



Bernie Edward Bahls

June 5, 1920 - March 16, 2009

Richey, Montana: Bernie Edward Bahls, 88, died on Wednesday, March 11, 2009 at his residence in Richey. Visitation will be held from 3:00 P.M. until 7:00 P.M. on Sunday, March 15, 2009 at the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Chapel in Richey. A Life Tribute Service will be held at 2:00 P.M. on Monday, March 16, 2009 in the American Lutheran Church of Richey with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Interment with military honors will be in the Richey Cemetery. Silvernale-Silha Funeral Chapel of Richey is entrusted with the arrangements. Bernie was born on June 5, 1920 in Sidney, Montana the son of Edward and Radie (Emery) Bahls. He was raised and educated in the Richey area, receiving his elementary education at the List Creek School in rural Richland county. He graduated from Richey High School with the class of 1939 and later attended a school for welding. Bernie entered the United States Navy on November 13, 1942 where he served as a First Class Petty Officer with the Sea Bee's 55th Construction Battalion during World War II. Bernie received an honorable discharge from military service on December 18, 1945 and returned to farm north of Richey where he managed the VFW Club and obtained his pilots license. He married Donna Creekmore in 1954 in Richey. They later moved to Lewistown where he was employed as a welder/electrician for Boeing. They divorced and Bernie traveled with Boeing to Cheyenne, Wyoming where he met and married Alma Monk. They moved to Crown Point, Indiana where Bernie was employed by Bethlehem Steel as an electrician/steel worker until his retirement. He owned and operated a ranch in

Crown Point, Indiana called the "Little Ponderosa" until his return to Montana in 2004, where he resided until the time of his death. Bernie was a charter member of the Richey Veterans of Foreign Wars where he had served as Post Commander, life member of the American Legion, Local #697 Electricians Union, the National Rifle Association and the Wildlife Association. He had enjoyed attending the reunion of his Sea Bee's 55th Battalion for the past 55 years. One of his proudest accomplishments was donating more than 111 pints of blood throughout his life. Mr. Bahls was preceded in death by his parents; wife, Alma; son, Jim and sister, Arduis Evers. Survivors include two daughters, Roxie Fox of Great Falls, Montana and Radie Fatzinger and her husband Robert of Spokane, Washington; one son Don Bahls of Great Falls; one step-son, Karl Monk and his wife Mary of Ohio; one step-daughter, Angie; five siblings, Lilburn Bahls of Billings, Montana, Neva Sorenson and Elva Jenkins of San Diego, California, Jinx (Cliff) Sampson of Helena, Montana and Erda (Stan) Waters of Richey; 10 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren. Bernie was a kindhearted, loving and generous person who will be greatly missed by family and friends alike. Remembrances and condolences may be shared with the family at: www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com Bernie Edward Bahls Life Tribute Service March 16, 2009 American Lutheran Church Richey, Montana Certified Celebrant – Sandy Silha Master of Ceremonies: Welcome Reading: Deb Waters Speakers: Daughter, Radie Fatzinger; Granddaughter, Michelle Fox-Hustwaite; Niece, Deb Waters Song: "Precious Memories" vocalist-Barb Johnson; Pianist/Organist-Jan Hrubes Celebrant: Eulogy "To live in hearts we leave behind, is not to die." Bernie Edward Bahls will forever live in the hearts of family and friends whose lives he touched with his unique and loving personality. Bernie was a very caring and patient person. He knew how to hug, and tell others he loved them, and he did it often. Bernie was very respectful of those around him; and although he spoke his mind, he was not one to judge others. Bernie was very generous, to the point that he sometimes was taken advantage of. He may even have been a bit old fashioned, because for Bernie, a handshake was a handshake and

your word was your word. Bernie loved a good and open discussion and there were many of these at the dinner table. And he had a wonderful sense of humor and wit about him. Bernie was a terrific worker and provider for his family, usually holding down two or three jobs at once. Bernie was still mowing, haying, and bartending at the local VFW well into his eighties. He would often tell his family when they tried to encourage him to participate in activities or meals at the senior center, that the senior center was for old people, and he wouldn't go. And Bernie always thought of himself as a true cowboy. Bernie was the oldest of seven children and was raised on a farm in the Richey, Montana area. He learned his work ethic at an early age, doing chores on the family farm. One chore Bernie was a part of was to butcher chickens. And along with that were the weekly Sunday chicken dinners. Bernie developed a strong dislike for chicken. Worldly possessions were not always plentiful in a large family. Bernie and his brother, Lilburn, sometimes had to share a pair of shoes, wearing newspaper wrapped in flour sacks when shoes were not available. As a youngster, Bernie wore button-up shoes or boots; as a man, Bernie wore boots almost without exception. When it came time for high school, Bernie stayed in Richey, going home on the week-ends, rather than drive back and forth each day. One week-end, Bernie and Lilburn talked their father into letting them take the car to Richey on Saturday night. Their father agreed to let them do this as long as they paid for their own gas. The boys managed to fill the tank with gas, and then remembered that Richey was playing basketball in Savage. That sounded like a good plan, so they headed for Savage. When they arrived at the ball game and went in, Bernie found that they didn't have money for admission, so Bernie told the ticket takers that he and Lilburn were the "Bahl boys". That did get them into the game, but Bernie was a bit uncomfortable, because he later commented that he didn't think his father would have approved of the way they had gotten in. When Bernie's sister, Erda, was to marry Stan Waters, Bernie and Erda's father was ill, and he told Bernie that Bernie would have to give Erda away at

the wedding, which Bernie did. Erda and Stan went on a honeymoon and upon their return, Erda, went home to visit her parents. Bernie was there and when Erda walked in, Bernie said, "What are you doing here, I thought I gave you away." When World War II began and Bernie's number was coming up, he enlisted in the United States Navy. He spent a total of thirteen days in training, with nine of those days in rifleman training. Because Bernie had went to school for welding, he served in the Navy's Sea Bee's 55th Construction Battalion in the South Pacific. Not only did he have to fight the Japanese, his battalion also had to fight the natives and head hunters of the islands where they were sent to build bases and runways for the Marines who would follow. Bernie also had the opportunity on several occasions to see Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe in shows presented to the troops. When his battalion was sent home, they were aboard the ship Ticonderoga. The ship got caught in a typhoon and it was ironic that some of the men who had survived the war, died in the typhoon. Following the war, several interesting things happened to Bernie. One was that he helped build the Coulee Dam. Another was that when he returned to Richey, the state began issuing drivers' licenses and Bernie was the first one in Richey to get one. It cost him 35 cents, and he bought one for his mother at the same time. And the third interesting event was that Bernie's Battalion of Sea Bees began a tradition of yearly reunions that lasted for 55 years. Bernie rarely missed these reunions, and would take any available members of his family along with him to these reunions. His daughter, Radie, attended 13 of these reunions with her father, and granddaughter Ronnie, won the raffle prize that her grandfather had donated one year when she was there with Bernie. In 1995, after 55 years, the Sea Bee's 55th Construction Battalion retired their flag at the same port they had departed from, Port Hueneme, in Oxnard, California. At that reunion dinner Bernie shared his dinner table with an admiral. With all his stories of his experiences in the Sea Bees, Bernie's grandchildren wanted to take him to school for show and tell whenever their studies were about World War II. The grandchildren would ask Bernie what Sea Bee stood for and he would reply

that it meant “ a confused” ... well an off colored term. They would remind their grandfather that they couldn't say that in school, so Bernie would explain that Sea Bee stood for “construction battalion”, but that they received so little training and instruction on what to do, that most times they were confused as to what was expected from them. Bernie was always a very proud veteran. He stayed active in veteran groups and clubs wherever he lived, selling raffle tickets, bartending, serving in honor guards, placing flags on holidays and in cemeteries, and staying in touch with those he served with throughout his life. One of the areas in life where Bernie was fearless was as a father. When Bernie married his first wife, Donna Creekmore, he had an instant family of three children. He and Donna had two children together, Radie and Jim. Two more children came with his second wife, Alma Monk. Because of divorce and distance, Bernie saw the children he shared with Donna for only short periods of time each year when they were growing up. Bernie would see to it that his children would spend some time in Richey, getting to know their relatives here in Richey. It was when the children were older, that more time was spent developing a rich relationship with their father. And it gave Bernie and the grandchildren their opportunity to know and be a part of each other's lives. Daughter Radie distinctly remembers swimming in the Lewistown pool and seeing her father circling the block. Finally he stopped and came to ask permission from his children to marry Alma. Bernie had that much respect for his children. And later in life, the same respect was accorded to Bernie when Robert Fatzinger came to ask permission from Bernie to marry Radie. Bernie told of his great respect for Robert, who had never been married, and was willing to marry Radie and her family of children. As for Robert, Bernie was more like a dad to him than a father-in-law. Over the years, daughter Roxie Fox, has come to appreciate Bernie marrying her mother and the time Bernie spent being a father to her. Step-son Karl Monk tells how Bernie met Alma in Cheyenne, Wyoming. and the influence Bernie had on their lives. Karl was about in 1st grade, when Bernie met Alma in a restaurant. Alma was waitressing and Bernie would come in for breakfast each morning and order

his eggs “knocked in the head.” Alma didn’t know what he meant and this got her attention. Bernie wanted his eggs with the yolks broken. The relationship developed from there. Karl says the two things that have stayed with him about Bernie over the years is that Bernie was the one who showed Karl how to ride horse. And most importantly, Bernie showed Karl how to be a gentleman. Bernie told Karl to watch how he, Bernie, treated Karl’s mother, and Karl would learn how to treat women and be a gentleman. Karl recalls that lesson very well. Karl remembers Bernie as a great guy, who was generous to a fault. Karl would like to thank Nelson Ford and Jim Wolf for their care and friendship for Bernie. When Bernie and Alma moved to Indiana, they acquired Bernie’s little piece of heaven, a 43 acre ranch he called the “Little Ponderosa.” Bernie and Alma raised chickens, and cattle, and had horses, their own and some they boarded. Bernie did some haying on the place too. This was in addition to his work at Bethlehem Steel. Bernie’s children and grandchildren would travel to the “Little Ponderosa” to visit as often as they could. Granddaughter Ronnie vividly remembers one Easter visit when she was nine and they flew into O’Hare airport to see Bernie. Bernie’s plan was to pick them up from the airport with a limo, but he had decided to drive it himself. When the family had arrived and the luggage was collected, Bernie took them to the parking area of the airport to load everybody up. But he couldn’t remember where he had parked. Bernie would decide it was just over there and so they would drag the luggage to that area of the parking lot, but no limo. They walked much of the airport parking to find the limo. Ronnie also remembers the seemingly unending toll booths they had to go through to get to the “Little Ponderosa”. Bernie kept his toll change in a cowboy hat in the middle of the seat. Bernie always wore a cowboy hat. Granddaughter Rami sent this e-mail about her favorite memories of her grandfather Bernie. “Grandpa loved to dance. We danced to “Grandpa Tell Me About the Good Old Days’ by the Judds at my wedding, and it still brings tears to my eyes because he kept telling me how he was the only true cowboy at my wedding,

and only a real cowboy can dance with a beautiful bride. He led me around that dance floor almost better than my new husband did on our first dance. I danced with Grandpa many times over the years and he never disappointed me in how well he could lead a lady around the floor.” Radie, Roxie, and Erda all tell that Bernie loved to dance. But he would tell them that they “had to lead him.” And they claim they really did. When Bernie’s parents both had died, as the eldest son, Bernie inherited the family homestead. Because he no longer lived in Richey to farm it, he rented it out to his special nephew, Ron Waters and Ron’s wife, Deb. Bernie and Ron had always had a close relationship. When Bernie had been on the farm and would go out to work in the corrals or barn, Ron would follow right along. Their catch phrase was about how he would “look out for me.” It’s unclear who was looking out for whom. Whenever Bernie would visit, Ron and Deb’s children, Tim, Chris and Rachelle, would be impressed by the fact that Bernie would drive straight through from Indiana, and after he left they would collect the empty cigar tubes because they smelled like Bernie. Chris especially had a special bond with Bernie. They would go to the farm together, and seem to be on the same page about everything concerning the farm. For much of his life, Bernie was very structured in his appearance. After Alma died, he grew his hair long, grew a beard and had a unique mustache. He would wax his mustache into long handlebars, and his grandchildren thought he looked like the Kentucky Fried man, Colonel Sanders. Manners were always very important to Bernie. He felt people should know how to act. His children remember one rule in particular, no elbows on the table. Another was that at meals, Bernie required that you at least try everything and eat it. If you didn’t like it, you learned not to make a face or show disgust or it got you a second helping. They remember once when Bernie was eating spinach and made a face. Alma made him have a second helping. Bernie didn’t argue with or raise his voice to anyone. But he only said things once and you knew he meant it. Bernie had a few favorite things in life. He enjoyed his homemade pickles, tomato juice, salsa and horseradish. He loved his cigars and his blackberry brandy. Alma used to

bring Bernie his brandy on a silver tray on Sundays. After Bernie moved back to Richey, his friend Mike Pitzen would bring him leftovers for lunch and they would eat and sip blackberry brandy. The doctor once asked Bernie how much brandy he drank a day, and Bernie replied that he wasn't giving up his brandy. Bernie, who didn't believe in pills or surgery, went on high blood pressure medicine instead. A couple-three years ago, Bernie was carrying two jars of horseradish into the house when he fell and landed on the jars, shattering them, breaking seven ribs and puncturing a lung. After that, Bernie's health began to decline and he had to spend some time in the hospital. Florene Green, a member of Bernie's extended family, would come and read scripture and pray with Bernie, providing him with a bit of spiritual comfort. This past Wednesday, Bernie died at his home. But the family is grateful because Bernie wanted to die in his own home, not in a hospital or nursing home, and he did not die alone, his sister, Erda, was with him. And now, we mourn the loss of Bernie Bahls, a father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle, friend, distinguished and real cowboy, a good man. Take a few quiet moments for your own personal memories of Bernie, as we listen to a song chosen by his family, "Daddy's Hands." Song: "Daddy's Hands" by Kathy Matea Sharing: Celebrant: Closing There are many views about the hope that waits for us in life beyond life, but there is one undeniable and ever present hope we can all share. That is the hope found in memories. We live on in the lives of those we touch and Bernie has touched many lives in his 88 years of living. The stories his life created will keep his memory and his presence alive long into future. Roxie, Radie and Robert, Don and all of Bernie's extended family, as friends and community, we grieve with you and we grieve for you. The world is a bit poorer for having lost Bernie. To all who knew Bernie, please continue to share Bernie's story with the family later today at the reception. Every story and every experience about Bernie they can take home with them will bring them comfort during their journey of grief. The significance of Bernie's life is emphasized with each memory. You have paid tribute to Bernie with your presence here today. We have honored him with our sharing of memories.

Remember Bernie in your heart, in your thoughts, and the memories of these times of love, the memories of times shared, will assure that Bernie will never be gone. At the reception you will find cigars placed on the tables by Bernie's family. Anyone 18 or older is invited to take a cigar to keep, smell, or smoke in remembrance of Bernie. Enjoy! We will close Bernie Bahls' life tribute service with some spiritual words from _____ followed by Bernie's favorite song, "North To Alaska" chosen by Bernie for his service. Let us ask _____ to come forward to for a message of spiritual comfort. Spiritual message:

_____ Song: "North To Alaska" by Johnny Horton

Tribute Wall



“ *Bernie Edward Bahls*

December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM