



## Charlene Elsie Rill Thomas

January 20, 1934 - May 27, 2025

Charlene Elsie Rill Thomas, age 91, went to be with her Lord and Savior on May 27, 2025 while in assisted living hospice care in Surprise, AZ. Charlene was born in Heppner, Oregon on January 20, 1934 to Leonard Hiram Rill and Ninon Elizabeth Huston Rill and was raised on the family farm with her seven siblings. Charlene moved after high school to Phoenix, Arizona where she worked as a bank clerk and met and married in 1953 Luke Air Force Base Fighter Pilot Donald Eugene Thomas of Gettysburg, SD. She became a dedicated military wife and together they had four children: Holly, Travis, Kindal and Brian. They divorced in 1971 and as a single Mother in Phoenix she raised four children, attended college and received her real estate license. She became a top selling realtor for the Del Webb Corporation while in Sun City, AZ and was promoted to Del Webb's Las Vegas, NV division in 1988. She had a very successful career, enjoyed meeting and helping people find their dream home. Charlene was a devoted mother to her four children, a cherished grandmother, great grandmother and great-great grandmother. She lived in Henderson and Las Vegas for many years until moving back to Sun City in 2015.

Charlene was preceded in death by her parents and brothers Noel Rill, Evan Rill, Cecil Rill and Lynn Rill.

She is survived by her older brother Myron Rill of Othello, WA and younger sister Sharon Trout of Universal City, TX, her four children Holly Burke of

Ypsilanti, MI, Travis (Shelley) Thomas of Jensen Beach, FL, Kindal (Cheryl) Thomas of Browns Summit, NC, and Brian (Karen) Thomas of Iceland. She has 10 grandchildren Robert Brown, Denise (Eric) Avila, Heather (Nick) Thompson, Kayla (Kris) Van Boven, Nathan (Miriam) Thomas, Starr (Kelly) Friesen, Joshua (Tosha) Zimmerman, Egill Lynn (Ebba) Thomas, Lilja (Sigurour) and Karel Thomas; 22 great grandchildren, 9 great-great grandchildren, cousins and nieces and nephews.

Charlene was a member of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Surprise and enjoyed Bible studies led by her Pastor John Sprain. The family wishes to extend their heartfelt gratitude for the love and support shown during this time of remembrance.

# Tribute Wall

AC

“ Ashley At Simply Cremation lit a candle in memory of Charlene Elsie Rill Thomas



Ashley at Simply Cremation - June 05, 2025 at 06:40 PM

DA

I cannot finds the words. I'm heartbroken. I love you mom!

Denise Avila - June 10, 2025 at 05:38 PM

KA

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



kayla - June 03, 2025 at 06:27 PM

BR

Great picture, Kayla Joy

Brian - June 04, 2025 at 04:39 AM

KA

“ Grams was the steady, wise presence I could always count on. She had a gift for reading people and always seemed to know the right thing to say—or not say—at exactly the right moment. Her advice was honest, thoughtful, and always rooted in love. When I joined the military, she opened her home and her heart to me without hesitation, and reminded me often how proud she was. Her support never wavered. I’m so deeply grateful that my daughters got to know her and create their own cherished memories with her. Her love, strength, and encouragement will stay with us always.



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Kayla - June 03, 2025 at 04:47 PM

BT

“ Mom was/is a wonderfully complex character making her especially fantastic to be around. I said “is” because she is conscious, sentient and feel good “in Abraham's bosom. LK16:22” You can find further proof of that in Mark 12:18-27. The key verse being 12:27.

*Mom loved to have family visits and gave up her bed for kin. She was always the wonderful host, paying for dinners or a show. At her core she was immensely social though somewhat locked in during her last years due to health problems. This isolation gave her greater cause to relish each visit and visitor. Thanks to all you who dropped by and socialized over the years.*

*In my early years mom enjoyed being a housewife and could have stayed just a housewife. The Air force years afforded plenty of opportunity for social interaction which she revelled in. The Thomas house held frequent dinner parties for guests among those were dad's fighter squadron. She was the ultimate hostess, being attractive, bright, and amiable. I believe that she truly saw her life's work as being a devoted wife and mother. She would line us up in the ole days by age & so by height to introduce us individually and then say “ok, kids are to be seen and not heard.” Then we would shuffle off to be neither seen nor heard for the rest of that evening. Mom & Dad were avid bowlers delighting in the competition, the rivalry and socializing with good friends. They took more than their fair share of trophies and consistently took home the highest scoring couple award. There were cookouts with the squadron where us kids could be seen and heard, lots of fun! She'd baked birthday cakes for us. Forming and decorating the cakes as we requested; with roses, as a dog, as a sailboat, as a car, whatever. Then there would be a party, kids galore and games. She was All-in as they say on the housewife gig. But “Adam wasn't long in Paradise.” Behind the scenes was an abusive relationship and mom chose to risk the unknown and face its challenges rather than be abused. She has my utmost respect for this decision. In those days divorce was difficult and any reason needed to be proven in court. So, mom got a lawyer and had to fight Dad and the system; both being against*

*her. Mom won! She went from “Premier housewife” to “Uneducated Divorcee Mother of 4” not the title one aspires too. She didn't look like a winner in anyone's eyes but her own. There is no backing up, no rewind in life as we all know now. She was determined to have a quality life for herself but not sacrifice any quality nor social status already achieved. She'd advance from country girl to upper middle class housewife to ruler of her future. No divorce would change our social status. Mom and Dad had done well together but what now?*

*Well, Charlene Elsie Thomas, divorcee, bought a 3 bedroom house with a dug-in pool. I still remember it vividly at 3233 W. Sahuaro Dr. 85209 phone 602-942-9421. Seems a little bit careless today, her buying that house on a secretary's salary. She'd enrolled in a short-hand course and was rewarded with a job at Hurricane Car Wash. Why not start renting in a cheaper neighborhood and work your way up? This is counterintuitive but typical mom. The answer can only be her driving force; my kids and I are not going backwards. I'll provide them everything they could've expected before the divorce. She was going to do it and do it alone; tenacious. There was a family one house down from us on W. Sahuaro Dr. Divorced and remarried both parents working to support themselves and 4 children. They both brought two kids into their new family unit. Most people then and now would have gone that route. Mom could have easily taken that route; still young, extremely attractive and effervescent. She could have married again and taken the quick path to security. Tenaciously, Charlene had another vision for herself. She still amazes me! I asked her, years later, about her decision to quit Hurricane and go into real estate sales on a commission only basis. Regular safe money or more but nothing guaranteed. She trusted in her ability and left “safe” behind. Her reply was; Hurricane was paying the bills but we'd never get ahead. Did you catch that? “WE'D never get ahead. It was the group! There were chicks in the nest. They needed ample protection. Real estate was an all or nothing proposition and there were CHICKS in the nest. She didn't ask for a security net. She never looked down. It wasn't easy and she put in the hundreds/thousands of hours to learn and succeed in her new profession. She wasn't going to go*

*backwards, no way! Kudos.*

*She sent us kids to her parents during summer months both to save money and keep us out of mischief. Grand-Pa and Grand-Ma (Ma & Pa) were farmers/ranchers near Heppner, OR. Ma & Pa had 7 other children besides Charlene and loads of great grandchildren. We cousins would rendezvous over the summer at "Rill Place." Those were great summers with the big family gathering, rubbing and even throwing elbows; it was family after all. Most of them were country and gave the family city-slickers their due hazing. Country humor is funny for the country folk and for us city folk it's an acquired taste. I love it and am thankful mom sent us to the Rill's Place every summer. Although, if you'd have asked me at the time you wouldn't have gotten that impression nor that answer.*

*While we were connecting with family; mom was busting gut to provide for her children. Fall would find us back in Phoenix and ordinary city life. Mom's mantra was "if anyone calls, take a name and get a phone number. I need both. If we miss a sale, you'll miss a meal." She'd be headed out early while we were getting dressed or eating cereal; not saying goodbye but saying "take names and numbers." It was as good as goodbye at our house. It meant the same thing; I'm gone.*

*MOM leaving; "OK gang, Names AND numbers. Got it"*

*CHORUS; "Got it!"*

*MOM: "Brian.. what are you gonna do?"*

*BRIAN: "take names and numbers."*

*MOM: "that's right, names AND numbers. And there are TV dinners in the freezer. I'll be late."*

*Apparently, I'd forgotten a name or number at some point. I must have given an incomplete message. She was gone early and home*

*late keeping up with the Jones' was difficult for one bread winner. She got us Schwinn ten speeds when the names and numbers directive was followed and yielded fruit. She was doing so good that she added 2 dachshunds to the family unit. I recall viewing the puppies and asking what they cost. It was \$250 back then. I found that extravagant for a dog. You used to get them for free. Then she would pick the runt for the same price. When mom was at Hurricane she was only taking in \$400-\$450/month and that was only a few years before. She worked hard and rewarded/blessed us when she could. Mom didn't set a high bar for scholastic achievement. Her rule was to get C's. If you go above fine but don't get below and stay out of trouble. No trips to the principal. Mom was so busy that she didn't have time to tutor in the evenings and didn't want to spend valuable sales office hours in the elementary school principal's office. The C's were easy enough to get, staying out of the principal's office proved more difficult for me. When we were sick she didn't hover over us, nope. She was out the door at the same time saying the never forgotten "take names and numbers" but would add "sip your soup and nibble the crackers." One time after introducing mom to the principal, yet again, she took me aside. Not for a whipping, but it still shook just the same. She wanted me to behave better so she would look better. I was casting a poor shadow on the inner workings of our family. Wow, she got me there. We were a team, she was busy and I had to do what I could to help. I didn't sell real estate, she did and I was keeping her from that. I was keeping her from helping me. Keeping her from helping us. It was a good speech and hit the spot. I've used that lesson often in my life; I want to cast a true shadow at work; for the company and co-workers, at home; for wife and kids, in life; for those watching. The lesson was good but the learner was slow. Mom finally got to quit seeing the elementary principals. I eventually graduated and that seemed to solve that problem. But to both our credit the visitation frequency became acceptable.*

*Then us kids grew up and left home one by one. And she bloomed again and became Del Webb's top sales person year after year after year. Most sales people don't even get an interview for Del Webb.*

*Some make top Sales for a year but the intensity gets to most of them. Their sales begin to lag, they don't recover and boom they're fired. Mom never lost a sales job. In that dog eat dog environment, with or without kids in the house, she was Alpha! Still "all or nothing" with mom and "nothing" would wait. She was a Force. She was a great wife & mother and would have been content at that. But our life story is played on the move and she had SO much to do and prove. She wrestles life's challenges and pinned them all to the mat. She adapted to changes on the fly instinctually. She's still my inspiration. Please think of her often and fondly. It is hers and mine hope that you will reunite with us in Abraham bosom until the resurrection. Contact me anytime about salvation.*

*In proud memory of my mother, Charlene Elsie Rill Thomas,*

*Brian Thomas*

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**Brian Lynn Thomas** - June 03, 2025 at 02:43 PM

HB

“ *Holy Burke lit a candle in memory of Charlene Elsie Rill Thomas*



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**Holy Burke** - June 02, 2025 at 06:53 PM

BT

*Thank you*

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**Brian Lynn Thomas** - June 03, 2025 at 03:21 PM