



## Bernice Elnora Durfee

March 22, 1923 - June 16, 2011

**BERNICE'S LIFE STORY:** From the blessings of love, Bernice Durfee lived a life of faith. From that very faith, she persevered through some enduring heartaches, but in the end, they gave her unending strength, a feisty demeanor and an independent nature all her own. At the end of the day, Bernice considered herself truly blessed by the love of family whom she dearly cherished. From the world of fashion to the world to politics, forces clashed in the 1920s to produce one of the most explosive decades of the century. An age of prohibition, prosperity followed many new advancements, discoveries, and inventions of the day which greatly improved the American way of life. A sense of gaiety filled the air, and The Roaring Twenties brought a sense of hope to the nation. It was during this time of change when a young couple from Custer Township in rural Mason County, Michigan anticipated the arrival of new life in their lives. On March 22, 1923, Oscar and Geneva (Lehman) Odean welcomed the birth of their daughter, Bernice Elnora into their hearts. Born on the family farm on the corner of Chauvez and Kintner Roads, Bernice grew up alongside her sisters, Arloa, Wilda, Loreen, and Evelyn, and their brother Russell in a home well grounded in their faith. Bernice loved playing baseball with others in the neighborhood, and could easily be found doing so during her free time. An outgoing young girl, she enjoyed sliding down Custer hill in the colder months of winter, and as she grew older, liked attending Bonnie Belmont dances. For a time Bernice earned extra income working as a housekeeper for Nondes Saxton at her home. Through the eighth grade, Bernice attended Resseguie School before moving on to Scottville High School. She was an avid basketball player at Scottville and her commitment to her teammates was evident as she walked into town and back home for each of her practices. She was also involved in several of her junior and senior school plays, graduating in 1940. Following high school, Bernice began working at Star Watch Case in Ludington before marrying Earl Brye in 1943. Sadly, he died a mere seven months later in trucking accident. Girded in faith and the desire to make a way for herself, Bernice eventually moved to the Flint area to attend cosmetology school. She stayed with her aunt, Wilda Bishop and became a close friend to her cousin, Joyce during this time. Before long Bernice began operating her own beauty salon in Flint. One of her faithful customers never ceased in continuing to encourage Bernice to write to her son Lamont Durfee, who was serving in the Army during WW II. His

mother's persistence paid off, and when Lamont eventually returned home, they were happily married in 1946. Soon after moving back to Mason County they decided to start a family of their own. As a new mother, Bernice was thrilled to welcome daughter, Carol into her heart. Life for Bernice was ideal, but with the onset of the Korean Conflict, her husband, Lamont reenlisted and soon became "missing in action". He was later declared dead. Lamont's best friend and brother, Percy often looked out for Bernice and Carol, and they continued to run into each other at family get-togethers. It was understandably awkward at first, but Bernice and Percy grew to love each other. They were blessed in marriage on April 3, 1954 in Angola, Indiana. Soon after they welcomed the birth of their daughter Jane, followed by son, Jim who completed their family. Bernice's independent nature shone bright when she began selling cosmetics and grew her business as a hairdresser for selected women in the area. Years later she went to work for Mason County Central Schools. She thoroughly enjoyed her work at Scottville Elementary School as an aide, playground supervisor, and lunchroom attendant for 15 years. In her free time, Bernice loved to bowl on several women's leagues. She was a very good bowler, and when Spartan Lanes opened their new alleys, they invited a professional bowler for exhibition matches. Bernice was the only one to beat him that day. For many years, Bernice, Percy and Jane loved taking off in their motor home. They enjoyed times camping and fishing all over the United States, but especially at Saddle Creek Park in Florida. When traveling, her CB radio handle was, "Kitchen Aide." She also enjoyed mushrooming, and canned nearly everything possible, especially fruits, vegetables, and fish. Among the many things Bernice took interest in, she liked working crossword puzzles and enjoyed a good Detroit Tiger baseball game. Of course, she rarely missed her beloved soaps, As the World Turns, The Young and the Restless, and Guiding Light. Bernice proudly rode on the cancer survivor float in the Harvest Festival parade every year. She remained especially close to her sisters, and they even made it a point to get together to play cards every week, usually pinochle. They often picked up a fourth player, like Carol or occasionally one of their close friends. She loved sharing a good game of Skippo with her grandkids, and the board game, Aggravation with her daughter, Jane which they called "Shake, Shake" A loving and attentive mother, Bernice was a devoted and faithful caregiver to Jane. She was a great mom and was ever so dedicated to her care. Jane was quite involved with Area 24 Special Olympics where Bernice often volunteered, and together they traveled all over the U.S. for Jane's competitions. Bernice was Jane's greatest cheerleader and advocate. One of a kind, Bernice seemed to always be in constant motion and on the go. It also seemed as if she were always cleaning and tidying up. She made a good home for her family over the years. Although she'd have a cup of coffee in the morning, it was about all the fluid she would drink in a day and hated the taste of water. She was known for some of her quirky sayings, like "jeepers", and if something was really bad, she'd comment with "jeepers creepers." Of course, no one will

ever forget, "100 years from now, it won't make a difference." Bernice was a longtime member of Sugar Ridge Church of the Brethren. Throughout life, even with all of its ups and downs, Bernice held strong to her faith. For many years she served as a Sunday school teacher and organist. Playing the organ brought much contentment to Bernice's heart, and quite often, anyone coming up her driveway could easily hear her playing. A practical and exact type of woman, she loved everyone she came in contact with. One would be hard pressed to find someone she didn't like, and she was always waving to people as they drove by the house out her kitchen window. Although gone from human touch, Bernice will be deeply missed and forever loved. Bernice Durfee, aged 88 of Scottville, went home to be with her Lord on Thursday, June 16, 2011. Along with her three husbands Earl Brye, Lamont Durfee, and Percy Durfee, She was also preceded in death by her parents, her adopted granddaughter Annie Mullens, her brother Russell Odean, and her sisters Wilda Albatis, and Loreen Dodson. Bernice will be greatly missed by her children Carol (Bill) Copeland of Ludington, Jane Durfee, and Jim (Sandra) Durfee all of Scottville, her grandchildren Brandon Wendt of Oak Creek, Wisconsin, Beth Durfee of Phoenix, Arizona, and Becky Durfee of St. Louis, Missouri, her great-granddaughter Taylor Wendt, her adopted grandchildren Lorrie, Frankie, and Barbie Seely, her adopted great-granddaughter Mary Mullens, her sisters Arloa (Jack) Flynn, and Evelyn Jacobson all of Ludington, and her cousin and best friend Joyce (Jim) Rupert of Scottville, along with numerous nieces and nephews. A service of Praise and Thanksgiving for the life of Bernice will be held on Tuesday, June 21 at 11:00 am at the Sugar Ridge Church of the Brethren, with her pastor David Wood officiating. Burial will take place at Brookside Cemetery in Scottville. Friends may meet with her family for a time of visitation on Monday evening from 5:00 – 8:00 pm at the Stephens Funeral Home in Scottville. Those who wish to make memorial contributions are asked to consider the Area 24 Special Olympics, or the Sugar Ridge Church of the Brethren.