



Thomas H. Wood

June 22, 1923 - July 5, 2012

Thomas Hamil Wood

1923 - 2012

Thomas Hamil Wood, 89, of Merion Station, died on July 5, 2012. He is survived by sons David,

Robert, and Scott, daughter-in-law Suzanne and grandchildren Aaron, Carolyn, and Richard Wood.

Born in Atlanta on June 23, 1923 to Edwin McCuin Wood and Abigail Sherman Huckaby Wood, he

spent most of his youth in Tallahassee where he was a scholar athlete active in basketball, track, and

football. He attended the University of Florida where he majored in mathematics before being drafted

into the Navy. After attending the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey, he was stationed at the

Brooklyn Navy Yard where he helped oversee construction of the aircraft carrier FDR and served

aboard as a radar operator. After WWII Tom completed his undergraduate degree and began graduate

studies in physics and the new field of biophysics at the University of Chicago, taught by several Nobel

laureates. In 1951 he married Mary Lucy Mendenhall and in 1953 was awarded a Ph.D. in physics on

the same day his second son was born. He moved with his family to the University of Pennsylvania where he became full professor of physics in 1963, continuing work in radiation biology and genetics. With great enthusiasm Tom and family took sabbatical leaves in Paris (1961-2), Leicester, England (1967-8), and in Cairo (1980-81). In addition to scientific research, these launched passionate interests in photography and filmmaking as he documented the family's fearless trips all over Europe and North Africa. These travels in two successive red VW microbuses were formative experiences for his family and are remembered with great fondness. He retired from the University of Pennsylvania in 1989.

Thomas Wood was a unique autodidact and a driven man. His achievements seem to fill more than one life. As an experimental biophysicist he worked on mapping the E. coli genome decades before DNA sequencing, mentored younger faculty, and trained a generation of premedical students at Penn.

Beyond his profession he was widely talented and prodigiously energetic, renovating a large house in Merion from the inside out as woodworker, craftsman, electrician, and plumber. He crafted a unique home and furnished it with antiques, Asian art, scientific instruments, and rare books and maps. He thoroughly enjoyed giving tours of his collections and his remarkable basement workshops. He was able by his own hands to create a world of high craft, fine art and fascinating content. In later life he continued to enjoy bookbinding, Egyptology, and his collections. During

retirement he traveled throughout the world with his loving and devoted wife and companion Mary Lucy, documenting trips for family and traveling companions.

Tom was generous with his creativity, energy, and the gift of travel to his family, with trips to Egypt in 1980 and to Tanzania in 1999 with grandchildren, his brother George and his granddaughter. He valued hard work, education, craftsmanship, beauty and adventure. His friends and family will miss his generosity, guided house tours, dinner parties, and his many talents and interests. A memorial service is planned in the fall.