

Thomas “Tom” Raymond Merry was born November 24, 1925, in Dell Rapids, South Dakota, the son of Henry and Anna Janette (Qualseth) Merry. He grew up in Dell Rapids and graduated from Dell Rapids High School in 1943. He began College at South Dakota State University and was a member of the varsity basketball team. While he was a good athlete, he claims he made the team only because the others were serving in the military during World War II. His college and basketball careers were also interrupted when he was ordered to report. While going down the hallway to the Army office, Tom passed by an open door that said Navy above the door. He inquired of the young man behind the desk if it was too late to become a seaman, and the answer was “come on in”.



While Tom was training in Southern California he met Julia “Judy” Whitlock who was working at the Naval Ammunition Depot in Fallbrook, California. Tom and Judy hit it off right away, and Tom called his dad to say he and Judy were going to get married. His dad dismissed it as perhaps youthful “not quite” maturity. After a brief courtship, they were married on June 7, 1945. When Tom’s sister, Reefa, came for a visit, and found they were married, she said “Tommy, you had better call your dad!”

Following the war and Tom’s discharge from the Navy in August, 1945, they moved to Brookings so both could continue their education at South Dakota State. Tom could no longer make the basketball team, but to get into the games, and considering they were dirt poor, he followed in the footsteps of his older brother, Howard “Jiggs”, and became a cheerleader so he could get in free. Tom and the Dean of the math department became good friends and “billiard buddies”. The Dean would get Tom out of class to shoot billiards which Tom became very good at, and billiards tournaments helped with the family finances. Tom graduated in 1949 with a degree in engineering, and his first job was with the Trane Company in Salt Lake City and then Boise, Idaho, where Max was born in 1949. In 1951 Tom and Judy moved back to Dell Rapids, and Tom joined his dad and brother, “Jiggs”, in the John

Deere Implement business known as Dells Motor Co. Sue was born in 1952, and Ray was born in 1960. Tom and Jiggs continued to work in the business after it was sold and relocated to the Dells Interstate Exchange. They considered the 3 mile drive a commute and packed their lunches. Tom retired in 1989.

Tom was an avid sports fan, playing amateur baseball and basketball. He was one of the founders of the Dell Rapids Golf Course in the early to mid 1960’s. He was instrumental in the original layout, which for the most part went in a counter clockwise direction. Trouble was generally on the right. Tom never sliced the ball but was prone to hook the ball to the left, thus designing the course to suit himself. In later years, senior citizen golf was more about scrounging golf balls than serious golf. Tom was in charge of rodent control, and he was an excellent shot. The course was gopher-less for many years. Tom’s greatest interest was young people, and over the years he came to know many. Whether it was a basketball game, football game, track meet, volleyball game, baseball game, etc., whether varsity, junior varsity or younger, quite often he would be there. Tom is a 3-time recipient of the Booster of the Year Award at Dell Rapids Public High, most recently with his close friend and “care giver”, Don Sagmoe. Tom regularly handed out Tootsie Roll Pops to “kids”, even in their 60’s. In the summer he would stop by the local swimming pool and take Blizzard orders from the staff, which he would buy and deliver. If he knew you, you’d get a hug. If he didn’t, you may still get a hug. He loved kids and just enjoyed people.

Tom was preceded in death by his wife, Judy. Tom’s family includes his sister, Reefa Hanenberger, of Laguna Woods, California, his son, Max (wife, Cheryl) of Dell Rapids, daughter, Sue Pond (husband, Graeme) of Melbourne, Australia, son, Ray (Christine Farragher) of Eagle, Colorado, three grandchildren, Lindsay Merry (Joe Espinoza), Jessica Pond (Nick Uren), Sarah Burnett (husband, Justin) and four great-grandchildren, Brooklyn Merry, Paisley Espinoza, Hamish Burnett and Abby Burnett, Judy’s sister, Sammy McKay (husband, Howard) of Snohomish, WA., and many nieces and nephews.

*The family request that memorials be directed to the First Baptist Church, Dell Rapids where Tom was a lifelong member.*