



## James F. Theis

May 26, 1924 - November 22, 2018

James F. Theis, 94, Topeka, Kansas, one of the greatest of the great generation, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on November 22, 2018.

Jim was born in Lawrence, Nebraska, on May 26, 1924, the eldest in the family of 10 children of Frank Patrick and Hedwig "Hattie" Marie Gilsdorf Theis. The Theis family moved from Lawrence, Nebraska, to Hastings, Nebraska, early in Jim's life and Jim attended Kindergarten at St. Cecilia's Catholic Parochial School in Hastings prior to the family moving to Heartwell, Nebraska.

After the family moved to a farmhouse southwest of Heartwell, Jim attended the rural county grade school at District #4 through eighth grade, thereafter attending and graduating from Heartwell High school, Class of 1942.

Jim grew up on the farm about a mile and a half south of his parent's home, living with his grandmother, Mary Noel Theis, and her son, William, after the death of his father when he was 14. Early in his long life, he relished riding to school on his beloved pony, Cupi, in all kinds of weather, trapping for pelts from rabbits, mink, fox, and the occasional skunk and selling them by mail to the Sears, Roebuck, Co. Savoring these memories and sharing them and others with his children was a joy to all.

A proud veteran of WWII, Jim entered the United States Army on September 25, 1944, and was inducted at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received basic training at Camp Fort Robinson, near Little Rock, Arkansas, after which he shipped to Luzon, Philippine Islands. There, in the Sixth Infantry Division, 63rd Infantry Regiment, he served as a first scout in heavy combat against the Japanese. On Luzon, the Sixth Division set the unchallenged record for 219 days of continuous combat in the Pacific Theater and Jim as a first scout served 112 days of that front-line combat. After Japan's surrender, Jim transferred with the Sixth Division to the Army of Occupation in Seoul, Korea, where he became editor of the regimental newspaper.

Shortly thereafter, Jim returned home to Heartwell. He received a Red Cross emergency

furlough just before Christmas, 1945, in time to get home and visit his dying grandmother, Mary, who was so instrumental in raising him. He subsequently received an honorable discharge on February 7, 1946.

At a Bohemian wedding dance in Lawrence, Nebraska, he met the love of his life and mother of their five children, Nelma Ione Stuehrenberg, and they married at St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Hastings on May 27, 1948. They have enjoyed 70 years of commitment in this union.

Jim used the GI Bill to attend Hastings College, where he received a Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in English - Class of 1950. He then became a teacher and coached basketball and 6-man football at Kenesaw High School, Kenesaw, Nebraska, in 1950 and 1951. In 1952, when still living in Kenesaw, he entered the life insurance business full time (after working during summers when teaching) as an agent for the Union National Life Insurance Company, a Lincoln, Nebraska domestic company, later acquired and merged into the American General Life Insurance Company of Houston, Texas. Jim enjoyed the life insurance business and became very successful as an enthusiastic apostle of the life insurance industry, admiring its contribution to the security of the family, and its contribution to the American way of life. He attended the Life Insurance Marketing Institute at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, graduating in 1954. The next year, he took a leave of absence from the Union National Life Insurance Company and moved to Lafayette, Indiana, with his family to become an instructor at that same Insurance Marketing Institute at Purdue.

In 1956, Jim and his family moved from Lafayette to Lincoln, Nebraska where he became the Director of Training at the home office of the Union National Life Insurance Company. During that year, he was also awarded the Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU) designation from American College of Life Underwriters.

In 1957, he resigned as Training Director of the Union National to become State Director for the State of Kansas for Union National Life, and moved from Lincoln to Topeka, Kansas, just prior to the Company's acquisition by the American General Life Insurance Company.

In 1965, he was appointed as Regional Director for American General Life and was later promoted to Regional Vice President. In 1972, he was promoted to Agency Vice President of the Western Division of American General Life and moved with Nelma and the youngest of his family still at home to their headquarters in Denver, Colorado. In 1975, Jim and Nelma moved to Houston Texas, the home office of American General Life Insurance Company to become the Agency Vice President. In 1976, he was promoted to Senior Vice

President and Director of Marketing and was elected to the Board of Directors. In 1980, Jim took early retirement from American General and moved with Nelma to Hastings, Nebraska. There he specialized in estate and business planning and selling life insurance and securities as an independent unaffiliated agent.

During his years as a marketing executive for American General and later while living in Hastings, Jim and Nelma did extensive traveling all over this country and the world, much of it with good friends Gene and Emory Hatcher. In 1996, Jim completely retired from the life insurance profession and he and Nelma moved from Hastings back to Topeka to be nearer family.

Jim was a member of Most Pure Heart of Mary Parish from 1957 to 1972 and since returning to Topeka, has been a member of Christ the King Catholic Parish. He was also a member of the Knights of Columbus, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Shriner's International.

James is survived by his wife, Nelma Theis; all of his 5 children, James F. Theis, Jr. (Diana), Paola, Kansas, Thomas L. Theis (Joan), Topeka, Kansas, Kathryn Ann McPherson, Olathe, Kansas, Jill Marie Firth (James), Suffolk, Virginia, and Mary Jane Santeiro (Ernest), Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida; 11 Grandchildren; five Great Grandchildren, all of whom Jim and Nelma are very proud; and sisters, Alice Pumilia (Luke), Kay Everett of Omaha, Nebraska and DeeDee Gibbs (John) of California. He was preceded in death by his mother, Hattie Theis; three brothers, Don, Bob and Fran; and three sisters, Anna Marie, Mary and Jean.

Visitation will be 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, December 12, 2018, at Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka KS 66614, with rosary being prayed at 7 p.m.

Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Thursday, December 13, 2018, at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church, 3601 SW 17th Street, Topeka KS 66604, with burial to follow in Mount Calvary Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Most Pure Heart of Mary Church, sent in care of the funeral home.

# Cemetery

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## Mount Calvary Cemetery

801 SW Westchester Rd  
Topeka, KS, 66606

# Events

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**DEC 12** **Visitation** 05:00PM - 07:00PM  
Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home  
2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka, KS, US, 66614

**DEC 12** **Rosary** 07:00PM  
Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home  
2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka, KS, US, 66614

**DEC 13** **Mass of Christian Burial** 10:00AM  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 SW 17th Street, Topeka, KS, US, 66604

# Comments

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“ An external video has been added.



Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home - Yesterday at 03:57 PM

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“ Loving Lilies and Roses Bouquet was purchased for the family of James F. Theis.



Yesterday at 11:23 AM

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“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of James F. Theis.



December 09 at 10:40 AM

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“ Janette Kirkpatrick and Risk Management Staff, LMH purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of James F. Theis.



Janette Kirkpatrick and Risk Management Staff, LMH - December 06 at 01:58 PM

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“ Dear Jill,  
Condolences from an old Most Pure Heart of Mary Elementary School friend. I remember spending the night at your house when we were in grade school. You had a beautiful home near 21st and Fairlawn. I don't think we realized at the time how "great" a role our dads played in protecting our country, our community, and our families. They truly were the, "Greatest Generation."

You are in my thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.  
Fondly, Susan (Thompson) Chilson

Susan Chilson - November 29 at 10:28 AM

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“ I always remember uncle Jim's great smile and laugh. His great sense of humor, and wit made him so much fun to be around. He looks so much like Grandma Theis. Especially this picture of him. A number of us remember how personable he was and always interested in what you were doing. I loved visiting Jim, Nelma, and family at their homes in Topeka, and Hastings through the years. He was ever present at weddings, funerals, anniversaries, and Alice and Luke's family get togethers in Omaha. He will be missed.

Much love and may God's healing touch be felt upon you all, aunt Nelma and family.

Gregg and Shari (Brusnahan) Wiese

Sharon L. Wiese - November 26 at 05:22 PM

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“ I met Jim Theis almost thirty years ago. It was on a very cold Thanksgiving Holiday. My bride to be, Mary Jane, had invited me to join her and her family for Thanksgiving in Hastings, Nebraska.  
I flew into Lincoln and then drove to Hastings. On the drive from the airport, I remember it was dark, cold and flat, oh and there was a lot of corn. Bitter cold though, at least it felt that way to a Floridian.  
Upon arrival to Jim and Nelma's home, they welcomed me with open arms. Their friendliness and warmth made me feel comfortable right away. The entire family was kind,  
friendly and made me feel like family. But then, the "Pitch" card games started. A little competitive, but a lot of fun.  
That also was my introduction to "basement living". A whole new world below ground, with a pool table, ping pong table, card table, bar, TV area and couches. Even a wood burning stove. All you needed to hibernate through the winter.  
It was a wonderful time, and I was hooked.  
But it was Jim and Nelma who so graciously welcomed me into their home and into the family that Thanksgiving, some thirty years ago. It has only gotten better since then. Jim, I'll always remember fondly your kind words, good advise, keen

observations and great sense of humor. I'll raise a glass to you and toast you, as a great man and role model for me. I thank you. To Jim!

**Ernie Santeiro** - November 24 at 02:58 PM



“ Jim and Diana,  
My sincerest condolences to you and your family for the loss of your Dad. I don't think that I knew what a distinguished gentleman your Dad was at the time we all worked for the Kansas Highway Patrol in old KHP Division IX out of Olathe. I was particularly impressed with his military service during WW2. You are in my thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.

Laynard "Lanny" Shearer, Lt. Col. (Ret.)KHP

**Laynard Shearer** - November 29 at 05:38 PM



“ Dear Aunt Nelma and Cousins,  
It is with sadness that we learn of Uncle Jim's passing, but what an amazing life he lived. Gerry and I so enjoyed our brief visits when we stopped in on our way from visiting our kids. They were always so hospitable and gracious. Uncle Jim loaned us a copy of his book that offered so much more insight into his life, which proved very interesting. He was an interesting man, experienced a lot in his life, including marrying the sister of my father, and raising 5 children; enjoying the gift of grandchildren, and loving life. He and Aunt Nelma shared many years of married love and I hold fun memories of times with the cousins at Grandma's house in Rosemont.

We pray for the peace and strength of those he left behind, that the Lord would comfort each of you as you deal with this great loss in your lives. You remain in our thoughts and prayers, as we are grateful for having known Uncle Jim.

Blessings,

Gerry and Penny Amack

**Penny Amack** - December 01 at 11:43 AM



“ What a joy to be a part of Jim's life as a caregiver! He shared his stories with me and I was blessed to hear them! He was exemplary in every way--love of family, love of country, dedication to his work, and kindness to his fellowman. May God give comfort to Nelma and the family. Thank you, Jim, for all you meant to me.

**Claire Phillips** - December 01 at 07:46 PM



“ I met Jim and Nelma about 4 years ago when I started bringing them Communion on Saturdays. I loved all the stories about their travels and families growing up. They both truly love God, family, country, and friends! I was blessed that God put them on my path! I will miss Jim and he will always be in my prayers. May you rest in peace Jim.

**Bonnie Donald** - December 03 at 06:35 PM



“ Jim, Diana, and Family,  
Our condolences for the loss of your father. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Ed and Nancy Vesey.

**Ed. Vesey** - December 06 at 12:06 PM