

# In Loving Memory

By Kelly Homan Rodoski

*Through the Remembrance Scholarship Fund, an alumni couple pay tribute to a soldier lost in World War II and the young bride he left behind*



Jean Taylor Phelan Terry

Convocation. While they didn't know any of the students lost in the crash of Pan Am Flight 103, they appreciated meeting the 35 students who were named as the 2000-01 Remembrance Scholars. "The convocation was an eloquent testimonial to the memory of the students of Pan Am Flight 103," says Jean Thompson. "It was an honor to meet the families of the students and learn their personal stories. We were also impressed by the very high caliber of the scholarship recipients. The University's strong commitment to this program was clear."

The two Syracuse University alumni gave a significant gift last summer to the Remembrance Scholarship Fund in memory of Jean's parents, John Phelan and Jean Taylor Phelan Terry '43. The couple decided to support the fund because of the similarities between the loss of the 35 Syracuse University students in December 1988 and the loss of Jean's father in 1944.

John Phelan had just completed his sophomore year at SU in 1941 when he was drafted into the Army. Like so many other young men, he left to serve his country in World War II, planning to return to the promising life he was building in Syracuse. But John never returned. He was killed in action in France in August 1944, leaving behind his young wife and daughter, 6-week-old Jean. Like the Pan Am 103 students, John left SU in his prime and never made it back to the Hill. And like them, John left behind grieving loved ones and unmeasured potential.

Born on August 24, 1918, John Phelan grew up in Sherrill, a small city tucked inside the western border of

Oneida County, New York, where his father worked for the Oneida Community silver manufacturer. John attended Sherrill High School, and spent a year at Perkiomen Preparatory School in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. From 1938 to 1939, he studied at the Manlius School, now Manlius-Pebble Hill School in DeWitt. Known there as "Big John," he played three sports and graduated with honors. In a letter to John's parents following his death, D.P. McCarthy, headmaster of the Manlius School, said: "There was never a more popular boy ever to attend Manlius, and he will always be remembered for his kindness to others."

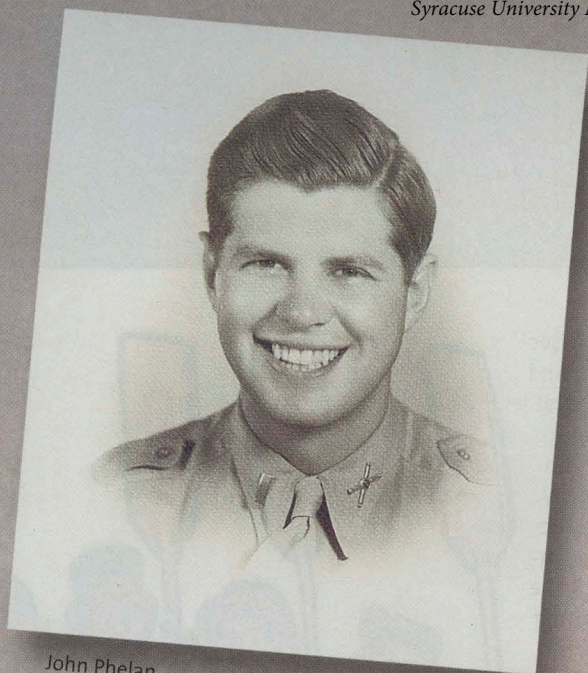
Jean Taylor was born in Baltimore on September 23, 1921, and moved to Syracuse as a young girl. Her parents settled into a home on Brattle Road in the Sedgwick section of the city. Jean attended Syracuse Central High School and in the fall of 1939 prepared to enter Syracuse University.

It was here that Jean and John met. Friends remember them both as attractive, popular, and outgoing. Jean was active in her sorority, Theta Phi Alpha, and served as class president during her sophomore and junior years. Her activities set the stage for a lifetime of commitment to and involvement with the University. John was a star football player, with a personality that matched the scope of his athletic talent. "John was a very handsome, very pleasant guy," says Mildred Lonergan McAuliffe '43, a friend of the couple. "I was a student journalist, and he always called me 'Scoop.' He made me feel like a million dollars."

Jean Taylor and McAuliffe were sorority sisters in Theta Phi Alpha, and John lived with other football players in a house close by. "Jean had a car, and she was always outside, pretending there was something wrong with it, hoping to catch Johnny's eye," McAuliffe says.

It was only natural that a romance would quickly blossom. The couple dated throughout their freshman and sophomore years. On July 8, 1941, just after completing his sophomore year, John was drafted into the Army. McAuliffe remembers that he was one of the first local boys to go off to war. By the end of 1941, he was stationed in Hawaii.





John Phelan

Even though they were separated by thousands of miles and a world war, the bond between Jean and John remained strong. Jean continued her studies in SU's College of Business Administration. The couple maintained their courtship through letters, and, according to friends, became engaged through the mail. Their betrothal was announced in the *Syracuse Herald American* in December 1942.

In May 1943, while serving in California, John was granted an unexpected leave. The wedding was quickly planned—not an easy feat with the country at war. Jean Thompson remembers her grandmother's stories about the wedding, and the challenges posed by planning a reception while rationing was in effect.

Four days after graduating from SU, Jean Taylor married her college sweetheart at St. John the Evangelist Church in Syracuse. Jane Kendrick '40, G'43, of Skaneateles, New York, a friend of the couple, attended the wedding. "They were so much in love, and you were just so happy for them," Kendrick says. "Jean couldn't have been happier."

The couple spent a brief honeymoon in New York City, after which John returned to his post at Camp Young in California. Jean remained with her parents until she could join her new husband. During that time, Jean worked as a secretary in the University registrar's office.

When John was sent to Officer's Training School at Camp Davis, North Carolina, Jean joined him. But their time together was brief. John shipped out to England, arriving there on Christmas Day 1943. Jean, pregnant with their first child, returned to Syracuse.

John never had a chance to hold that child, Catherine Jean, born June 29, 1944. He died August 8, 1944, while serving with a U.S. coastal artillery (anti-aircraft) unit in France. His obituary was published in the *Syracuse Herald American* on his 26th birthday. According to the obituary, Jean received a letter from her husband a few hours after receiving the War Department telegram notifying her of his death. In the letter, John told her that he received the pictures of their infant daughter.

That baby girl is now grown and happily married with daughters and grandchildren of her own. Jean Thompson grew up in Syracuse and attended SU, graduating in 1966 from the College of Arts and Sciences. She married, and gave birth to a daughter, Kristin. In a twist of fate that mirrored her mother's experience, Jean lost her first husband, Marine Corps Capt. Richard Morin, in the Vietnam war. In 1974, she married Richard "Dick" Thompson, a Vietnam veteran and a 1967 graduate of the Maxwell School, where he earned a master's degree in political science. Jean gave birth to another daughter, Beth.

Jean is active in a variety of Washington-area organizations. She has served as chair of the Women's Committee of the Smithsonian Institution and is currently a member of the executive committees of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society and the Congressional Club. Dick is vice president of government affairs for Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. He has served on the advisory boards of SU's School of Management and the Maxwell School. He is currently a member of the board of the Meridian International Center and Ford's Theater.

The Thompsons lead busy lives filled with family, friends, and activities. Some of their favorite times are spent with their young grandchildren, Stephen and Kaitlin. Even with the joy that now fills their lives, they do not forget the losses they've experienced.

Jean's mother died last March. The Thompsons had considered a major gift, and after learning about the Remembrance Scholarship Fund, they decided it was the perfect way to memorialize Jean's parents. "The loss of 35 students in the prime of their young lives touched the hearts of millions of people. So, too, did the loss of so many exceptional young men like John Phelan more than 50 years ago in World War II," Dick Thompson says. "We therefore thought it fitting to support the Remembrance Scholarship with a gift in memory of Jean's mother and father."

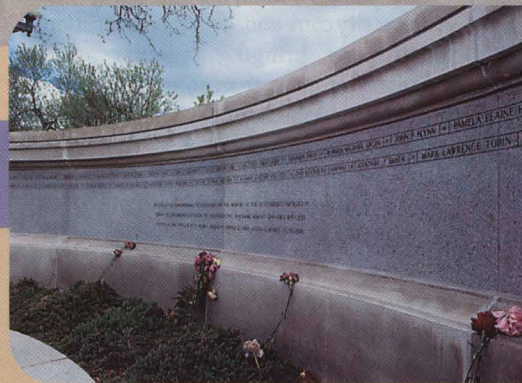
## The Remembrance Scholarship Fund

The Remembrance Scholarship Fund was established in 1989 to honor the memory of the 35 SU students lost in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on December 21, 1988. The students were returning home to the United States after a semester abroad.

The scholarship provides \$5,000 awards to 35 students of special merit for their senior year of study. It is considered the University's most prestigious student award. Remembrance Scholars are chosen

based on academic excellence; service to the University through clubs, campus organizations, or other activities; an essay; and a personal interview with the selection committee.

The Fred L. Emerson Foundation awarded the University a \$500,000 challenge grant to encourage donations to the Remembrance Scholarship Fund. The University met the Emerson Foundation's challenge by raising more than \$3.1 million for the endowment through 5,121 gifts. The



endowment fund now exceeds \$3.6 million, with an ultimate goal of \$5 million.

For information about making a gift to the Remembrance Scholarship Fund, contact Jon Denison, executive director of development, at 315-443-5466, or [jddeniso@syr.edu](mailto:jddeniso@syr.edu).