



Mary Hays Wanninger

July 2, 1935 - September 24, 2025

Mary Hays Callaghan Wanninger "Mare," 90, of Edina, MN, passed away peacefully on September 24, 2025, surrounded by her family.

Family was Mary's greatest joy. She is survived by her partner-in-adventure and devoted husband, Dr. Lester "Les" Wanninger and their children: John (Carrie Wanninger), Jimmy Wanninger, and Katie (Brad Smith). She beamed brightly as "Grammie" to Lexie, Ellie, Callie, Lilli, and Finn-who all agreed she made the best Christmas cookies and spaghetti "basketti." Mary was preceded in death by her thoughtful brother Lansing "Unc" (Helen Callaghan) and is survived by her beloved sister Jane "Auntie Janie" (Larry Pederson).

Born on July 2, 1935, in Duluth, MN, to Dr. Desmond Hays and Martha Elliott Callaghan, Mary grew up in Hayward, WI. She graduated from Stanbrook Hall, a Catholic girls' school, then earned a degree in Public Health Nursing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Medical School, where she joined Kappa Delta and launched a lifelong vocation of compassion, service, and care.

Early in her nursing career she helped organize the first-ever polio vaccination campaign in California's East Bay, vaccinating over a million people in a single day with calm efficiency only she could pull off. She later spent more than 25 years as Nursing Director for Children's Services at the Minnesota

Department of Health, publishing standards that shaped treatments for scoliosis, diabetes, and more.

She married her best friend on December 29, 1962, in Hayward, WI, on an icy 40-below-zero day warmed by love, champagne, live lobster at Charlie's, and a night at the Curtis Hotel. Together, "Beastie Boy" and "Wifey Girl" spent 63 years laughing, raising their family, and traveling to over 20 countries. Mary's biggest passion was Christmas and her holiday parties and handmade ornaments were legendary.

Mary had a flair for the heroic; she flawlessly typed Les's dissertation with hundreds of subscripts and superscripts, earning a party dress and lifelong bragging rights, all without ever taking calculus. She was the unofficial campaign manager for every civic project Les pursued, running the show with wit and a keen eye for detail.

Mary loved shopping at Dayton's, writing, reading fiction, crosswords, sudoku, and jigsaws-she never met a puzzle she couldn't conquer. She adored Nat King Cole, Elvis Presley, and polka music, wore bright red lipstick with style, loved football, and was a gifted golfer until work and family called her away. Her cackle was unforgettable, her wit sparkling like tinsel on a Christmas tree, and no one laughed harder at her jokes than Mary herself. Her mother was known as Mrs. Always Right, and Les called her Mrs. AR2, a nickname that captured her charm and cleverness perfectly.

"Mary Christmas" had a special gift for giving nicknames, creating joy in everyday moments, and finding magic in the ordinary.

Please join us as we celebrate Mary's life on Thursday, October 2, 2025 at Our Lady of Grace Church, 5071 Eden Avenue, Edina, MN 55436. Visitation at 10:00 a.m., funeral service at 11:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers, gifts in memory

of Mary can be made to Methodist Hospital or a preferred charity of your choice.

Previous Events

Visitation

OCT 2. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church
5071 Eden Avenue
Edina, MN 55436

Mass of Christian Burial

OCT 2. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church
5071 Eden Avenue
Edina, MN 55436

Tribute Wall

DK

“ We were friends when we all lived in California. Sorry to learn of Mary's passing and we send our condolences to Les and family. May her memory be for a blessing. Arlene & Dan Kollin

Daniel Kollin - January 09 at 10:51 AM