



Thomas G. Pelham

November 23, 1943 - February 21, 2023

Thomas G. Pelham ("Tom" to friends and "Jerry" to family) passed away on February 21, 2023 from complications of Parkinson's Disease at home surrounded by his loving family in Tallahassee, FL at the age of 79.

A funeral will be held at Bevis Funeral Home of Tallahassee on Sunday, February 26, 2023. Visitation will begin at 2:00 pm and the service at 3:00 pm. In lieu of flowers, gifts in memory of Tom may be made to the Parkinson's Foundation, parkinson.org, or to the Second Harvest of the Big Bend: fightinghunger.org.

Tom was born on November 23, 1943 to Roy and Annie Louise Pelham. The oldest of their five children, he grew up and worked on their family farm in Holmes County, Florida in the 1940's, 1950's, and early 1960's. In his early years, they lived in a two-room shotgun shanty without indoor plumbing or electricity, which did not come to the rural Florida panhandle until around 1950. Despite the backbreaking work of plowing fields, picking cotton, harvesting watermelons, maintaining fences etc that all members of farming families had to do, Tom found time whenever he could to read whatever newspapers and books he could get his hands on. Despite his father's love of farm work and rural life, Tom longed for a life of the mind.

Inspired and guided by his mother who had graduated first in her class and

who always ensured that her children completed their school work no matter how many chores were waiting, he graduated Valedictorian of Holmes County High School in 1961 and convinced his parents to allow him to attend college. He chronicled the colorful stories of their life on the farm during this time of economic hardship and transformative change in his memoir, *Kids Don't Have Backs*.

Tom received a B.A. degree in Government from Florida State University, a M.A. degree in Political Science from Duke University; a J.D degree in law from Florida State University; and a LL.M degree in law from Harvard University.

He taught for five years at the college level, two years at Prairie View A&M in Prairie View, Texas as a Woodrow Wilson Foundation Teaching Fellow and three years at the Southern Methodist University Law School from 1977 – 1980. Since moving back to Tallahassee in 1980, he also often taught classes at the Florida State University College of Law.

Dedicating himself to a life in the law, Tom had a distinguished career as a lawyer, certified planner, teacher, and writer. He was in private practice in Florida as a lawyer and planner for 28 years and is widely recognized as one of Florida's leading environmental and land use lawyers.

Tom served twice as Secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs, the state land planning agency, and he is the only secretary to serve two terms under separate governors. During his tenure as Secretary, Pelham played a pivotal role in shaping Florida's growth and development. He worked to ensure that the state's communities were sustainable, resilient, and able to meet the needs of their residents. He also led efforts to preserve Florida's natural resources, protect its coastal areas, and promote smart growth policies.

Tom is a past President of the American Planning Association/Florida Chapter. In April 2012, Tom was inducted into the American Institute of Certified Planners College of Fellows, one of the highest honors bestowed by the Institute for outstanding contributions to the planning profession at the national and local levels. He also served on numerous boards and commissions, including the Florida Housing Finance Corporation, the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund Advisory Council, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force.

He wrote extensively about Florida's land use planning laws for scholarly journals. He is author of *State Land-Use Planning and Regulation*, published in 1979 by Lexington Books. Two of the chapters included in this memoir were previously published in the *Seven Hills Review* in 2018.

Tom was also a devoted husband and father. He leaves behind his wife, Vivian Pelham née Holden, and sons Christopher in New York City and Evan in Tallahassee, his brother Stanley in Wauchula, sister Sherri in Tallahassee, and numerous nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Roy and Annie Louise, and by his younger brothers Bruce and Richard.

A passionate Yankees fan stretching back to the days when Mickey Mantle first patrolled center field and the imaginations of school boys all across America, Tom also enjoyed a lifelong love of movies and music of all kinds and was a voracious reader of both fiction and non-fiction. He remained active in retirement even as Parkinson's took its toll on him, pushing himself to complete and publish his memoir in 2021.

He will be remembered by his family, friends, and colleagues for his wisdom,

fair-mindedness, attention to detail, commitment to justice, and unwavering dedication to making Florida a better place. His sons are grateful for his unconditional love, for the many opportunities and experiences he endeavored to provide them, and for his support through whatever life decisions they made. His contributions to Florida's growth management, his championing of environmental safeguards and mixed-use development, and his opposition to urban sprawl will be felt for generations to come. He will be deeply missed by all those who knew him.

Rocky Bevis of Bevis Funeral Home (850-385-2193 or www.bevisfh.com) is assisting the family with their arrangements.

Previous Events

Visitation

FEB **26**. 2:00 AM - 3:00 PM (ET)

Bevis Funeral Home & Crematory
200 John Knox Rd
Tallahassee, FL 32303
(850) 385-2193

Funeral Service

FEB **26**. 3:00 PM (ET)

Bevis Funeral Home & Crematory
200 John Knox Rd
Tallahassee, FL 32303
(850) 385-2193

Tribute Wall



“ It was my privilege to work with Tom. His leadership and intelligence enhanced livability in Florida and the performance of those he worked with. I am thankful to have known him, my life is better for it. David Van Horn, former project manager for the Florida Governor's Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns

David Van Horn - February 28, 2023 at 03:47 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Thomas G. Pelham.



February 23, 2023 at 05:55 PM



“ Sweet Tranquility Basket was purchased for the family of Thomas G. Pelham.



February 23, 2023 at 04:39 PM