



## John "'Ray'" Raymond Stevens

December 29, 1916 - March 7, 2008

John "Ray" Stevens was a devoted husband, loving father, doting grandfather and good friend. He lived a life that was both adventurous and rooted, outgoing and contented, fun loving and considerate. Ray was a man who cared for everyone he knew, and expressed this care through his generosity and willingness to always lend a helping hand, a listening ear or a dose of his warmhearted love. 1916 was a year full of excitement on all fronts. In science, Albert Einstein had just completed his theory of relativity, and in entertainment, Charlie Chaplin was amusing audiences everywhere as a silent movie star. The political scene too was dynamic as World War I raged through cities in Europe. Amidst all of these events that came to define the era, George Madison Stevens and his wife, Iva (Ostrander), of Muskegon, Michigan welcomed the birth of their first child. John Raymond Stevens was born on December 29, 1916, to the delight of his parents. He was later joined by his brothers, George and Jack, who rounded out the Stevens family with three boys. John, or Ray as he was called, spent his growing up years in Muskegon, where his father earned a living as a pipefitter. Ray received his education at Hackley School and went on to trade school, where he learned the skills of a machinist. When the harsh days of the Depression hit, Ray went to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for some time. His family then moved to Bridgeton in Newaygo County, where he helped his father build a log cabin for the family home. After the Depression had lifted, the family moved back to Muskegon, and Ray soon secured a job at Norge Manufacturing as a

machinist. Here he met Al Pratt, another machinist whose workbench faced Ray. The two men became life long friends. Ray was in his late 20s when he met his future wife, Betty Kozicki, at a dance. They were happily married at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Grand Haven on September 5, 1942. Shortly after saying "I do", the newlyweds packed up and headed south, making their home in Florida. Here, Ray found work as a Foreman in road construction, and was instrumental in building several bridges along the interstate. While in the Sunshine State, Ray and Betty were blessed with the birth of their only child in 1948, a son they named John Raymond Jr., though he went by "Skip." The family of three eventually moved back to Grand Haven, and Ray went to work at Cooper Tool as a Supervisor for almost 40 years. Outside of work, Ray took an active role in his son Skip's life and was a Scoutmaster for his Boy Scout Troop. They had one of the largest troops in the State, and were always active doing something together. This included monthly camp outs and their annual camp out-survival trips to Isle Royale National Park, which is on the largest island in Lake Superior. Aside from their son, Skip, Ray and Betty helped raise Ray's youngest brother, Jack, who was born a few years before Skip, and also opened their hearts and home as foster parents whenever needed by the District Court in Grand Haven. Because Betty's health was not always the best, the couple was not able to travel much. Occasionally they headed south in the winter to the warmth of Florida, New Mexico and Arizona. In the meantime, Ray enjoyed taking trips with his best friend, Al, for some moose hunting and fishing in Canada. He also had a cottage on Lost Lake in Scottville, where he could fish whenever he wanted. Ray's true talent, however, was found in making homemade wine, which he became a perfectionist at after mastering his technique over 50 years. He made his wine from just about anything, including Elderberries, cherries (his favorite) and dandelions – you name it he tried it. Over the years, Ray and Betty and their best friends, Al and Leatrice, did everything together. They so enjoyed each other's company and made many great memories together. Sadly, the friends would endure the heartbreaking loss of Al in 1986, and Betty in 1991. Ray tried to stay in

contact with Leatrice, who lived in Scottville, and one day while up north fishing, he decided to bring her a bottle of his wine. Unfortunately, she wasn't home, so he left it anyway with a sweet note. As fate would have it, Ray and Leatrice were married soon after at the Scottville United Methodist Church on November 23, 1997. Affectionately, Ray told Leatrice "he liked her cooking too much not to marry her." As a couple, Ray and Leatrice loved to travel, and soon purchased a motor home, which they drove all across the United States. They were truly an "on the go" couple and were happiest when they were headed somewhere to visit someone, particularly their children and grandchildren. Their plans were usually to be gone for a week, but it wasn't unusual for it to last a month. Ray also enjoyed many fishing trips with Leatrice's family to Canada. When they weren't cruising around the country, Ray and Leatrice enjoyed going dancing, usually to square dances and polkas. Being "night owls," they also were known to make late night visits to their children's. Ray was a pretty proud Grandpa and enjoyed teaching his grandkids how to fish. Ray also enjoyed golfing with the younger folk - which was anyone younger than himself. Ray was a man who was deeply committed to his family and his faith. His deeds and his actions were an inspiration to those who knew and loved him. He will be dearly missed. John Raymond Stevens died on Friday, March 7, 2008, at his home. He was preceded in death by his wife, Betty, his granddaughter, Jamie Lynn Stevens, and his brother, George Stevens. Ray will be greatly missed by his wife, Leatrice; his son, John "Skip" and Jean Stevens of Custer; his grandchildren: Kari (Matt) Harburn of Grand Rapids, Tara (Rob) Lutke of Muskegon and Chuck (Kayla) Gaul of Scottville; his great-grandchildren: Jamie and Brock Harburn; his stepsons: Garland (Gayla) Pratt of Lakeview, Ronald Pratt of Kingman, AZ, and Warren (Carla) Pratt of Bonney Lake, WA; 5 step-grandchildren, 15 step great grandchildren; and his brother, Jack (Shirley) Stevens of Muskegon.