

Ragene Albert Farris November 28, 1918--July 14, 2002

Ragene Albert Farris died peacefully in his home at the age of 83. A devoted father and husband, Farris was also an educator and World War II veteran.

Born in Rocky Ford, Colorado during the flu epidemic of 1918, Farris came with his family in 1929 to Escondido, where his father worked in the post office. Father and son were active in the town band, in which young Farris played the clarinet. Although his career took him to other locations in Southern California, he returned to Escondido in retirement and resumed his life-long connection with the First United Methodist Church of Escondido.

After graduating from Escondido High School in 1936, Farris attended UCLA and finished his bachelor's degree in music in 1940. Throughout his college years, Farris helped finance his education by singing and playing reeds with a dance band. His first job after graduation was leading the band at Santa Monica High School, marching with them in the Rose Parade in 1941.

World War II presented Farris with difficult decisions. While his father had served with distinction in the Army, Farris' involvement with a Methodist Men's group led him to declare conscientious objector status. Even so, he served in a clerical capacity until the recommendations of his superiors took him to an ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) at Fordham University, where he studied French in order to serve as a translator. In September of 1944, he shipped off to Normandy with the 329th Medical Battalion of the 104th Army Division, the Timberwolves. At every stage of his military involvement, Farris applied his musical background, developing a division song-book called *Rally the Pack* and leading twilight serenades during the ocean voyage. In his later years, Farris described his military career, with its unusual musical episodes, in a book titled *Rally the Pack: Music, Morals, and Morale in a Medical Battalion*.

When the war in Europe ended, Farris returned to UCLA to marry his college sweetheart, Marjorie, who also studied and later taught music. Balancing a teaching career with further education, Farris eventually earned his Ed.D., with a thesis on music education, a degree awarded shortly after the birth of the couple's third child.

Their four children, born between 1947 and 1955, were central to the life and happiness of this couple, who would have celebrated their fifty-seventh anniversary on July 29. All of them completed college and pursued professional careers; all followed in their parents' footsteps by becoming accomplished musicians. Patricia Farris Hennings went on to conduct the Peninsula Women's Chorus, recording four CDs, performing in prestigious venues, including conventions of the American Choral Directors' Association, and touring internationally.

In 1947, Farris started building a cabin in the Sierra National Forest at Huntington Lake. Spending summers together away from television and the distractions of the valley was central to the life of the family, and the extended Farris family continues the tradition today.

Farris steered his career toward public school administration, eventually serving as Director of Secondary Curriculum for the Covina Valley Unified School District. In addition to curriculum

development, Farris was instrumental in improving career education in Southern California, helping to set up Regional Occupational Programs where high school students could learn how to connect their education to careers.

Soon after his youngest child left for college, Farris took early retirement and returned to Escondido, purchasing a small rancho off Mary Lane, near the property where his mother was still living among her avocado groves. Farris spent almost twenty years caring for his orange and avocado trees, while also remaining active in the musical activities of the Methodist church and enjoying his five grandchildren. Marjorie and Ragene Farris also traveled extensively. Their last trip together was a journey to Nordhausen, Germany, where Farris appeared at a conference of witnesses and survivors of the Mittelbau-Dora labor camp; during the liberation of this camp in 1945, Farris served as an interpreter for French-speaking prisoners.

Memorial services will be held at the First United Methodist Church in Escondido at 4 p.m. on Friday, July 26, 2002. Memorial contributions may be sent in memory of Ragene Farris to the First United Methodist Church of Escondido, 341 S. Kalmia St., Escondido, CA 92025.