

Tommy Ray (not Thomas, as he would be quick to tell you) was born in Yoakum, Texas to Alice Amanda Thackston and Thomas Crawford Burkett. He attended high school in Corpus Christi, where he cut a swath among the young ladies with his dashing looks, quick wit, and his father's Chrysler Town & Country woody convertible. The first in his family to attend college, he graduated from Rice Institute and earned a Ph.D. at the University of Kansas. He served as an officer in the US Navy at Newport Naval Station and aboard the USS Monsen. Upon leaving the navy, he married his high school sweetheart, Karolyn Marie Holm. In 1963 the family landed in Granville, Ohio where Tommy began a long career in the English Department at Denison University. He was instrumental in the implementation of the freshman writing program and an early champion of the use of technology in teaching. Despite the esteem he earned from his writing students, he is best remembered for leading decades of student theater and history trips to London. He is remembered by his friends and colleagues as a thoughtful mentor, gracious host, and skilled and relentless bridge opponent. More than anything else, Tommy loved being a husband, father, and grandfather. He was lavish in his generosity to, and encouragement of, his family, and delighted in their successes and accomplishments. Planning decades in advance, he made it possible for the entire clan to assemble in later life on the River Road compound, where they all live now. Mourning his life and celebrating the legacy of this extraordinary man are his wife Karolyn, to whom he was married for nearly 67 years, four children (Mandy, Kris, Jeff, Tom) and their spouses, and seven grandchildren. Interment will be in the Denison University cemetery at a later date, and a portion of his ashes will be secreted at London's National Theater.

Remembering Tommy Burkett

Welcome & Reflection - David Woodyard

Denison University Religion Department

Reading - Loveliest of Trees by A.E. Housman

Maggie Burkett, granddaughter

Reflection - Ken Klatt

Denison University Biology Department

Reading - from Cymbeline by William Shakespeare

Kelsey Burkett, granddaughter

Reflection - Fred Porcheddu

Denison University English Department

Reading - A Journey by Nikki Giovanni

Anna Burkett, granddaughter

Red River Valley, traditional

Athena Burkett, granddaughter

Reflection - Tom Burkett

Reading - from World's Champion Grandparent by Tommy Burkett

TJ Burkett, grandson

Prayer & Reflection - Reverend Richard Bowser

Former pastor, First Baptist Church of Granville

Musical selections performed by Jackie Dawson

As is the custom at any gathering of Burketts, all are invited and welcome to join us (in the Chapel, through the rear doors) for eating, drinking, conversation, and reminiscing. Tommy's children will greet visitors in the front of the sanctuary. His grandchildren will be in the chapel. Come and go as you like.

QR

Whenever our family is together and I bring up my aspiration (i.e., “deeply held hope”) that everyone should live next door to us, invariably, one of the kids pipes in, “Who do you think you are, Tommy Burkett?” And I always say, “I should only be so lucky.” And luck has always been there for us when it comes to you, Tommy. Giff and I particularly have been so lucky for over 40 years to have had you and Karolyn and all the Burketts in our lives. There are only three other superb human beings that come to mind for me in the same category as you – my mother, Laura, my father, Bob, and my father-in-law, Bob (the Bobs). Each of you - models of decency, courage, kindness, big caring, and love of family and friends, deep consideration of others, integrity, hard work, and joy in the world – traits that have ignited our own yearning for the same for our family.

—Marty Pollack, DU’98

[Marie] and I were on a Zoom call with college friends a few months ago and talking about the enduring impact your first freshman English course had on us, back in 1982, and all that we remembered from it beyond the literature itself. The lessons ranged from your revelations about sexist language (I still cringe and gently correct when my students call each other or themselves “girls”), to my still dangerous overuse of passive voice, to urging us to make the most of our college educations. I think often about how you counseled me not to take merely the required or the easy course, but always to push and extend myself, and I shamelessly copy this advice in talking with my own students. There is much that I can’t remember from even yesterday, but your words from 40 years ago remain evergreen. I have such gratitude for all that you gave me, from my first to last day at Denison.

—Jeff Mastin, DU ‘86



Tommy Ray Burkett
1931-2021