



## James Ira Smeltzer

December 12, 1954 - June 7, 2011

Townsend, Montana: James "Jim" Ira Smeltzer, age 56, passed away on Monday, May 30, 2011 at his new home in Townsend. A Life Tribute service will be held on Tuesday, June 7, 2011 at the Chapel of the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home in Glendive, Montana with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home of Glendive has been entrusted with the arrangements. Jim was born in Baker, Montana on December 12, 1954 to Ira and Gloria Smeltzer. He was the second of five children. He was raised in Glendive and graduated from Dawson County High School with the class of 1973. He later lived in Missoula, Montana; Casper, Wyoming and finally resided in Phoenix, Arizona for the past 25 years. He started his construction career as a Union Laborer working on various projects throughout Montana. In 1987, he started his apprenticeship as a Union Pipefitter-Refrigeration in Phoenix. Jim was recognized as Local 469 Apprentice of the Year Outstanding Apprentice Pipefitter-Refrigeration Award in 1992-1993. Jim's hobbies included hunting, fishing, camping and spending time with his friends and family. He enjoyed raising, training and showing his registered labs, Pal and Haze. He enjoyed photography, coyote call making, and gardening. He carried on the tradition of making fudge, popcorn balls and cookies from his father. His family looked forward to receiving boxes of goodies at Christmas. He was preceded in death by his parents, Ira and Gloria Smeltzer; brother, Tom Smeltzer and sister-in-law, Sandra Smeltzer. Jim is survived by his brothers, Everett Smeltzer of Billings, Montana and Warren (Kim Rickard)

Smeltzer of Billings; his sister, Rita (Vic) Young of Glendive; and numerous nieces and nephews. Remembrances and condolences may be shared with the family at: [www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com](http://www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com). Eulogy: Celebrant Today is an important day. Today we remember, honor, and celebrate the life of James "Jim" Smeltzer. Jim was a man of many interests, many passions. To those of you who called him brother, he was also your friend, and to those who called him friend, many of you also termed him just like a brother. Perhaps it was because, as Jim's friend Don Cloud states, "Jim's heart was as big as he was!" Many of you have spoken of his passion for hunting, fishing, and camping. Oh the stories! And then there are the dogs he loved and treated like the kids he never had. And the kids he did have in his life, his nephews and nieces, well, he certainly made his mark with all of them. No matter where Jim was, and he was many places, and no matter what he was doing, or with who, his family and friends were always kept close in his heart. Granted, he was gruff on the outside, but he had a heart of gold. One friend termed Jim like a cactus, prickly, but underneath, sweet. Jim was the second oldest in a family of five children. He had three brothers and one sister, and they were all close in age. He learned his love of hunting, fishing and camping early in life from his father. He wrestled and played football in high school and a nephew claims that there is still a desk at the high school here in Glendive with Jim's name carved in it. Jim's first job was working irrigation on the ditch. And he drove a couple of sporty cars as a young man, a Cobra and a GT Mustang. Brother Everett remembers Jim and their father working on transmission of a car in the family garage. They had gotten something backwards and when they checked out the reworked tranny, they backed through the garage door. After high school, Jim attended Dawson Community College for a year and then went on to Eastern in Billings, Montana, for a short time. The family thinks Jim majored in fun! After college life, Jim traveled Montana and Wyoming for a few years, working construction and putting up power lines. Needing a change, Jim headed to Arizona to find work. His parents were spending time in the winters there and his sister, Rita was living

in Phoenix. Jim moved in with Rita and her family for a short time, while he got settled and found work. Jim joined the pipefitters union and became an apprentice, going to school a couple evenings a week as he learned the skills needed to do commercial refrigeration. Jim found that refrigeration was hot work; he was always fixing the cooling systems in the hot desert heat. He would balance impellers on chillers on the roofs of tall buildings in Vegas, and set up refrigeration in transportable buildings used for large blood draws in California. Jim did some traveling to many places with his job. He lived in Phoenix for 25 years, and made many good friends there. He continued his passion for hunting, fishing and camping in Arizona with new friends. Jim was both a gun hunter and a bow hunter. He would buy a gun every year and call it an investment. Everyone who hunted with Jim knew him as an aggressive hunter who left many memorable experiences in his wake. Brother Warren distinctly recalls hunting with Jim and their father, and Jim filling all three tags. His brothers tell about Jim working out in the oil fields driving a steam cleaning truck. Many days Jim would hunt on his way out to the oilrig sites, arriving with the truck full of deer. Jim's philosophy was "if it moved, it was shootable." Once when Jim was visiting in Montana, he went out hunting with a friend, Henry Mischel. Only Henry had a deer tag, and they found a nice 5x5 buck. Henry couldn't decide if he wanted to shoot the buck, and Jim, who had a hot and quick temper, jumped all over Henry, wondering if Henry had joined PETA that he wasn't shooting that buck. Henry took the buck. Jim became friends with Deb and Jim Schroeder in Arizona, and they hunted together. Schroeder's idea of a day hunt was to go out early, hunt, come in for lunch and maybe a nap, and then go out towards evening. One year a nephew of theirs drew a deer, but only Deb was available to take him out. Jim went along. Deb says they hunted from daylight to dark; Jim would not take a break, trying hard to get a deer for the nephew. Big game was Jim's favorite to hunt, deer and elk, but he also hunted havalinas, and even got drawn for a desert sheep. He often complained about Arizona's deer being so small, but

he still hunted them. There is a story about a turkey hunt Jim was on being quite exciting. Jim was calling in turkeys, while another hunter was walking ahead of him with the gun. The hunter looked back at Jim and began waving his arms and pointing behind Jim. Jim turned, only to see a mountain lion stalking them about ten feet away. The mountain lion also was looking for the biggest turkey in the area. Fishing was a bit like hunting, Jim fished for anything that swam. Henry Mischel chuckles when he tells about paddlefishing with Jim. They were working the bank pretty good, when a fellow tried to move in where they were. Jim's temper immediately flashed at the guy about his choice of locations. The man told Jim that Jim wasn't being particularly friendly. Jim replied that he was there to catch fish not make friends. But under the cactus barbs was the good guy. Jim later helped the fellow land his paddlefish. Deb Schroeder called Jim the "ultimate Boy Scout, always prepared." Whenever they all would go out camping and hunting, Jim was ready for anything that would come up. Jim Schroeder says of his friend, that Jim always did his homework and put forth a great deal of effort to make a hunt successful. Jim was the original "gitter done" guy. They were on an elk hunt on a reservation, and there was a heavy snowfall. The tent collapsed during the night. Jim would not sleep in the truck, but put the camp back together that night, not stopping until the job was done. That is just how Jim was. It was mentioned that Jim's Labrador dogs were the kids he never had. "Pal" was a registered champion and "Haze" who is here today, were his pride and joy. He loved them, hunted birds with them and showed them on the field trials circuit. The swimming pool in Jim's back yard was for the dogs. Sister Rita claimed Jim's dogs had "went to the best colleges." Not all the dogs Jim bought came along so well. Jim had bought a pup here in Glendive one Christmas, when he still lived in western Montana. Jim stopped to stay in Billings with friends on his way home. The pup escaped the garage and they couldn't find it. Jim put up a reward of several hundred dollars but had to get home. After arriving home he received a call that someone had found the pup. Jim drove four hours back to Billings, payed the reward, and picked up the

dog. Come to find out, it was the wrong pup and not a very smart one besides. Well, he did have papers on a dog, so he kept it, but... Besides his obvious passion for hunting and fishing, Jim had many other interests. He made coyote calls. He would call his nephew, Jay, and tell Jay to send him all his "Bambis", meaning any horns and antlers Jay had laying around, which Jay did. Jim would use these to make the calls. Jim participated in rendezvous. He was an avid photographer, rarely without his camera. He enjoyed sharing his photos with family and friends, and would enlarge them, and sometimes even make frames for the photos that he would give away. He would pick up pens, pencils, and scratch pads, and send boxes of them home for the family to use. He collected antique glass, including bottles, insulators, and depression glass. He gardened, and canned vegetables and the game meat from his hunting. Jim enjoyed going to Nascar races and baseball games. And his sister found he had a large collection of shoes, especially crocs. Jim was a diverse man. He was innovative. Once babysitting for Rita's baby daughter Lindsay, his niece, he reported that he had a bit of trouble with the diapering. Rita found duct tape holding the diaper on Lindsay. He was self-sufficient. Brother-in-law, Vic, says Jim had a philosophy that "you don't buy it if you can make it." Nephew Eric remembers Jim liking the best, and saying "I never go anywhere on scholarship." But what made Jim that special brother, uncle, and friend was that big heart, full of caring and generosity. He would keep in touch with long phone calls to catch up on what family or friends might have going on in their lives. Jim made huge first aid kits for each family member, including nieces and nephews, using tool boxes filled with everything imaginable, including bee sting kits, iodine, and many other fixes. Jim took up his father's tradition of making Christmas fudge and popcorn balls for family members. Jim would buy boxes from the post office used to send books and media in for a flat rate. Jim would load these boxes with fudge using popcorn balls as fillers, and send each family member 2-10 pounds of fudge. Problem was, the post office would make you come in to pick it up along with paying extra postage to get it and a lecture about abusing the system! Jim would lend money to anyone,

and he would give money to family. To his brothers and sister he would send blank signed checks and tell them to buy things, or use them for something they needed. He would send money grams to Rita for Memorable Day flowers for family who had died. When nephews, Eric and Jay, were in college, Jim would send them money and/or tools. Eric still has all the tools Jim sent him. Jim would buy savings bonds for all the nieces and nephews and continued this for the great-nieces and nephews. Whenever Jim would visit with his nieces and nephews, he could always relate a story of his life to go with any stories of theirs they shared with him. As a special tribute and good-bye to their uncle, Jim's nieces and nephews will be leaving a penny with Jim at the conclusion of today's life tribute service. This tribute is called "pennies from heaven" and the pennies that they leave will symbolize the loving thoughts they want to send with their uncle Jim. As they go about life, when they find a penny in an unexpected place and at an unexpected time, these "pennies from heaven" will symbolize that Jim is thinking about them and sending his love their way. If you were a friend of Jim's you most likely benefited from his caring heart. Henry Mischel tell of his mother being sick and how Jim stayed available to help. Deb Schroeder tells of having a stroke and being in the hospital. Jim visited often, and looked out for her better than the nurses. Jim also served for Schroeder's 10th anniversary as their best man when they renewed their vows, toasting them with some very beautiful words. Jim was the only one they trusted with a key to their home up north. Don Cloud often couldn't be present to spend time with his mother on Mother's Day, so Jim would take Don's mother out for a special Mother's Day time. Once, Jim took her in her wheelchair to Cabella's for their outing. Jim preferred to show his love, his friendship, not through words, but through many acts of kindness and caring. Jim lived and worked in Arizona for 25 years, but his heart was always in Montana. His dream was to return, and he worked hard to make that happen. Jim was able to find and buy his piece of paradise in Townsend, Montana. He had a place built where he had "fishing out the front, and hunting

out the back". Although limited in his activities because of being on oxygen, he was still prepared to live his dream, if only in a chair, holding a fishing pole, and looking at the water. Jim had moved in, but was not yet unpacked. He had plans and who knows where they would have taken him. A big shed to hold all his hunting and fishing gear, maybe a return to woodworking...but it was not to be. At age 56, in his dream home in Montana, Jim died. Jim Smeltzer will be greatly missed by many. Song: "Go Rest High On That Mountain" by Vince Gill

A couple of e-mails have been sent to be read today. The first is from Bernie Georgia Clark: "Jim, I am so very sad and disheartened to hear of your passing. Having returned to Phoenix after a year in Savannah with Carter and Caitlin, I looked forward to catching up with you and hearing about your new home in Montana. I have been keeping track of your progress through the grapevine and was so happy that your dream to return to Montana was finally being realized. I am so glad that we had the opportunity to talk at Christmastime when I was home. I felt we had a good talk and cleared up some things. I wanted to let you know that no matter how often we talked or didn't, that I loved you very much and you were always/and always will be in my thoughts and prayers. I have to say that you were your mother's son. Having said that, I want you to know that that is the highest compliment I can give you since I hold your mom in the highest esteem. Gloria was an amazing person and when she was gone, you picked up and carried on where she left off. I know you were a comfort and a blessing to her in her time of need. I have known you my whole life and our lives have been woven together for all time. I can vividly pick out memories as children that I hold in my heart still. At times you appeared gruff, but were in actuality a huge softie with an enormous heart. We shared countless memories so that when we were talking, a single phrase (or grannyism) would put us on the same page. And we would laugh because it's like belonging to a secret club, but what it actually came down to was that we were "family." We shared birthdays, holidays, picnics, happy times, and sad times. I can still remember being at your house in Wolfpoint when we were young, several of us sleeping upstairs one Christmas, waiting

for Santa. Warren, you and I were planning to stay awake and catch Santa, and Warren saying he was sure he heard sleigh bells...I can remember chokecherry picking, and all of you boys sluicing down some irrigation culverts and I wanted to so badly, but got all scratched up from thorn bushes growing next to the ditches...I can remember when my family lived with yours for a while in Glendive and I was playing outside in the dirt with a spoon; you brought me tiny teacups and plates to use (God, I hope you didn't steal them)! Right now there is no end to what I can remember and it breaks my heart because you are gone too soon. My last memory of you is right before I went to Georgia. You wanted to put together some bouquets for the graves for Memorial Day. We went to Michaels and picked out silk flowers. We kind of sparred back and forth as we picked out which colors or types looked good together and I called you a "girly man," especially when you had your Michael's coupon on the ready, and it was a day I will hold dear now... So, Jim, I don't know what comes next for sure, but I love you and wish you well on the next leg of the journey that we all must take. You will be missed for your compassion and generosity of spirit, your true sense of family, and especially for your unique sense of humor. Georgia" This next e-mail comes from a friend, Rod Furne. "First and foremost, I would like to convey my deepest sympathies to Rita, Warren, Everett, Bonnie, and all of Jim's relatives and friends. I want you to know that I will do whatever I can to help from down here. Jim and I met when he was a 2nd year apprentice and I was just starting my first year in the AC union. We hit it off right away. He was going to desert landscape his front and back yard that week-end, so I offered to help. Even though whoever was operating the tractor hit the roof flashing a couple of times, we got the yards done. I guess alcohol may have been involved. Jim and I started a 20 plus year friendship that week. Actually, Jim was like a brother to me. We went through good times together, (a bunch of gutter huggers) and bad times, (surgeries and ICU stays), but Jim was always there for me and I tried to be there for him. He would give his friends the shirt off his back. Jim will be missed by many people here in Phoenix, friends and family

alike. Jim helped many people here. I was lucky enough to be his friend. I met him when he was starting a home in Phoenix and I say goodbye as he returned to start a home in Montana. I will most definitely miss him. I am sorry for all of our loss. Jim's friend, Rod Furne"

# Tribute Wall



“ *James Ira Smeltzer*

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December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM