



Gerald "Jerry" Gilbertson

March 26, 1937 - May 4, 2013

Glendive, Montana: Gerald "Jerry" Gilbertson, age 76, passed away on Saturday, April 27, 2013 at the Valley Health Care Center in Billings, Montana. A Life Tribute Service will be held at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, May 4, 2013 in the Chapel of the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home in Glendive with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Interment will be in the Dawson County Cemetery in Glendive. Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home of Glendive has been entrusted with the arrangements. Jerry was born on March 26, 1937 in Glendive, the son of Chester and Alma (Vorhies) Gilbertson. He was raised and educated in Glendive where he attended Dawson County High School graduating with the class of 1955. Following high school, Jerry worked as a plumber before being employed with Burlington Northern Railroad in the roundhouse as a pipefitter. As a child Jerry's father passed away leaving him to tend to his mother, brothers and sister for many years. Jerry met Patsy Struthers and they were united in marriage in 1957 and to this union four children were born; Deb, Jerry, Terry and Darla. Later in Jerry's life he married Joan in 1975 and with this union, Joan brought two children; David and Debbie Sackin. Jerry was known as "Mr. Fix it," you break it, he would fix it. He may have been small in stature but he was mighty in will. Jerry wouldn't take "no" for an answer and would never be told he couldn't do something. He enjoyed hunting, fishing and rock hounding. He loved spending time with his family and friends. Jerry was preceded in death by his parents, Chester and Alma Gilbertson; wife, Joan; sister, Gloria; brother, Ron and numerous uncles and aunts. Survivors include

his children; Deb (Joe) Salb of Baldwin City, Kansas, Jerry (Sherry) Gilbertson of Wing, North Dakota, Terry (Gabi) Gilbertson of Glendive, Darla (Mark) Erickson of Billings, David Sackin of Las Vegas, Nevada and Debbie (Jim) Sackin-Suh of New Jersey; grandchildren, Mike (Bente) Gilbertson, Candy (Jason) Dreyer, Leann Athas, Nicole Lordemann, Scott Athas, Max and Piper Suh; nine great-grandchildren; siblings, Ken (Mick) Gilbertson of Billings and Bonnie (Dave) Juhl of Shepherd, Montana; sisters - in - law, Dot Gilbertson of Hood River, Oregon and Jan (Bruce) Russell of Glendive; special cousins, Joanne (Don) Smith of Glendive and Duane Johnson of Beulah, North Dakota and numerous nieces and nephews. Memorials are suggested to: Montana Alzheimer's Association, 3010 11th Avenue North, Billings, Montana 59101, 1-800-272-3900 or to the charity of one's choice. Remembrances and condolences may be shared with the family at: www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com. Eulogy: Gerald "Jerry" Gilbertson. Probably the first thing we should define about Jerry was that he would be rather uncomfortable with all the attention focused on him today. A quiet, shy, reserved fellow, Jerry's life was dedicated to those he cared about and cared for; his priority was his family, and he always put them first. Born and educated in Glendive, Jerry's father died when Jerry was just 15 years old. Jerry's mother was a homemaker, with five children to raise. Jerry became the man of the family, and the person his mother depended upon for many things, including raising the other children. Tragedy struck again when a sister, Gloria, died at age five. Jerry took his responsibilities seriously when it came to his mother and siblings. For years, he took care of the house, the rental his mother had, and the yard. His mother didn't drive, so he got groceries, ran errands, and was constantly fixing things. Younger brother, Ken, tells that with Jerry, the rules were the rules, and the consequences were Lava soap and a belt. Ken's reaction to his brother's discipline resulted in the Lava soap being a staple in Ken's diet. As Jerry approached the end of high school and thought about the direction his life might take, college and the military were considered. But after graduation, Jerry married Patsy Struthers, and they began a family of their own. Jerry had

learned some plumbing skills from his father, and since no schooling was required and it was a trade you could learn on the job, it seemed a good way to provide for his young family, and still allow him time to help his mother and his siblings. Jerry worked for Wagner Plumbing and Heating, and Ken remembers many a cold, winter night when Jerry would have to go out on service calls until the wee hours of the morning. Often Jerry would let his younger brother go with him on the calls, something Ken loved to do. Jerry deserves a lot of credit for virtually raising two families. Jerry and Patsy had four children, Deb, Jerry, Terry, and Darla, with the children being about two years apart in age. During their growing up years, they remember their dad as being a hard worker, not only going to his job but also going on many service calls after hours. Much time was spent by their dad helping their grandmother with her house and yard, and when at home, he tinkered on projects in the garage. When the weather was nice, Patsy, Little Jerry, and Terry would get their camper all ready on Fridays so the family could head out to Intake for camping and fishing. Jerry, tired from a long week of work was never very excited about going, but once at Intake, he was good and enjoyed it right along with them. They camped with Jerry's fishing buddies, and paddlefishing was a favorite sport. A favorite childhood memory for Deb was a trip to a small lake near Circle, where the family enjoyed Jerry's boat, playing in the water, and just having fun as a family. Daughter Darla tells that she and her brothers and sister loved playing on Hungry Joe Hill, but many times came back with someone crying or hurt. Jerry and Patsy would say that Jerry missed many family suppers because of service calls or because he had to take a child to the doctor for stitches or to get some wound attended to. They would remark that Doc Chambers never got to eat supper with his family either, because of the Gilbertson's. Sadly, Jerry and Patsy's marriage ended in divorce. This was a very hard time for Jerry. He changed jobs and went to work for Burlington Northern Railroad as a pipefitter. Jerry worked there for almost 30 years until he retired at age 68. He liked his job and enjoyed the men he worked with.

After his divorce, Jerry met and married Joan, and she and her two children, Dave and Debbie, joined Jerry's family. Jerry and Joan were married for over 30 years. Joan was ill for a time before she died and when ever she would have to go for treatments or care, her sister Jan Russell would take Joan, and as they would leave, Jerry always would say to Joan, "I love you very much." Darla says "it was a good thing her dad was strong of heart; Joan was a prankster and pulled many pranks on Jerry. She would wear masks, and use fake bugs, fake vomit, and fake burn holes to scare Jerry and other family members. Jerry was not always amused when the prank was directed at him but tried to be a good sport. He was more apt to find it funny when the prank was directed at someone other than himself. One memorable surprise Darla and Deb pulled on their father was on his 60th birthday. Deb dressed as Dr. Ker "dork" ian, and Darla was the nurse. They surprised Jerry at work in the roundhouse with his birthday cake. Jerry was an amazingly good sport considering how he did not like being the center of attention. A "cake break" was held with his co-workers, and everyone had fun celebrating. Being a man in charge of two families would try any one's patience, and Jerry's demeanor was a bit gruff. He was not a warm and cuddly person, or expressive in his affections, but you just knew he cared by the way he did things, the time he took teaching and caring for his families, and the fact that he always put everyone else's needs first. He wasn't a talkative person, but when he talked you listened, and if he didn't say what he meant, he could convey what was important in other ways. Ken smiles when he remembers all the times he would come home from college and Jerry would tell him to "get his hair cut", and take him to the barber. With Darla it was always "get off the phone!" And Jerry didn't like Deb's cooking, especially her "hippie hotdish" and her rock hard brownies, the ones that Little Jerry would throw against the garage to see if they would break. Jerry's words of wisdom to his children were "stay out of trouble and stay out of jail." Jerry was not a man given to displaying anger, in fact, he rarely raised his voice. The one time that son Jerry remembers his father being angry was at Intake one week-end, when a german shepard dog,

attacked, and killed his dad's small dog named Bingo. Jerry was very upset over losing his beloved pet so senselessly. A very self-reliant, independent, hardworking man, Jerry could do anything with his hands when it came to fixing, building, mechanicing. Known as Mr. Fix-it, Darla says of her dad, "he may have been small in stature, but he was large in will and wouldn't be told he couldn't do something." Jerry was the first call when there was a plumbing or other household breakdown or crisis, and he always came to the rescue. As a father, Jerry was also a teacher, but not always a patient one. Jerry would show his children how to do things once, twice, maybe three times, and then he let them fly on their own. Terry says his father's philosophy was "if you don't try, you fail; never be afraid of learning or trying new things." Terry was impressed with all that his father knew, and amazed with all that his father could do. He taught Terry mechanics, Terry's trade today. He taught Terry all about hunting and Terry credits his passion for hunting to his father, and felt his dad was proud of the hunting ability and love of the sport that he instilled in Terry. Over the years, the first day of hunting season was looked forward to with great anticipation. Memories of the many times hunting on Uncle Ted's farm with Jerry and others family members are some of the best the family have. Jerry and his family loved going to Uncle Ted's farm and all the experiences they shared there. It was a special and fun place. It was a chance to enjoy nature and each other's company; it was quality time, the best of times for Jerry and something he tried to repeat over and over. Jerry was a big agate collector. He was very good at spotting agates, often following Ken or other family members, picking up rocks they had missed. Ken claims that Terry has his father's eyes when it comes to spotting agates or wild game, seeing what no one else sees. Not only did Jerry collect agates, he would cut and polish them and would make, or would help a friend make jewelry, light switch covers, and lampshades that are enjoyed by his family, especially Deb. His garage, his shop became a mecca of interest for his grandchildren, because of his agates. Jerry's grandchildren held a special place in Jerry's heart. If he cuddled anyone it was his grandbabies. Once he had hold of them,

you couldn't hardly pry them away from him. He loved spoiling them. Deb remembers a Christmas when Little Jerry came with his two kids, Jerry's first grandchildren. Joan made fabulous food for the holiday, and a pick-up truck was needed to haul the grandkids gifts home. It was a time in Jerry's life when the demands placed on him by the responsibilities of two families and his job had diminished, and it was a time he could relax and enjoy life and the people in his life. The grandchildren loved to go visit him, with his interesting shop and projects. He would let grandson Scott ride the riding mower, and all the grandkids loved to help him pick rocks. As a grandpa, Jerry had time to spend with them, share his interests, and get to know them. Jerry was so very proud of his family, his siblings, his children, his grandchildren. He was proud of their accomplishments, the educations they received, their achievements in life. Jerry was a huge part of their successes, and they became his successes. It was his selfless care and dedication to them, it was his unending support and being there to help and "fix" that portrayed his love for them. He found his happiness in having helped them to become the people they were and he could be proud of his role as father, brother, grandfather. Another important part of Jerry's life were his dogs. He always seemed to have at least one around. Most of the dogs were mutts of the smaller breeds. They were strays or ones someone had given away. Jerry enjoyed their company and friendship. In his last years, his dog Shortie was by his side. One thing about Shortie, he was well fed. With only the dog to care for, Jerry would have 8 to 12 dishes of dog food around the house and would cook the dog breakfast. That poor pup was so fat, his belly dragged on the ground. When Jerry became a resident of the Valley Health Care Center in Billings, Shortie found a new home with son Jerry. Jerry's move to Billings was a big move for Jerry. He had spent his life in Glendive, and was very content to do so. He was most comfortable in his own home, with his family, his dogs, and his own company. The rare times he went anywhere away from home, he didn't enjoy the amount of traffic or people. His grandchildren could hardly even get him to go

out to eat. When his physical capabilities diminished, he enjoyed watching old television shows such as “Andy Griffith” or “Bonanza”. It was when the dementia set in that Jerry moved to the care center. It was a good move for Jerry. There was a sense of contentment about him. He seemed to actually enjoy the many social aspects of the home, the activities, the people who cared for him, and he enjoyed sitting in the day room and having people talk to him. The dementia caused a loss of his ability to verbalize. Deb says he could say “yes, no, and gottas, gotta go.” One interesting and funny phrase he would use was “god damn it”. Interesting and funny because Jerry was never one to swear or even express anger or frustration aloud. His inability to talk didn’t hinder him from expressing himself. One example of this was when the nursing home floor was being retiled. A worker had spread glue on the floor in the hallway outside Jerry’s room. Jerry’s door was shut. Jerry opened the door and walked out in his stocking feet and into the glue. After a bit of excitement, the worker got Jerry back into his room, removed the socks, and went out, shutting the door. Jerry opened the door and threw his pillow into the glue. The staff had a good laugh over Jerry’s expressing his displeasure with what was going on.. Jerry was a resident of the care center for just over a year. On April 27, 2013, at age 76, Jerry Gilbertson left our world. His family greatly loves and appreciates this good man, this father, brother, grandfather. Jerry Gilbertson will be greatly missed.

Tribute Wall



“ *Gerald "Jerry" Gilbertson*

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