years. We spent many holidays together, bible studies, baby showers, cider press parties but most of all we share the Lord Jesus Christ as our friend and Savior. Richard left this earth too soon in my opinion, yet the Lord counted every hair and numbered all his days prior to his birth. We will all see him again and rejoice in the reunion. My prayers go out to Linda, Adam, Alex, Audrey and Amber and all the spouses and grandchildren, you are all loved very much! Kathy Robertson

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**Kathy Robertson** - November 24, 2019 at 10:53 AM

WT

“ I have fond memories of Richard and his father Harris doing business with us at Hamilton Farm Equipment. He had high expectations and you wanted to perform up to them. He was a customer, but more importantly was a friend. So sorry to the family for your loss.

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**Wayne Turner** - November 24, 2019 at 01:18 AM

JS

“ Richard was an incredible man who was well respected in the Horticulture community where we were able to work with Richard thru our company C & O Nursery I was also lucky to have shared with Richard while I was a member of the Wenatchee Valley Street Rods our love or cars we had the opportunity a couple of times for Richard to share the Danny Boy Streamliner car during our annual W.V.S.R car show during the Apple Blossom Festival at the old ice arena it was amazing to listen to Richard about the building of the Danny Boy Streamliner and the speeds that the car was capable of traveling at he loved to talk to all that attended I know it was a real treat for those attending to meet a celebrity and overall wonderful man. Richard will be missed by many our prayers and thoughts are for all his family for his unexpected passing. Jack & Jan Snyder

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**Jack Snyder** - November 23, 2019 at 11:55 AM

 Ethel  
Wicksey

“ JESUS SHED A TEAR

*Linda and family*

*Jesus shed a tear and felt your pain when Richard died. He was there, to take him up in His arms. As He held Richard near His heart, Richard was healed. Jesus looked down to earth and saw your pain. He bathed Richard with His tears. He dried the tears from off his head with His royal robe. Then He picked up a robe, more beautiful than you can ever imagine and clothed him in it. Right now, Richard is up in heaven. Jesus is praying for you and your loved ones, as you grieve the loss of this special man. My prayer is that when you see a sparrow, that you will be reminded, that not even a sparrow can fall to the earth without God's knowledge. He even knew how many hairs were on the head of Richard before he died. Just like when a little sparrow falls from heaven, God is aware of the death of Richard.*

*God be with you in your time of grief.*

*Love Ethel*

*In memory of my Husband Dean, my daughter Roberta and grandchildren, Joseph and Katie.*

*The night Joseph died God gave me a vision of Jesus handing this little baby to his Grandfather Dean up in heaven. What a beautiful picture.*

*© Ethel Hiday Wicksey  
Chatham Ontario*

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**Ethel Wicksey** - November 23, 2019 at 09:24 AM

BF

“ *I've know Richard for many years and I'm shocked he is no longer with us. Always enjoyed our meetings at the quickEmart. Bob Foyle*

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**Bob Foyle** - November 20, 2019 at 12:35 PM