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Donald Frederick Thielke



Born on Dec. 19, 1930 during the Great Depression in North Tonawanda, NY, Don Thielke was raised in a faithful Lutheran family. His childhood was spent in simple pursuits playing in empty lots, building snow forts, lake swims and taffy pulls.

Always a tinkerer, he worked as a mechanic in his youth. A 1949 graduate of North Tonawanda High School, Don enlisted in the Air Force, was sent to (Harlingen, TX) and later sunny, dry Sacramento at Mather AFB, rising from airplane mechanic to plane owner. This sealed his fate for a future California residency.

Upon return to New York, Don was finally able to secure a blind date with the ever social Phyllis (née Huk) Thielke to Niagara Falls. Theirs was a love story for the books and they married on Oct. 27, 1956 sharing nearly 63 years until her passing in 2018. Whether in Buffalo, Chicago, Alameda or Lafayette, "Don & Phyllis" will long be remembered for their mutual care giving for one another's health, hearts and dreams. After 15 years of marriage, a miracle baby (Kathy) brought them joy and the opportunity to become "parents" to countless friends in her growing up years. He knew the value of being a loving and generous dad.

After attending Spartan College of Aviation and Technology in Tulsa, Don flew with a variety of carriers in the advent of the jet age. He proudly served American Airlines as a flight engineer for 37 years and also as an executive with the Flight Engineers International Association. He cared deeply about flight safety and trained in accident investigations at USC. These roles led him to world travel, though his favorite became Kaanapali beach in Maui with his family and friends.

A Lafayette resident and member of Trinity Lutheran Church for 52 years, Don held every role imaginable. His easy going style and can do spirit were felt by neighbors too, where he served the Happy Valley Highlands HOA for decades. Don was the master of ceremonies, who could tell a joke or story that would

keep you on the edge of your seat. A friend to many, he never stopped reaching into new social circles as the years went on with YoungLife, cardiac inmates, men's fellowship breakfasts, fishing buddies in Alaska, Jazz circles, Lutheran Golfers, the Grey Eagles. His dry wit and sly grin were his trademark, as much as his warm smile and knowing eyes.

He was happiest in his own "back-forty" maintaining the yard, fending off poison oak, taking in a swim with family and tackling the next project with a dog at his side. Or perhaps it was surf-side at Half Moon Bay with old friends, crab, chowder, a good sourdough and cold beer. Most likely it was sharing one of his "9 lives" stories with granddaughters and eating fudgesicles.

He is survived by beloved daughter, Kathy; son-in-law, Pete; grandchildren Leilani, Kalea and Malia; nephews, Alan, Mike and Chuck; nieces Elaine, Phyllis, Laura, Anne, Cindy and Linda.

Knowing that "he had some projects to do" heavenward, Don passed peacefully at home. He lived a blessed life knowing Jesus. May he dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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