



## Thomas William Henry Roberts

July 9, 2023

Thomas "Thom" William Henry Roberts of Nashville, TN, died on July 9, 2023. He was preceded in death by his parents Daisy and Fred Roberts of Royal Oak, MI. He is survived by his stepson and grandson John and Cameron Thorburn, his brother and sister-in-law Dave and Diane Roberts (Gervais), his nieces Haley Roberts (Robert Olkowski) and Rose Grugal (Bryant), and his nephew David Roberts (Kathleen Hosie).

Thom grew up in Royal Oak, Michigan, loving the diverse music scene that included local favorites Bob Seger, Glenn Frey, and the MC5, as well as famous venues such as the Grande Ballroom where he could attend live concerts by Cream, The Who, and others. Thom also loved the folk scene and frequented places like The Raven Gallery to watch singers like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee, Tom Waits, and Chuck Mitchell perform. Thom and his friends bought and studied records the way other kids collected baseball cards and memorized batting averages.

While at Dondero High School in Royal Oak, Thom teamed up with several friends to form an "Ecology Club," a student environmental action group that came to be known as SCUM (Students Cleaning up Messes). The group introduced can recycling to Royal Oak. SCUM won one of fifty Presidential Environmental Award certificates in 1972.

In 1974, Thom enrolled at Central Michigan University. While he enjoyed books and history, he quickly resolved to find an opportunity to work with bands. In 1977, he left Mt. Pleasant to work with a Milwaukee group called The Street Corner Band. And with that move, Thom began his odyssey that would take him across North America, Europe, and Asia, working lights for such greats as The Beach Boys, The Grateful Dead, John Fogerty, Emmylou Harris, Eddie Rabbit, and many others. He worked for Vince Gill, Randy Travis, Olivia Newton-John, and Here Come the Mummies for extended periods before retiring from the road in 2022.

At home or between gigs, Thom also worked for several local houses, including The Grand Old Opry, The Franklin Theater and The Exit/In. At Belmont University, Thom served as lighting director for several of their PBS Christmas Concerts. One of his greatest delights was working with Belmont students to plan and execute their final spring performances each year. He was a great mentor to young people starting out in the concert tech business. In short, Thom loved collaborating with artists, techs, and roadies of all ages.

When Thom wasn't doing what he loved at work, he focused on being his grandson's biggest fan. Whether it was baseball, golf, or other activities, Thom encouraged Cameron to explore his interests and develop his skills. Cameron graduated from high school in 2023. To celebrate, Thom planned on taking him to Italy.

In an online tribute, his long-time friend and employer Randy Travis said that Thom was one of the best lighting technicians in the music business. "Thom not only had a magical sense about lighting a stage, but he had a quiet, charismatic presence that ignited your soul."

Thom kept in touch with a core of friends from his childhood, including the SCUM group, going back to 1960. He and some high school classmates were

planning a celebration of their 1973 graduation for this fall.

Co-workers, friends, and neighbors knew Thom as a big man with an even bigger heart. He will be dearly missed by many. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Feeding America or to the charity of your choice.

Friends and family will gather on Saturday, September 30, from 12:00 pm until time of memorial service at 1:00 pm at Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors, 705 W. Eleven Mile Rd. (4 blks. E. of Woodward), Royal Oak, 48067.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Gathering

SEP 30. 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (ET)

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors-Royal Oak  
705 W. Eleven Mile Road  
Royal Oak, MI 48067  
(248) 541-7000  
royal@sullivanfh.com  
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

## Memorial Service

SEP 30. 1:00 PM (ET)

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705 W. Eleven Mile Road  
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# Tribute Wall



“ *Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors created a Webcast in memory of Thomas William Henry Roberts*



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**Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors** - September 29, 2023 at 04:22 PM

CE

“ *TR was the best boss we had in the Icon dept at Light&Sound Design!!!  
He will live long in our hearts as a darn good man as well.*

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**Carol Ann Earle** - January 22, 2025 at 08:17 PM

“ Thom and I met on the day freshmen moved into dorms at CMU in Mt. Pleasant. We took a walk, and I listened to Thom talk about music. We would continue this conversation for fifty years and I am the better for it. He came to college with over three hundred records, a good stereo system, and a dream to work with a Rock'n Roll band. He also wore tee-shirts promoting his favorite bands. Only later did I realize that the shirts were conversation starters for Thom. He could listen to a cut from Roxy Music and follow it with a song by the MC5. Likewise, he would converse with a football fanatic or a Buddhist monk. With music and people he was only intolerant of hate, snobbery, and fakery.

Flash forward ten years during a pretty tough stretch for me. Thom visited and cued up John Hiatt's, song "Just Like My Dad Did". The song helped me understand where I was and what I did not want. It was a slow turning for me, but Thom was always a loyal friend, even when I was not at my best. We often would catch up when the tour he was working came into or close to Michigan. We would make meet up after he took care of the details for the evening concert, take a walk or explore some attraction and eat dinner. Often I would stay for the show. Thom loved what he did, and from my untrained eye, the lights invariably enhanced the show. After Thom was murdered, Dave and I visited Rowena and Rudy, who is also in the lighting business. He commented that Thom loved talking about and participating in art.

It was an AHA! moment. He expressed what I knew but had never expressed. Thom loved creativity and the cooperative act of making beauty. And that beauty could as diverse as what Randy Travis created during his career or what Here Come the Mummies do every weekend.

And for me equally admirable, Thom was willing to pay the price to do it. He was never wealthy; in fact, he sometimes scrambled to pay the bills. He was often uncomfortable; life on the road includes sleeping on a bus, eating unhealthy food, killing time before the

*show, and being away from home. Steady work was not guaranteed; he ran lights for some great people and bands, but there isn't a union to keep him employed. He could be fired or lose his job for myriad reasons unrelated to his performance. In spite of those difficulties, Thom never made a big deal out of it, but he accepted the difficult to pursue what he loved. Over his working life, he worked with talented musicians and was recognized as one of the best lighting guys in Nashville.*

*It makes me very happy to remember that we celebrated together just before he hit the road for his first gig with Street Corner Band and that Geoff, Joan and I got to have dinner with him just before he performed with the Mummies on the night of his retirement from the road.*

*I loved him and am very lucky that he loved me back.*

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**Bob Sacksteder** - September 28, 2023 at 08:56 PM

BA

“ *I can still hear Thom's boisterous laugh ..... and hope I always will.*

*Bill Armstrong*

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**Bill Armstrong** - September 28, 2023 at 08:10 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Thomas William Henry Roberts.*



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September 27, 2023 at 04:36 PM

DV

“ *I think I'll always remember Thom best as a joyful little boy running around with all the kids on Altadena. Such fun! Love to all the family.*  
*Debby Garwood Voulgaris*

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**Deborah Voulgaris** - September 22, 2023 at 05:06 AM



“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



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**Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors** - September 21, 2023 at 04:01 PM

BR

*Love it, I am so glad to have been able to visit with Thom earlier this year. Miss him very much*

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**Bill Roberts** - October 01, 2023 at 04:13 PM