

Thomas Eugene Nelson (age 79) passed away on July 31st, 2025, in Custer, SD.

Tom was born March 14th, 1946 in Valley City, North Dakota to Kenneth & Elizabeth (Watson) Nelson. He was the oldest of 13 children. Tom was raised on a farm 3 miles west of Valley City & attended St. Catherine's School, where he participated in football, yearbook & was the student manager for basketball & track. He graduated in 1964 & was awarded the Holy Name Service Award.

Tom married Janice Lill in 1965 & they had 4 children born to the marriage. Tom graduated from Valley City State University in 1968 with a BS degree, & majors in English & Physical Education. While attending college he wrestled on the college wrestling team his freshman year. His Junior & Senior years he coached 7th & 8th grade basketball at St. Catherine's, & worked full time at Montgomery Wards. He spent most nights running the projectors at the local drive-in theater. After graduating from college, Tom worked for the Richland County Welfare Office in Wahpeton, ND until the fall of 1969, when he accepted his first teaching position in Nora Springs, IA. He taught HS English, directed the high school plays & was assistant varsity wrestling coach. Tom taught there until 1974 at which time he accepted a similar position in Spencer, IA. While in Spencer, besides coaching wrestling, he also coached 7th grade girl's basketball, junior high track & was the yearbook advisor.

Tom & Janice divorced in May 1983 & in August, while attending a family reunion in Custer, SD Tom met his wife Linda. They actually only saw each other for 12 days but over a period of a year of nightly phone calls, & hundreds of letters, their love grew & they were married July 21st, 1984.

Tom left teaching in 1987 at which time he & Linda moved to Custer & Tom worked as an advertising salesman for the Custer Chronicle until 1990. They then moved to Boise, ID, where Tom worked as a salesman in the telecommunication & janitorial supply industry until 2003 when they returned to Custer. After working 2 more years in the janitorial industry Tom went back to the telecommunication industry until he retired in 2013.

Tom enjoyed dancing to any kind of music but he especially liked to jitter-bug with his favorite partner (Linda). He also enjoyed camping, fishing, hunting, playing cards & most games (except marbles), working in their yard, raising quail & chukkars, & watching people stop by to enjoy the Christmas light display for which he was well known. To many who didn't know his name he was simply known as the Christmas light guy.

Tom was always ready for a good time & enjoyed spending time with family & friends & following the Boise State Bronco Football team.

Tom is survived by his wife Linda, of 41 years, & 6 children; Jim (Janette) Nelson, Okoboji, IA, Karla (Paul) Oppedisano, Princeton, TX, Greg, Minneapolis, MN, Steve (Kristin) Nelson, Independence, MO, Dallas (Lesley) Wilkinson, Custer, SD, & Sundae (Sean) Morgan, Newberg, MO. 2 brothers, Mike, Scobey, MN., David (Donna), Washburn, ND, 5 sisters; Barbara Sterling, Minneapolis, MN., Susan (Jack) Patrick, Cheyenne, WY, Linda (Jim) Stuart, Casper, WY, Diane (Mark) Nolte, Valley City, ND & Pam (Gaylen) Jensen, Hazen, ND; 13 grandchildren, & 12 great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his grandparents, parents, 1 sister, Cheryl, 1 brother, Terry, & 3 infant brothers.

Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home

# Celebration of Life



## Thomas Nelson

1946-2025

**I follow three rules:**

**Do the right thing.**

**Do the best you can.**

**And always show**

**people you care.**

**—by Lou Holtz**

## **Thomas Eugene Nelson**

**March 14, 1946—July 31, 2025  
Valley City, North Dakota Custer, South Dakota**

### **MEMORIAL SERVICES**

**Custer Lutheran Fellowship  
1:00 p.m., Friday, September 5, 2025  
Custer, South Dakota**

**OFFICIANT—Rev. Shannon Witt**

### **MUSIC**

**“Smile” by Nat King Cole  
“When I get Where I’m Going by Brad Paisley  
“I did it my Way” by Frank Sinatra  
“Goodbye” by Lionel Richie**

### **CONGREGATIONAL HYMS**

**“Jesus Loves Me”**

**Soloist—Ben Klaus**

**“Ava Maria”**

### **HONORARY PALLBEARERS**

**Todd Roberts, Jim Keck, John Fahey, Fred Mills,  
Dave Ressler, Larry McKinney, Dave Storm,  
David Lee, Paul Wire, Marshall Burtzlaff**

### **CELEBRATION OF LIFE**

**4:00—6:00 p.m., Mt Rushmore Brewing Company**

### **MEMORIALS**

**Custer Wildcats Youth Wrestling  
C/O Custer School  
527 Montgomery St., Custer, SD 57730**