



Thomas Connors,

March 17, 1938 - October 17, 2009

Dr. Thomas James Connors, 70, of North Branford, after a short illness died peacefully in his home on October 17, 2009, surrounded by loving family and friends. He was the son of the late Anna Theresa Enright Connors and the late Thomas Leo James Connors of New Haven. Connors leaves behind his beloved wife, Maria Elena Velez Connors, with whom he shared 42 amazing years. He is survived by his son Christopher Connors, also of North Branford, as well as two granddaughters, Haley and Alyssa. He will be deeply missed by both the extended Velez and Connors families, including his three siblings and their spouses: Veronica Connors Hendrick and the late William J. Hendrick, Jr., of Orange. Ann Connors Crowley and Kenneth Crowley of State College, Pennsylvania, and Leo Connors and Mary Ann Silvestrini Connors of Hamden. Connors led a rich and full life. Having survived a diving accident, which left him paralyzed at the age of 19, Connors proceeded to Fairfield University where he received BA degrees in both History and Philosophy and obtained his MA in Counseling. Connors went on to the University of Connecticut, earning his Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Research in 1976. As Chief of Rehabilitation Services for the Connecticut State Department of Education (1978 to 1988), Connors administered the statewide provision of rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities. Connors also worked as a Counseling Psychologist (1975 to 1979) for the Veterans Administration. Prior to that (1971 to 1973), Connors was a Counselor at the University of Connecticut Counseling Center where he later became the Coordinator of the Office of

Services for Students with Disabilities (1974-1975). In addition to this work, Connors had a long career as a Citizen Advocate and Rehabilitation Consultant, serving on numerous boards and commissions relating to disability issues. At various times, Connors served as the President of the Connecticut Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, the Chairperson of the City of Hartford Commission on Disability Issues, as well as the President of Personal Services Enabling Independence, Inc. His lifelong achievements have been recognized by multiple local, state, and national awards, a sample of which include the Secretary of State's Public Service Award 2003, National Spinal Cord Injury Association, CT Chapter Awards 1999, the Gaylord Lyman Gold Medal 1983, and the Fairfield University Alumni Association. Man of the Year Award 1978. Connors was selected by President Jimmy Carter as a recipient of the Outstanding Handicapped Federal Employees of the Year Award, an honor presented to Connors in a 1978 ceremony in Washington, DC. In retirement, Connors remained vibrant and active. As a lifetime learner, Connors attended Southern Connecticut State University where he studied Creative Writing and Poetry. He also participated in the Institute for Social and Policy Bioethics Working Group on Disability at Yale University and was the Chair of the Connecticut Statewide Independent Living Council. As a poet and humanitarian, Connors used his tremendous gifts for the benefit of others. As a patron of the arts, Connors supported various local theaters such as the Long Wharf and Yale Repertory Theaters. A devotee of all musical and visual art forms, Connors was most particularly drawn to music, not only as a listener but also quite often as a rowdy, joyous performer. He will be sorely missed by those who knew him. Calling hours will be Tuesday evening from 4:00-8:00 at Sisk Brothers Funeral Home, 3105 Whitney Ave., Hamden. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Wednesday at 11:00 o'clock, at Holy Infant Church, 450 Racebrook Rd, Orange. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project (CT-Y'LP), c/o John Bendoraitis, Treasurer, 370 Levita Road, Lebanon, CT 06249. This charity empowers children with disabilities to become leaders of tomorrow.