



Gerald Peter Smits

July 23, 1924 - December 24, 2020

Gerald "Jerry" Peter Smits of Wenatchee, WA, passed away Christmas Eve, at the age of 96. He was born on July 23, 1924, in Kimberly, WI, to Arnold and Anna Smits. His mother died when he was four years old, so him, his brother, and sister were taken in by their grandparents, until his dad remarried and they all were reunited. Jerry attended St. John's Grade School and High School in Little Chute, WI. A year after he graduated, Jerry was drafted into WWII Naval service, January 13, 1944, attending boot camp training in Farragut Naval Station in Athol, ID. He boarded a Navy destroyer, USS Renshaw, taking part in numerous engagements in the South Pacific. His duty as a water tender, second class, was to maintain the steam boiler room that propelled the ship. On February 21, 1945, at 10:56 a.m., the USS Renshaw was struck by a torpedo near the aft boiler room. Angels were watching over Jerry that day as he happened to be top deck at the time the ship was hit, after completing his shift. Unfortunately, he lost many of his ship mates that day, all being buried at sea. The events of that day had a major influence on the rest of his life. The ship received torpedo damage in the Philippines. After making temporary repairs at Subic Bay in the Northern Philippines, the ship departed to Todd Shipyards in Seattle, WA. At this time, Jerry met Margaret Crockett on a blind date. After repairs were completed the ship sailed to New York, participating in the Navy Day celebration on the Hudson River on October 27, 1945. He was discharged from Navy service on April 8, 1946, at Great Lakes Illinois Personal Center.

After being discharged from service, Jerry took a train to Seattle and proposed to Margaret, subsequently getting married at St. John's Church in Little Chute. After their marriage, they moved to Seattle, later purchasing a home in Wenatchee, WA, and raising their four children there. He was hired at the Wenatchee Post Office, working as a letter carrier and later in charge of vehicle maintenance, retiring in 1978 with 28 years of service. Margaret became ill, in 1970, and later passed away. Overnight, he became the breadwinner and head of the household. The love of his family and friends, and getting out to fly his plane got him through this difficult time.

With the help of a friend, Jerry was introduced to Mary Beth Thomas, Postmistress in Soap Lake, WA, and they married in 1979. They resided in Soap Lake. They spent countless hours volunteering at the Chamber of Commerce and 55 Alive Club, a class for driving safely. Water skiing and using their skimmer were great days for them in the summer. They spent many years in the winter months in California in their RV. The greatest result of this union was the blending of two families by annual reunions at multiple locations in Washington. Those events still continue to this day. Mary Beth passed away in 2012.

Jerry was preceded in death by his parents; his two wives, Margaret and Mary Beth; sister, Rita; brother, Clarence; son-in-law, Darold Thornton; and niece, Diane Reid-Davis. He is survived by his children: Susan Wright (Keith), Barb Thornton, John Smits (Pam), Paul Smits (Lori), Rosalie Thomas (Don), Carolyn Wollenweber; and 22 grandchildren; and numerous great-grandchildren.

The family wishes to thank the employees at Avamere Assisted Living for the great care that they gave dad the last few years. We know you loved him too!

Due to COVID, the family will hold a celebration of life next summer.
Arrangements entrusted to Chapel of the Valley, East Wenatchee, WA.