



***June 4, 1929 - May 12, 2021***

## **Obituary for Conley S. Thatcher**

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Conley Siddoway Thatcher, beloved husband, father, grandfather and rocket scientist, died on May 12, 2021, in Provo, Utah, just short of his 92nd birthday, from complications of Parkinson's Disease. He was born on June 4, 1929, in Salt Lake City, Utah, to John Kenneth Thatcher and Alice Harries Siddoway. He was a lifelong member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was married to Joan Harris on July 16, 1960, in the Logan, Utah, Temple, until she passed away in 1980. He then married Jane E. Appling on September 13, 1980, in the Los Angeles Temple. They celebrated their 40th anniversary last year.

Conley grew up in Sugar City, Idaho, working on the family potato farm with his Dad and younger brother, Gordon, caring for their cows, horses, chickens and the massive potato fields. Once the chores were finished, he spent a carefree childhood swimming in the irrigation canals, building and flying his model airplanes and having adventures with his buddies. He even tipped a few outhouses, much to the dismay of his father, who promptly made him apologize and set them back up with his co-conspirators! He always wanted to become a pilot and earned his pilot's license at 16! Sadly, his inability to cross his eyes prevented him from becoming a pilot in the United States Air Force.

He was a popular and respected young man and was Valedictorian of Sugar Salem High School in 1947. He served as

Class President his junior year and as yearbook editor his senior year. He attended Ricks College prior to serving his church mission in the Western Canada Mission (which encompassed British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta at the time). Decades later, he and Jane returned to Vancouver Island to learn that the children of the families he had baptized were now serving in bishoprics and the Stake Presidency!

Following his mission he enlisted in the United States Air Force during the Korean War. After extensive training, he was assigned to the elite Strategic Air Command as a maintenance crew chief on the Boeing B-47E and the Boeing B-50D airplanes that he loved. After his Honorable Discharge in 1957, he attended the University of Utah where he was President of Delta Phi fraternity and in 1960, earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. His dream was to move to California and work in aerospace and he accomplished that. He worked for General Dynamics, Hughes Aircraft and transferred to North American Aviation, Space Division, in Downey, California, which later became Rockwell International. This gave him the opportunity to work the entire Apollo program that sent our astronauts into orbit and then to the Moon. At his 50th high school reunion, he told his classmates that he wanted to send a man to Mars in his lifetime! He almost made it—having retired just 10 years ago at 81 years old!

Conley continued his stellar career when the Boeing Company purchased Rockwell International, Space Division. He became an expert in materials and processes for the Space Shuttle program, developing the vital materials for the Thermal Protection System (the tiles and insulation for the Payload Bay doors among others). He spent 50 glorious years doing the work he loved. He was admired and revered by his fellow engineers, received numerous accommodations, and in 1987, was nominated as Rockwell International's Engineer of the Year. He was honored to receive four United States Patents for the materials he helped develop for the Shuttles. He always said, "I have my fingerprints on every shuttle!" having worked on every orbiter mission. His worst moments were when Challenger exploded shortly after launch and when he walked into the hangar that contained all the recovered parts of Columbia that had burned up upon reentry, killing the entire crew. He said his knees just buckled and he couldn't help but cry.

Conley was an avid and accomplished skier his whole life. He was a member of the Air Force Ski Team and could conquer any Black Diamond slope he could find! He continued skiing with Joan and later with Jane at Mammoth Mountain in California, Alta in Utah,

and Banff, Alberta, Canada, until his Parkinson's prevented him from doing so. He never got over the sadness of not being able to ski again.

He loved classical music, opera, country western, and the big bands he danced to as a young adult at Lagoon Dance Hall in Utah. Name a song and he could tell you who composed it! He leaves an extensive collection of records by these musicians. Throughout his life, he designed and built model airplanes and loved flying them. For many years he was the Rocketry Merit Badge counselor for the Boy Scouts of America in Orange County, California.

He was an avid reader, enjoying Conservative political authors, Louis Lamour, Vince Flynn, M. C. Beaton and Harry Potter. He read all four standard works every year, and was Stake Sunday School Superintendent, High Priest Group Leader, taught early morning Seminary, Gospel Doctrine, his High Priest Quorum and served as a counselor in the Bishopric. He was a devoted Home Teacher and Ministering Brother until his health prevented him from serving. He was also an accomplished photographer and loved documenting family activities and vacations.

Conley is survived by his wife, Jane, his four children Sarah Joan (Gale) Taylor, John Conley Thatcher (Amy), Rachel Jane Loveridge, from his first wife, Joan, and Kaitlyn Joy (Erik) Nystul with Jane; six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, his two younger sisters, Laurel Thatcher (Gale) Ulrich, and Layle Erickson; and his adoring dog, Gracie.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his younger brother, Gordon Thatcher, Joan and his grandson, Gale Scott ("Scotty") Taylor.

Funeral Services will be held this Saturday, May 22, at 11:00 a.m. at the Daniels Chapel, 2285 S. Daniels Road, Daniel, Utah 84032. A viewing will be held prior to the service from 9:30 - 10:45.

The service will be broadcast via Zoom. There will be no interment as he will be cremated and remain with Jane.

Those who wish to join by zoom, please use the following link <http://zoom.us/j/8012624631>