



Merrill Harrison Bates

August 3, 1916 - August 8, 2009

With his charming personality and sunny disposition, Merrill Bates was a man who made a significant impact on everyone within his reach. He was a trickster who liked to tease, and a man with a routine that he rarely deviated from. Merrill was a family man through and through who tenderly interacted with his family and always cared for their needs in any way he could. He was very handy - could fix just about anything, and was known to create something new to make life easier where he saw a need. Merrill was a remarkable man who lived a vibrant life, creating a colorful mosaic of memories that will be forever cherished. The year 1916 was drastically different from the life we know today in many ways. Our nation had been entrenched in WWI since 1914, the average annual salary was \$750, and people often worked in unsafe, unhealthy working conditions. It was also during this year that Rufus and Grace (Simmons) Bates, of Hart, Michigan, were thrilled with the birth of their son, Merrill Harrison, on August 3rd. Born as the second of seven children, Merrill's parents were farmers in the Hart area. During the spring of 1927, the Bates family moved to Amber Township in Mason County with three horse-drawn wagons and towing five cows behind them when Merrill was ten years old. Their farm was located on First Street between Amber and Quarterline Roads. At one of the farms where he worked, at the junction of US Highway 10 and Amber Road, the field and the barn were on separate sides of the highway and it was a novelty when they had to occasionally stop traffic to move cows from one side to the other. For his schooling, Merrill attended

Cedar School near Hart, and Amber Station and Jones Schools. Merrill had to leave school during his ninth grade year due to ongoing difficulties with a severe case of hay fever. By the end of 1929, our nation became gripped by the Great Depression which hit the farming industry especially hard. As a result, Merrill worked for different farms including Conrad's and Ray Pittard where he performed a variety of duties including driving a truck hauling produce, and tending to horses and cows, in addition to keeping up with his responsibilities on their own family farm. Life headed in a new direction for Merrill one fateful evening, in an unexpected but fortunate way. Merrill had been dating a young woman named Cora Ross and was friends with her sister, Opal Mallott. One evening he had taken Cora to a dance and she ended up leaving with someone else at the end of the night. Merrill took her sister Opal home and this marked the beginning of a love story which would span more than 60 years. After dating for about three months, Merrill and Opal were married on October 24, 1942, at the home of Rev. Fred Stewart. On December 8, 1941, America entered WWII after we had been viciously attacked on our homeland at Pearl Harbor. Merrill was drafted into the Army on December 21, 1942, where he valiantly risked his life in order to protect the freedoms we still enjoy today. He served in the artillery at Omaha Beach during the Normandy Invasion, fought during the Battle of the Bulge, and throughout Central Europe wherever his marching orders took him. It was while he was serving during WWII that Merrill became a father the first time with the birth of his daughter Irene in August of 1943. Upon his discharge, Merrill returned to his family and their home on East State Street in Scottville. Merrill and Opal were again blessed as parents with the birth of their son Larry in 1947. Then in 1949, their family moved to a farm on North Schoenherr Road in Custer where they later welcomed their daughter Barb in 1951. On their farm, they raised cows, pigs and chickens, and had large gardens where they grew corn and potatoes. The Bates children were responsible for picking the potatoes. Merrill also supported his family through his work as a supervisor for the Richter Vinegar Factory in Scottville where he was a

dedicated employee for more than 40 years. With his beloved wife Opal by his side, family was always Merrill's main priority, and it was important to him that they fostered close relationships. Since Merrill worked many hours during the week, the weekends were reserved for family time. On Sunday afternoons, they often took drives together, sometimes ending up at the Ludington State Park for a picnic, or to hang out on the beach. Merrill always remained close with his brothers and sisters as well, gathering every year to celebrate Christmas or Christmas in July, or to play cards. In addition, they always attended the large Bates family reunion held at Silver Lake and Twin Lakes for 62 years. When his family grew to include grandchildren and even great-grandchildren, Merrill always made time for them whether he was playing ball or games with them, or just telling them about growing up on the farm, and sharing war stories to the rapt attention of great grandson Billie. There were so many things that made Merrill unique. He loved pulling pranks and was famous for clipping clothespins on unsuspecting victims, trying to see how many he could clip before he was discovered. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, and was a member of the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry for which he was honored for 25 years of service. Merrill was also a lifetime member of the AMVET Post #82 in Ludington where he was honored as the AMVET of the Year three separate times, as well as being a member of the American Legion Post #76. Life became more difficult for Merrill when his wife became ill and moved to the Oakview Medical Care Facility. He visited her every day, taking his lunch with him and reading to her from the newspaper or letters. He was always looking for ways to show his love for her by finding ways to care for her needs. It was a great loss to him when Opal died on September 28, 2004. Merrill Bates was a man of great integrity. He showed his respect for others with his form of punctuality and independent spirit. Even in times of disagreement, he kept his remarks about others from being harsh or unkind. He had a keen mind and a sharp memory, drawing people naturally by his kind nature. He truly served as a "Dad" figure to many

people in his life beyond his own family. Merrill Bates died on August 8, 2009 at Tendercare of Ludington. Along with his wife Opal, he was preceded in death by his granddaughter Tammy Bates; his brothers Kenneth, Harold, Ray, and Lee; his sister Hazel Kukla; and his sister-in-law Cora St. John. Merrill will be greatly missed by his children Irene McCumber and her good friend Ron Lauterberg of Ludington, Larry (Judy) Bates of Grand Haven, and Barb (Herb) Gulembo of Greenville; his beloved grandchildren Michael McCumber, Marc (Jennifer) Bates, Bill (Amy) Gulembo, Christine Hinton and her fiancée' Matt Mason; his precious great-grandchildren Billie, Cassidy, Katelyn, Kaylee, Brian, Owen, and Gavin; his sister Ruth (Carl) Moreen of North Muskegon; his sister-in-law Yvonne Paulson; his brother-in-law Kenneth (Karen) Ross, and Noel (Barbara) Ross; and many nieces and nephews.