



John Messersmith

May 8, 1912 - December 15, 2006

John M. Messersmith, age 94, of Glendive, passed away on Sunday, December 10, 2006 at his home in Glendive. A Life Tribute service will be held at 1:00 P.M., Friday, December 15, 2006 in the Chapel of the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home in Glendive with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Interment with military honors will be in the Dawson Memorial Cemetery in Glendive. Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home of Glendive is entrusted with arrangements. John was born on May 8, 1912 in Marion County, Indiana, the son of Ralph Cleveland and Grace Viola (Briggs) Messersmith. He received his elementary education in Fishers, Indiana and the family later moved to Knox, North Dakota where he attended school until the 8th grade. He was united in marriage to Thelma Viola Brager on June 23, 1935 in Minnewaukan, North Dakota. John was a Standard Oil man in Bisby, North Dakota. The family moved to Joplin, Missouri where John worked in a meat packing plant. John entered the United States Army in January of 1944 and served in both theaters of World War II. He was honorably discharged in January of 1946. Following his discharge from the military, John returned to Knox, North Dakota where he farmed before moving to Tioga, North Dakota and then to Glendive, Montana in 1954 where he was employed as a truck driver for Northern Tank Line. After he retired from Northern Tank Line after 27 years of service, John continued driving truck on his own. He enjoyed hunting and fishing. Survivors include his wife, Thelma, of Glendive; his son, Robert Messersmith and his wife Karen of Tioga, North Dakota; his daughter, Sharon Russell and her

husband Cliff of Glendive; sisters, Mildred Nelson and her husband Leland of Rugby, North Dakota, Jane Book and her husband Warren of Mesa, Arizona and Ida Shipton and her husband Richard of Gwinner, North Dakota; seven grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. ***** Life Tribute Service: John M. Messersmith was a hardworking, independent, and very private man. During his 94 years of living, he spent the majority of those years working, beginning in his youth doing farm chores and then spending most of his adult years as a truck driver, a job that took him from coast to coast across these United States. John also served his country during World War II, where he saw much of the world, including as he put it, “too many beaches”. When John had time to spend at home, he liked to be home, tending to his yard and garden. John didn’t talk about himself or his experiences very often and his pleasures were simple. The one song that his family remembers John enjoying was “Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer” sung by John’s favorite cowboy, Gene Autry. Let us pause for a moment and listen to this classic holiday song. Song: “Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer” by Gene Autry Celebrant: Growing up during the early 1900’s in a rural environment, John Messersmith learned early about daily chores and physical labor. But he was still a kid and once in a while would find some mischief to get into. His sister Mildred recalls a certain 4th of July when she and John were about 6 and 8, and they managed to get into a bit of trouble. Their aunt and uncle had come to visit bringing firecrackers, and as kids like to do, John and Mildred were having a grand time lighting and throwing these firecrackers around the yard, right up until a few firecrackers landed on the roof of the house and started the roof burning. Mildred says her parents were too surprised and too busy putting out the fire to even spank her and John. It’s safe to say that John and Mildred were also very surprised at what they had done. As a young man in his early 20’s, John married Thelma Brager and began his family, having a son, Robert, and a daughter, Sharon. World War II started but John wasn’t supposed to go as by then he was in his late twenties and had a family. But in 1944, his country called John into the Army, and John

entered the war as a combat engineer, operating a bobcat. His outfit would go ahead of the fighting troops to build runways and help prepare for the invading United States Forces. He was first sent to the Pacific islands and Japan, going from there to South Africa, Sicily and Europe. John was honorably discharged in 1946. Most war vets don't talk about their time in the service, and this was true of John. However, John's son, Bob recalls one incident that his father told. John was working under an army truck and dosed off. He was awakened by someone kicking his leg. As he awoke, he was asked what he was doing and John replied that he was getting the truck ready because some "damn" general was coming to do inspections. As he got out from under the truck, John saw General Patton walking away. The inspection was over. Following his discharge from the Army, John returned to farming in North Dakota. He also drove school bus for a time. The school bus was a farm truck that John had converted to a school bus. John had put a box with a cover on the flatbed of the truck, put seats inside the box for the children to sit on and used a small propane stove to keep them warm. If you looked at the truck from the front, there were signs in the windshield. The passenger side read BUS and the driver's side read SCHOOL. But it suited its purpose. John left the farm to work at jobs that had a steadier income. He drove equipment in the oil fields near Tioga, moving oil rigs from location to location. In 1954, John and his family moved to Glendive, Montana, and John was employed by Northern Tank Line as a truck driver, where he worked for the next 27 years. According to John, truck driving was the best job he had ever had. When John retired from Northern Tank Line, he continued to truck, buying two flatbed trucks to haul a variety of goods. Keep in mind that John was at that time approaching 70 years old. John's son-in-law, Cliff Russell, relates that an aunt of his who worked at a café in Circle, MT. told Cliff that John would stop there for coffee or a meal regularly on his truck runs and all the waitresses fondly called him "Grandpa." John's daughter, Sharon, who lived in Wolfpoint, MT for a time, talks of her father going through Wolfpoint on these runs. Sharon would often

bake homemade rolls. Whenever she was baking rolls, John seemed to show up for coffee and a hot, fresh baked roll. Maybe he could smell that delicious, fresh baked bread as he rolled down the highway. John probably saw many things, people and places on his road trips, but he wasn't one to talk about any of it. He didn't like the East Coast, preferring the West Coast. And in his late years, when he was frustrated with his declining health and increased dependence on Sharon and Cliff, John would throw up his hands and exclaim that he was going to go back to Chicago. No one is quite sure what John liked about Chicago. Just that going back was what he would do to improve his situation. John's sister, Mildred, remembers an interesting experience that John told her about his trucking days. He was hauling a load of honey bees. When he would stop the truck, the bees would swarm out and buzz around, scaring anyone who happened to be near. As soon as he would start the truck up to hit the road, the bees would all go back into their hives. John found their behavior very interesting. When John wasn't on the road, he spent his time on his garden and lawn. John loved flowers, particularly roses, and would grow beautiful ones. And he grew huge bushes of four o'clock flowers. They were about waist high and great big around. At his home in Highland Park, these four o'clocks were all along his fence, and when he moved to Barry subdivision, they lined both sides of his driveway. He also grew a garden with strawberries, melons, and popcorn. He loved popcorn. At his home in Barry subdivision, he bought the lot behind him. It rose into a bit of a hill and he would park his trucks up there. Whenever a seedling tree would sprout in his garden or yard, John would transplant it up on his hill. Today you can see a nice shelter belt of these transplanted trees. John was meticulous about his yard. His grass was weed free and fertilized twice a year. Once, John noticed some quack grass coming up so he took out the whole lawn and reseeded it. No weeds allowed! John would water his yard faithfully with irrigated water and heavy above ground hoses...no underground sprinkler for his lawn. He would mow it and then sweep it to get all the clippings off the grass. At one point during all this, some local contractors wanted to hire him to put lawns in

at the new homes they were building. John turned them down knowing if he put the lawn in right and it wasn't taken care of properly, it would really bother him. John was also very meticulous about his vehicles and trucks. All were kept very clean and well maintained. John was a Ford man and would trade cars every few years. The Ford dealer always wanted to know when John was thinking about trading, because most times there already would be a buyer for the vehicle John would be trading in. When John was 65, he got a Honda motorcycle to ride to work and before that he had a three wheeler. John loved being on wheels. No matter if it was 2 wheels, four wheels, 18 wheels, or light and heavy equipment. John was always in the drivers seat. John's other interests included fishing and hunting. In John's younger days in North Dakota, Sundays were spent picnicking and fishing with family. Later in life, fishing was one thing John did consistently in his spare time. Son Bob recalls John coming up to Alberta, Canada where Bob was stationed at a radar base near Sturgeon Lake. This large Canadian lake was known for its huge northern pike. These northerns were four, five, six feet long. Bob took John fishing for northerns on the lake. And John loved it. John would be waiting to go fishing every day when Bob got off work. John did get a lesson in fish handling one of the first days out. Bob had told his father that northerns were especially known for their sharp teeth and fighting ways. It was important to get them out of the water and into the boat or on land before taking out hooks or putting them on a stringer. John made the mistake of reaching into the water to grab the stringer and one of the large northerns bit him in the hand with the teeth going all the way through. It was a painful lesson. As a youth, Mildred remembers John hunting jackrabbits. As an adult, John enjoyed hunting deer. He did hunt and successfully shoot an antelope once. But when he and Thelma went to cook it up, the antelope smelled and he decided he wasn't going waste his time hunting such a smelly animal and so he only hunted deer. For social activities, John enjoyed card playing, Canasta for the most part, and he bowled on the Northern Tank Lines men's bowling team. During John's late years, it was suggested he join the senior citizens center.

He replied he didn't have time to sit around with a bunch of old folks, his garden and yard kept him busy enough. And that was true...John was young and very physically able for his age. It was only in the past two years, that John's age began to limit him. It fell to Sharon and Cliff who live here to help care for her father, much to his dismay. Losing his independence was a blow to John. He began to slow down, finally braking and coming to a stop this past Sunday. For John the wheels finally stopped turning. But John lived with a vigor seldom seen in those given 94 years of living. Perhaps it is a lesson to us all to view John's working well into his 70's and staying busy throughout his life, as a way to maintain a certain quality of life that we may enjoy throughout our later years. Please listen to this special song selected by John's family, "A Closer Walk With Thee." Song: A Closer Walk With Thee Celebrant: Closing

It's been said that the most important part of a story is the ending, as no one reads a book to get to the middle. This is an ending to John Messersmith's story. As we remember John, we realize that the death of someone close to us brings to mind their total story, their life. And with a man as private as John, we know many stories and experiences that made up John's life were not spoken of here today, many are not known and cannot be shared. If stories and memories have come to mind in listening to those told here, please share them with others present today. Take all of these stories and memories home and share them with family members not present today and on occasion repeat them for all to hear. The significance of John life is apparent in you. For John is a part of the fabric of your lives, he touched you with his life; he will remain with you. Telling his story will honor John Messersmith, and it will allow others to know you better. "To live in hearts left behind, is not to die." This concludes John M. Messersmith's life tribute service. We will proceed to Dawson Memorial Cemetery for military honors and a final farewell.

Tribute Wall



“ *John Messersmith*

December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM