

Carl and Marilyn Thoma: A Legacy of Determination and Generosity

Like you, Carl and Marilyn Thoma were once starting college, ready to seize the opportunities that education offers. They grew up in rural Oklahoma and New Mexico but were determined to make the most of their opportunities. Today, their success and generosity have made a difference in many people's lives, but their journey began much like yours—with a love for learning and a desire to create a better future.

Perseverance and Hard Work

Marilynn's story begins with her grandmother, who moved to Beaver County in 1888, now in Oklahoma, before the state even existed. Her neighborhood school only went up to the 8th grade, but Marilyn's grandmother went on to become one of the first women in her region to earn a college degree. She passed down her determination and value for education to her five children, saving money throughout the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression to help her children could go through college.

Marilynn learned from her grandmother's determination—working hard and finding creative ways to be successful in school. In the 8th grade, she started taking the "Vocabulary Page" from *Reader's Digest* and taping it to her bathroom mirror to study daily while getting ready for school. She also worked hard outside of the classroom in 4H. When she was 16, her hard work paid off when she placed second in the junior category of the Pillsbury National Bake-Off. Thanks to her baking talent, Marilyn got to take her mother and grandmother on their first-ever airplane ride to the national competition.

Carl's mother was also the first in her family to graduate from college. Her achievements in graduating as valedictorian of her middle and high school classes paved the way for her to attend college, but her parent's unwavering support made college a possibility. She taught Carl and his sister the importance of education early on. Carl followed in her footsteps, becoming valedictorian of his high school graduating class of 33 students in Boise City, where less than half of his classmates went on to college. His mother's dedication didn't stop when her children went to college—she would drive over six hours to OSU to ensure Carl's sister was staying on track during midterms.

These stories of perseverance are evidence of what can be achieved by refusing to give up, even when life gets difficult. As the first recipients of the Thoma Scholarship, you can also ensure that your hard work in achieving your bachelor's degree will create meaningful opportunities for yourselves and your families.

Building Their Future: From College to Careers

Carl and Marilyn met at the beginning of their junior year at Oklahoma State University through his fraternity and her sorority. Drawn together by shared experiences of growing up in rural Oklahoma and a mutual determination to succeed, they supported each other through their studies—Carl in agricultural economics and accounting and Marilyn in home economics and journalism.

After earning their bachelor's degrees, the Thomas continued their education at Stanford's Graduate School of Business, where they each earned a master's degree. From there, they went to Chicago, where Marilyn's talents at the intersection of baking and advertising led her to an advertising and food branding position with Quaker Oats. Rising to Senior Brand Manager, she led many successful brand campaigns, including introducing the world to Cap'n Crunch. Carl's first position was with First Chicago Corporation, where he met Stanley Golder, who would become an important mentor. Carl later became partner and founder in several private equity firms, ultimately founding Thoma Bravo, which focuses on software and technology companies. It is known for its innovative "buy and build" strategy, which Carl developed and is now used by most private equity firms worldwide.

Giving Back: A Commitment to the Arts and Education

After years of professional success, Carl and Marilyn turned their focus to giving back. They recognized the importance of mentorship, something Carl had experienced firsthand through his relationship with his mentor, Stanley Golder. This commitment to helping others led them to establish their first charitable foundation in 1986, which eventually grew into the Thoma Foundation.

The Foundation has focused on art-related grants, supporting research and innovation in the Art of the Spanish Americas and Digital and Media Art. More recently, the Thomas expanded their mission to include grants for education, particularly in the Southwest region. They realized that one of the most meaningful ways to create change was by supporting bright, ambitious students—like you—through scholarships that would allow them to pursue their dreams without financial burden.

Your Role in the Thoma Legacy

As Thoma Scholars, you are now part of a legacy that values hard work, perseverance, the pursuit of knowledge, and giving back. The Thomas have created a tremendous opportunity for you, but it's up to you to take the next steps. How will you use this opportunity to make the most of your time at Texas Tech—and ultimately make a difference in your community, your chosen field, or the world?

Carl and Marilyn's story is proof that with the right mindset, dedication, and help from mentors and other supporters along the way, you can achieve incredible things. As you begin your academic journey as a Thoma Scholar, you are writing the next chapter of their legacy of determination, generosity, and possibility.