

*In Loving Memory Of*  
**John & Eileen Raforth**

*Born*

September 22, 1929  
Fairfax, Minnesota

*Born*

January 22, 1930  
Hector, Minnesota

*Passed Away*

November 13, 2025  
Sturgis, South Dakota

*Passed Away*

October 27, 2025  
Sturgis, South Dakota

*Funeral Service*

Saturday, January 3, 2026, 11:00 a.m.  
Grace Lutheran Church  
Sturgis, South Dakota

*Officiant*

The Reverend Kevin Jensen

*Sign Language*

Sherri Raforth

*Musicians*

Jean Britsch- Pianist  
Neil Witte - Soloist  
Marlene Kotab - Organist

*Musical Selections*

“Children of the Heavenly Father” “Where the Rivers Meet”  
“What Wondrous Love is This” “Give Me Jesus”  
“On Eagle’s Wings”

*Pallbearers*

Tom Raforth Michael Britsch Shayne Britsch  
Brad Piehl Rich Knowlton Bob Haivala

*Honorary Pallbearers*

All the Grandchildren

*Final Resting Place*

Black Hills National Cemetery

*In Loving Memory*



**John C. Raforth**  
*September 22, 1929*  
*November 13, 2025*



**Eileen B. Raforth**  
*January 22, 1930*  
*October 27, 2025*

John was born at home to Wilhelmina (Minnie Schultz) and John Frederick Raforth on their farm near Fairfax, Minnesota on September 22, 1929. John was the youngest of four children. He was a child of the great depression, and his family lost their farm to foreclosure when he was a young child. This led to his family moving to Gibbon, Minnesota where John attended school.

As a young boy John became very sick and almost died from whooping cough and measles. When walking to school, John would often carry hot potatoes in his coat pockets to keep his hands warm and then would eat the potatoes for his lunch. He enjoyed sports at school, and played basketball, baseball, and football, earning 14 letters. While he was in high school, John played town ball and was good enough to get a tryout with a scout for the New York (San Francisco) Giants. His big-league dream failed when his pitching hand got stung by a bullhead the day before his tryout. John was a voracious reader. The town librarian said that John had his name in nearly every book in the library because he checked out so many.

After he graduated from Gibbon High School in 1948, John joined the Air Force. He trained to be a pilot and passed propeller school but didn't make it through jet school. He became Staff Sergeant for the office of the training squadron and was honorably discharged in 1952. During his time in the Air Force, he passed a college equivalency exam which gave him 2 years of college credits. Following his discharge, John attended the University of Minnesota on the GI bill. He was the first member of his family to attend college. As an undergraduate, John was a member of Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity. After obtaining his Bachelor of Science degree, he applied to the University of Minnesota Veterinary School, and was one of 40 admitted out of over 300 applicants. John graduated in 1958.

As an undergraduate, John met his future wife Eileen in 1953 at a school dance. After a whirlwind romance they were married on November 22, 1953. Following graduation, John's first veterinary practice was in Eureka, South Dakota. Later, in 1961, the family moved to Ada, Minnesota and then relocated to Sturgis in 1978. During John's veterinary career he treated all types of animals, ranging from a circus elephant to birds to cows, horses, and other livestock, to dogs and cats. He truly epitomized a country veterinarian as depicted in James Herriot's *All Creatures Great and Small*, and had great compassion for animals and their owners.

John also loved farming and ranching, and raised his own herd of beef cattle both in Minnesota and South Dakota. He was particularly interested in genetics to improve his herd, and crossbred Herefords, Angus, Tarentaise, and Simmental cattle breeds.

John kept busy working as a veterinarian and on the farm but managed to serve on the local school board for 8 years and taught Sunday School at Grace Lutheran Church in Ada. When he was on the school board and embroiled in contract disputes with the teacher's union, he and the union representative would sometimes resolve their impasse with a chess game – winner takes all.

In 1966, John and Eileen took their young family across the world to participate in mission service in northern Ethiopia. He provided veterinary support and trained farmers to care for their animals. On the return trip back to America, John and his family also visited India, Thailand, Japan, and Hong Kong. John later made three additional trips to Africa, providing veterinary care and disease testing in Cameroon.

John participated in Kiwanis and received recognition for 60 years of continuous membership in the American Legion. He enjoyed reading, visiting with friends, swimming, and playing card games. John was proud of his German heritage, and made several trips to Germany to research his family genealogy. He also was a diehard Minnesota Vikings and Gophers sports fan.

John peacefully passed away on November 13, 2025. He is survived by his son, John (Sherri); daughter, Jean (Mike); his grandchildren, Cheyenne, Denali (Alec), Cordelia, Tom, Shayne (Hwawon) and Sydney; great grandchildren, Serah, Selina, and Stephen; nieces and nephews, and many many friends.

John was preceded in death by his wife, Eileen; his parents, John and Minnie Raforth; siblings, Robert, Phyllis, and Edna,; and niece, Gail Walsh.

Eileen peacefully passed away on October 27, 2025 with her family around her.

She was born on January 22, 1930 at home in Hector, Minnesota to Herb and Hulda (Radloff) Witte. Eileen was the oldest of three siblings (Donna and Harold).

In high school, she was active in the school newspaper, school council and was president of her class senior year. She was a cheerleader, participated in Girl Scouts, and was confirmed at St. Paul's Lutheran church in Hector. Growing up, Eileen and her family went fishing and blueberry picking in northern Minnesota, a tradition she later continued with her own family.

She graduated from high school in 1948 and then worked for a year at her father's car dealership. She received a scholarship to Macalester College in St. Paul, which she attended for one year before transferring to the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Eileen graduated from the University in 1953 with a degree in home economics, specializing in institutional management and dietetics. She taught at the University while taking master's level classes. She supervised food service for over 1200 students in addition to teaching college classes.

Eileen met John in 1953 at a school dance. After a whirlwind romance they were married on November 22, 1953. After John graduated from veterinary school, they lived in Eureka, South Dakota. Later they moved to Ada, Minnesota in 1961 and then relocated to Sturgis in 1978. Eileen worked as a dietician and also raised two children.

While she lived in Minnesota, Eileen coordinated a One-Fund drive and was a Girl Scout leader. She was active at her church with quilting, circle, and teaching Sunday school.

In 1966, John and Eileen took their family across the world to participate in mission service in northern Ethiopia. Eileen helped women there with hygiene, children's health, and nutrition. She returned to mission service in 1998 with a trip to Cameroon and also participated in a mission trip to Liberia.

In Sturgis, Eileen was active in church quilting, Bible study, Spring Creek Ladies club, organizing church breakfasts for the motorcycle rally, women's investment club, and the South Dakota Lutheran Church Synod board of directors. She enjoyed playing cards and games with her family and friends. She loved to entertain and often hosted dinner parties in her home. Eileen loved her six grandchildren and her three great grandchildren dearly, and enjoyed doing activities with them. She liked to read, cook, sew, and excelled at making lefse. Many enjoyed her homemade cinnamon rolls and bread. Eileen had a servant's heart and was always helping others in her community. She liked to stay BUSY.

Eileen is survived by her husband John, son John (Sherri), daughter Jean (Mike), her grandchildren Cheyenne, Denali (Alec), Cordelia, Tom, Shayne (Hwawon) and Sydney, great grandchildren Serah, Selina, and Stephen, nieces and nephews, and many many friends.

Eileen was preceded in death by her parents Herb and Hulda Witte, and her siblings Donna and Harold.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to Grace Lutheran Church, Sturgis, SD, Love INC of the Black Hills - Sturgis, or Global Health Ministries, 7831 Hickory St NE, Minneapolis, MN 55432. Condolences may be left for the family at [www.kinkadefunerals.com](http://www.kinkadefunerals.com).

***The family invites you to join them for fellowship and lunch downstairs,  
in the Sunshine Room, following the service.  
Thank you for your presence and condolences.***