



Dr. Nancy F. Thornton

February 9, 1949 - July 6, 2020

Nancy Freebairn Thornton, daughter of John Arthur Black, Sr. and Pauline “Polly” Cearley Black, died July 6, 2020, following a lengthy illness.

Nancy was born in Mexico, Missouri, on February 9, 1949, the twin sister of John A. Black, Jr. The family later moved to Phoenix, Arizona where Nancy attended school and was active in Girl Scouts (earning the Gold award) and the early Civil Rights movement. She graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in Urban Planning. She later earned a Master’s degree in Management from the University of Oklahoma and a Doctorate in Psychology from the Forest Institute of Professional Psychology.

Nancy joined the Army in February 1971. During her distinguished military career, she had many firsts. She was the first woman in the Army Corps of Engineers; first to attend the Army Engineer Officer Advanced Class; the first to command an Engineer company; and the first female Tactical Officer at the United States Military Academy. While at West Point, she enjoyed the challenge of getting all 4,000 West Point cadets both to and from Philadelphia for the annual Army-Navy football game. Nancy also was selected to work with the hostages returning from Iran in 1980 and was a national finalist for the White House Fellowship Program. She held both company and staff leadership positions, to include company command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia; an officer recruiter for the Army Recruiting Command; a staff engineer with the

Omaha Engineer District in Omaha, Nebraska; and a staff member at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, for management change actions. She also served in the Office of the Chief of Engineers. Nancy also was featured on the Paul Harvey show, Esquire magazine, and US magazine.

After retirement from the Army, Dr. Thornton was in private practice as a psychotherapist in both Jasper and Cullman, Alabama, and served as adjunct faculty at Bevins Community College and Wallace Community College. She remained active in Girl Scouting, served in the Cullman Women's League, and served on numerous civic boards including the Department of Human Resources in Cullman. She was a foster parent to 36 children.

In both military and civilian life, Nancy was well-travelled. She visited over 30 countries around the world, including China (twice), Russia, and Saudi Arabia. She was always fond of Estonia. She visited 49 of the 50 states and came within feet of Montana, which she looked forward to visiting.

Nancy is survived by her husband of 14 years, LTC (ret) Michael Burchett; brother, John Arthur Black, Jr. in Sedona, Arizona; brother, Bruce Leonard Black in Portland, Oregon; sister, Jane Akin Gilbert in Flagstaff, Arizona; seven children - Doug (Anita) Burchett, Bloomburg, Texas; Ann (Mark) Wilkinson, Jonesboro, Georgia; Bethea (Frank) Burchett, Linden, Texas; Michelle (Omar) Valentin, Bivins, Texas; Jeb (Mary) Burchett, West Chester, Pennsylvania; twins, Will and Wren Thornton, Cullman, Alabama; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 11, 2020, at First United Methodist Church with services to follow. Burial will be at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC. In lieu of flowers, Nancy requests contributions to Cullman Caring for Kids.

Cemetery Details

Arlington National Cemetery

1 Memorial Avenue
Arlington, VA 22211

Tribute Wall

CB

“ *Connie Byham lit a candle in memory of Dr. Nancy F. Thornton*



Connie byham - July 08, 2020 at 07:29 PM

JL

“ *John La Velle (Fort Dodge, IA.) purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Dr. Nancy F. Thornton.*



John La Velle (Fort Dodge, IA.) - July 08, 2020 at 12:20 PM

SW

“ *Sandy Walton lit a candle in memory of Dr. Nancy F. Thornton*



Sandy Walton - July 08, 2020 at 11:16 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Nancy F. Thornton.*



July 07, 2020 at 10:44 PM

AP

“ Angie Pruitt lit a candle in memory of Dr. Nancy F. Thornton



Angie Pruitt - July 07, 2020 at 08:14 PM

MB

“ I met Nancy, Michael, Will & Wren when I moved to Cullman in 2009 as the Children's Minister at Cullman First United Methodist Church. Soon after, I had 6th grade Will & Wren in my confirmation class. I will never forget Nancy introducing both children again. She shared with me some "need to knows" and wished me luck, prefacing that she could be reached if (when haha) needed. Long story short she was the first parent I met who knew (and wasn't afraid to share) the strengths and weaknesses of her children. She was a joy of a parent to work with in the spiritual development of her children.

I have also been allowed to be close with Nancy on a professional level. She has been a mentor, a listening ear, & friend. Nancy had a way to always help you see light at the end of the tunnel and her wit always put you at ease. I have seen Michael and Nancy both give 100% of themselves to helping and serving others, and to insist that Will and Wren had opportunities to do the same! For the last 6 years Nancy & Michael have purchased coats for every child on the church angel tree. Most years there were at least 90 children. Never did they blink an eye when one more needed to be added and sourced. They would purchase those coats, tag them for each child and bring them when needed.

Nancy, I will miss you friend. I thank you for the friendship and mentorship you have provided for me over the last 10 years. The world IS a better place because of you my dear!! -Melissa Betts

Melissa Betts - July 07, 2020 at 03:26 PM