



Dr. Herbert Louis Thornhill

September 14, 1929 - June 6, 2020

Dr. Herbert Louis Thornhill, FAAPMR, FACP, a champion for persons living with disabilities, passed away on June 6, 2020. Dr. Thornhill who resided in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, was born on September 14, 1929 in Homestead Pennsylvania. He was one of three children born to Sarah Lucille Lee Thornhill and Roger Alphonso Thornhill. Dr. Thornhill attended Homestead public schools and the University of Pittsburgh where he received his Bachelors of Science degree. In 1951, Dr. Thornhill married his childhood sweetheart, Martha Robertson.

Dr. Thornhill continued his post-graduate education at Howard University School of Medicine, graduating in 1955. He served as an Intern and Resident from 1955-1957 at Freedman's Hospital in Washington DC. A relentless public advocate, Herbert L. Thornhill joined the U.S. Navy Reserve. He was based at the Boston Shipyard from 1957-1959 and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

Dr. Thornhill completed his Residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital in New York City. He subsequently joined the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Montefiore Hospital in 1967, later moving on to work with his colleague and dear friend, Dr. Albert D. Anderson at Harlem Hospital /Columbia University. Together they established the hospital's Department of Rehabilitation Medicine. Herbert Thornhill served as Associate Director of the department until 1980 when he was promoted to Chief, a position that he held until his

retirement in 2007. In 1985, Dr. Thornhill assumed the position of Professor of Clinical Rehabilitation Medicine/Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and later Professor Emeritus.

During his 39-year tenure at Harlem Hospital, Dr. Thornhill served as the Founding President of the United Doctors of Harlem Hospital. He also served on the hospital's Medical Board in various leadership positions from 1979-1984, serving as President (1983-1984), Vice President (1982-1983), and Secretary (1979-1980). Dr. Thornhill also developed a Street Clinic, an innovative initiative where he went into the community to treat people with disabilities and link them with health, social and vocational services.

A devoted advocate for disabled persons, Herbert L. Thornhill collaborated with community, health, social, and vocational organizations to develop Building Bridges to Rehabilitation in Harlem. This interdisciplinary group worked together to develop policies and funding for programs and services for disabled persons. Dr. Thornhill was also a co-founder and served as Board Member Emeritus of the Harlem Independent Living Center. He worked tirelessly with community leaders and advocates to establish this organization 30 years ago and it continues to champion people with disabilities in securing independent living services to individuals with physical and mental disabilities. To everyone's amazement, Herbert Thornhill began his participation in the New York City Marathon in his early 70's. He joined the Achilles Track Club International and worked with Dick Traum, founder of the organization, to establish an Achilles Track Club chapter at Harlem Hospital. This enabled patients with ambulatory disabilities, including those in wheelchairs and those using walking aids, the opportunity to participate in walking and running groups and races. Dr. Thornhill also secured funding for prosthetics for disabled South African Achilles Track Club Members who were participating in the NYC marathon. A great source of pride was when one of his patients completed the New York City Marathon. Dr. Thornhill was also immensely proud that all three of his children and both grandchildren volunteered with the organization.

Herbert Louis Thornhill also served as President and Program Chair of The New York Society of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation; Chairman of the New York Medical Academy PMR section; Chairman of the Medical Society of the State of New York, PMR Section, Chairman of National Medical Association, PM&R section; and Chairman of Council of Amputee-Orthotic Clinic Directors, NYCDOH.

His organization affiliations reflected his passion for advocating for services and rights for people with disabilities. He was immensely proud of his work as an active member and supporter of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and the Special Project: Employment Successes, Problems and Needs of Disabled Black Americans, President's Committee for People with Disabilities, and the sub-committee on Health and Insurance. He also served as a working member of the National Planning Committee. He was honored to have attended the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act at the White House in 1990. Dr. Thornhill served on the Advisory Council New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities; National Advisory Committee Howard University Research & Training Center for Access to Rehabilitation and Economic Opportunity; President of the Borough of Manhattan Advisory Council for People with Disabilities; Advisory Council for New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities; and the NYS Ad-Hoc Task Force, Acquired Physical Disability and Chemical Dependence. He was a proud Board Member of the World Rehabilitation Fund and the Walker-Thomas Fund for Social Advancement. Dr. Thornhill was the recipient of more than 20 awards and honors. He was a published author of 82 publications, scientific exhibits, special projects and addresses. Dr. Thornhill is also a proud member of Abyssinian Baptist Church and the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

Herbert and Martha Robertson Thornhill were married for 61 years. Herbert and Martha were childhood friends. They were baptized as children in the same church and sang in the same Junior choir together. She predeceased

him in 2013. He is survived by his children, Deborah I. Thornhill, Herbert L. Thornhill, Jr. (Maria), and Marsha L. Thornhill, MD (Brian); grandchildren, Jennifer L. Prince, Herbert L. Thornhill, III, Christopher J. Bauer, MD (Melissa), Hilary J. Bauer (Ian), Jarrett G. Bauer, Stefan G. Bauer; great grandchildren Sabrina J. Larkin and Jeffrey J. Bauer; sister, Iris King, brother, Rodger A. Thornhill, Jr., and a host of nieces, nephews and cousins including M.W. Thornhill, III, Nan Thornhill, Brenda Thornhill, Rodney Ferguson, Peggy Ferguson, Alvin Ferguson, Robin Ferguson, Earl King, Tracy King, Judy Thornhill Archer, Linda Thornhill Rickman, Roger A. Thornhill, III , Yvette Stevens and Marilyn Stevens.

A Memorial service for Dr. Herbert Louis Thornhill will be held at a later date.

Tribute Wall

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“ Wishing the Thornhill family my condolences on the home going of Dr. Thornhill. Such a beautiful celebration of his life and works you shared with us. I have had the honor of being a student during his affiliation at Harlem Hospital and a neighbor of Dr. and Mrs. Thornhill and family. Years later, I was blessed to be reacquainted with them and work with Dr. Thornhill on a professional level during his rehabilitation earlier this year. I know it has been such a difficult time and maintaining connected with family, friends and loved ones has been challenging. Know that you are thought of and kept in prayer. With peace and blessings, Thérèse A. (grand daughter of Mrs Ross). The team at KIR send their sympathy.

Therese Allen - August 22, 2020 at 08:01 PM