

# RICHARD JACOB SMETHURST



Dick Smethurst, aged 90, died peacefully in the early morning on Saturday, May 4, 2024, in the Westminster Place Senior Living facility in Oakmont, PA. He was born in 1933 in Carlisle, PA, the youngest son of Edward William ("Bill"), Sr. and Helen (nee Wiener) Smethurst. Dick was a devoted husband, gifted scholar, fantastic teacher, avid marathon runner, Army veteran and a wonderfully charming, warm

hearted, gregarious gentleman. Throughout his life, he touched many lives and is deeply missed by those left behind.

Dick's childhood years were happily spent with his parents; and older brother Bill, Jr. in Carlisle, Bloomfield, NJ and Montclair, NJ, where he graduated from Montclair High School in 1951. Dick liked to recall how his brother fiercely defended him from older bullies. He was an outstanding track athlete as well as a scholar in high school, developing lifelong passions for running and history.

He attended Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA where he met his future wife Mae Johnson in the Classical Documents room at the library during his junior year when Mae was just a freshman. He majored in history and graduated cum laude in 1955, winning the Morris Prinz prize for outstanding history major. After graduation, Dick went into the Army as an intelligence officer. Dick and Mae married in December 1956, between semesters of Mae's senior year, while Dick was on leave from the Army. Dick was subsequently stationed in Tokyo, Japan and after graduation, Mae joined Dick and got a job teaching Latin and French at the American School in Japan, located in Tokyo. So began a lifelong love and study of Japan for both Dick and Mae.

Following his tour of duty in the Army in 1959, both Mae and Dick went to the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, MI to pursue their doctorates, Mae in Classics and Dick in Japanese history. They both received their doctorates from Michigan in the same ceremony in 1968. They began working at the University of Pittsburgh in 1967, becoming Assistant Professors (Dick in History and Mae in Classics) following their graduation from Michigan. They would spend the next 46 years teaching at the University of Pittsburgh, retiring in 2013.

In the early 1960's, Dick and Mae spent several years in Japan doing research for their doctorates. Much of this time they lived with the Yasuba family, beginning a close relationship that lasted the rest of their lives. During this period in Japan, they both became deeply interested in Japanese art, collecting prints that became the basis of a major 2007 exhibit that Dick and Mae co-curated at the Frick Art Museum in Pittsburgh. Together, they amassed one of the largest private collections of Noh block prints in the world, particularly those by Tsukioka Kōgyo, much of which has been donated to the University of Pittsburgh.

Dick was a distinguished scholar of modern Japanese history and culture, writing on the rise of Japanese militarism prior to World War II, Japanese tenant farmers, Japanese fiscal policy in the early twentieth century, and Japanese art. He researched and authored an influential biography of Japan's great finance minister and cosmopolitan banker Korekiyo Takahashi, *From Foot Soldier to Finance Minister: Takahashi Korekiyo, Japan's Keynes* (2007). It was so well received that a Japanese government minister handed out copies of the book as part of an effort to shift Japan's economic policies in the early twenty-first century.

He also authored *A Social Basis for Prewar Japanese Militarism: The Army and the Rural Community* (1974) and *Agricultural Development and Tenancy Disputes in Japan, 1870-1940* (1986) as well as many influential articles. At the time of his death, Dick was working on a book about the Japanese military and World War II. In addition to his writing, he was known in his field as a captivating lecturer. He is remembered by his students and colleagues as a modest and generous scholar. He and Mae collaborated on many projects, especially concerning Noh drama and Japanese prints.

Mae and Dick lived in the Shadyside neighborhood of Pittsburgh for over 50 years. They were renowned entertainers, hosting many friends, family, colleagues and international dignitaries at their house over the years. They became particularly close friends with the neighbors with whom they shared a semi-detached house on Westminster Place, Missy and John Unkovic and their daughter Rachel.

Dick is survived by his brother Bill Smethurst (Ludlow), two nieces, three nephews, six grandnieces, a grandnephew and many friends who considered him and Mae family. He is preceded in death by his parents Bill and Helen Smethurst, his aunt Amelia ("Mimi") Blumenfeld, whom he considered a second mother, and his beloved wife Mae Johnson Smethurst.

A memorial service will be held on Monday, June 17 th at 11:30 am at The Church of the Redeemer, 5700 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15217. Arrangements by **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.**

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