



# James Peery Williams Thompson

March 1, 1947 - August 27, 2019

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## Obituary

James Peery Williams Thompson died in Cedar Bluff, Virginia, on August 27th, 2019, from complications of his chronic illness, Multiple System Atrophy, a progressive neurological disease. He is survived by three sons: Luke and his wife Julia of Van Nuys, CA; Reuben of Los Angeles, CA; and Adam of Paris, France. He has two remaining brothers, Lloyd of the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and Christopher of San Diego, California. His brother Mike died a year ago. He also leaves behind Jimbo Lindsey, the fifth brother. In addition, he leaves his divorced but devoted wife, Mary, of Paris, France, and his two stepdaughters, Raphaelle and Nini.

After Willams College and The Institute, James was drafted into the infantry. He was against the war, but felt an obligation to go, what with his father's own service and war injury. When he got to advanced infantry training in Louisiana, he found he could not pick up a gun. His sergeant threatened him with violence, but his dear friend and Tazewell County native Shelby Sparks protected him from the other soldiers. A Louisiana judge heard James' story, and told the army James was a conscientious objector, and they must let him go. The Army amazingly complied, and James came home to finish his PhD in Art History. James simply could not have

performed a violent act. He received his PhD from the University of North Carolina.

While James' teaching and writing career took him to France, England, Ireland, New York, Vermont, and North Carolina, his heart remained in the hills of southwest Virginia. He loved its music, its people, its wild stories, and its rambunctious heart. His remarkable memory for songs and anecdotes enriched every gathering, and his generous and sweet temperament made many fast friends for life. He often pulled out a guitar or sat at the piano to carry the singing along. And he knew every lyric to every song. His knowledge of Art History especially encompassed French painting, Orientalism, High Art and Folk Art. But when he walked around the Louvre and recounted the stories of the paintings and the artists, other museum goers would lean in. He wrote many catalogues, books and articles, and was especially pleased to be chosen by the great Meyer Schapiro to edit a book of the master's essays.

He taught at Trinity College and received tenure, but tired of Ireland and came back to the United States. Here he taught briefly at the University of North Carolina, but then became a full professor of Art History at Western Carolina University, where he became a student favorite for his extraordinary lectures. He also led many student trips to art museums in New York, Washington, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. He taught at Western Carolina from 1989 until his retirement in 2007, when he also won the University Scholar Award. On his retirement he was named emeritus professor.

Over the course of his long illness, he received many kindnesses from his hosts of friends and family. Especially helpful were Drema and the staff at Commonwealth, his home away from home. While his mechanical and cognitive injuries progressed, his remarkable kindness never wavered and unexpectedly, he would retrieve a memory, an event, a fact that would startle the listener with its prescience and recall.

If his friends wish to honor him, the family requests, in place of flowers, contributions to either of these organizations: the Appalachian Arts Center at Southwest Virginia Community College, P O Box 1101, Richlands, VA 24641 or Black Mountain College Museum Arts Center, 120 College Street, Asheville, NC 28801.

Hold him in your heart as long as you can.

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## Events

Deceased wishes

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## Memorial Contributions

### Southwest Virginia Community College Appalachian Arts Center

P. O. Box 1101 , Richlands, VA 24641

### Black Mountain College Museum

120 College Street, Asheville, NC 28801

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