



52 McGs.: The Best Obituaries from Legendary New York Times Reporter Robert McG. Thomas

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Among his devoted fans, his pieces were known simply as McGs. With a "genius for illuminating that sometimes ephemeral apogee in people's lives when they prove capable of generating a brightly burning spark" (*Columbia Journalism Review*), Robert McG. Thomas Jr. commemorated fascinating, unconventional lives with signature style and wit.

The New York Times received countless letters over the years from readers moved to tears or laughter by a McG. Eschewing traditionally famous subjects, Thomas favored unsung heroes, eccentrics, and underachievers, including: Edward Lowe, the inventor of Kitty Litter ("Cat Owner's Best Friend"); Angelo Zuccotti, the bouncer at El Morocco ("Artist of the Velvet Rope"); and Kay Halle, a glamorous Cleveland department store heiress who received sixty-four marriage proposals ("An Intimate of Century's Giants"). In one of his classic obituaries, Thomas described Anton Rosenberg as a "storied sometime artist and occasional musician who embodied the Greenwich Village hipster ideal of 1950's cool to such a laid-back degree and with such determined detachment that he never amounted to much of anything." Thomas captured life's ironies and defining moments with elegance and a gift for making a sentence sing. He had an uncanny sense of the passion and personality that make each life unique, and the ability, as Joseph Epstein wrote, to "look beyond the facts and the rigid formula of the obit to touch on a deeper truth."

Compiled by Chris Calhoun, one of Thomas's most dedicated readers, and with a fittingly sharp introduction from acclaimed novelist and critic Thomas Mallon, *52 McGs.* will win legions of new fans to the masterful writer who transformed the obituary into an art form.

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