



## Gary Jensen

August 5, 1950 - November 22, 2014

All who knew Gary Jensen would agree that there was no one who met him and left unchanged. He was vibrant, fun-loving, and the heartbeat of wherever he was with a contagious zest for life. A more devoted husband, father, and grandfather would be hard to find as it was easy to see that Gary's family was his greatest source of pride and joy. Although he accomplished so much of which to be proud, he was a humble, gracious, and generous man whose focus was forever on those around him. Life will never be the same without Gary here, but his timeless legacy will be proudly carried on by those who follow in his footsteps. It seems only fitting that Gary's journey began during a time that was as colorful as he was. It was the 1950s when rock 'n roll took the world by storm, James Dean made young girls swoon on the silver screen, and Elvis was king. Just as this decade was dawning there was a young couple from Kankakee, Illinois, who was eagerly anticipating the birth of their baby. The big day finally arrived on August 5, 1950, when the baby boy they named Gary W. drew his first breath. He was the second of four children born to his parents, Bill and Irene Jensen, and he was raised in the family home alongside his brothers, Ron and Terry, and his sister, Anita. Growing up on a dairy farm meant there was little room for anything other than tending to farm responsibilities. The entertainment came after the milk check arrived when the family headed to Kankakee for some shopping. Although he loved the farm and imagined that he would one day take over the farm himself, Gary's life took a different path. He was an active member of the 4-H and spent several

days and nights at the Kankakee County Fair and also at as many as seven other surrounding fairs Gary graduated from Limestone Grade School where he loved playing basketball. He went on to Herscher High School where he participated in wrestling and football and was also an active member of the Future Farmers of America. After graduating from high school in 1969, Gary left for college that fall but was only at Spoon River Junior College in Canton, Illinois, for a short time as he was soon drafted. Before he left for the service he took a two weeklong road trip with good friends, Don Johnston, John Cox, and Wayne Kruse. The consensus was that the details of that trip were not to be shared publicly! Gary entered the United States Army on September 23, 1970, and served in Vietnam from September 1, 1971, to April 10, 1972. He was honorably discharged from the Army on April 24, 1972. In recognition of his service Gary received the National Defense Service Medal, an Expert Badge (M-16), Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, and an Overseas Bar. Once again a civilian, Gary returned home and began working at Home Appliance. At times he and his cousin, Kim, would eat lunch at the Homestead, and it was there that he got to know the woman of his dreams. Her name was Debbie, and although they both attended Herscher they ran in different circles since she was a goody two-shoes while he was one of the smokers. Despite their differences, they got to know one another over the lunches at the Homestead, marking the beginning of a love story that would span 42 years. Deeply in love, Gary and Debbie were married on June 20, 1975, at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Herscher. After a honeymoon in Florida, the newlyweds returned to Herscher where Gary began working as a semi/heavy equipment driver at Tobey's Construction and Cartage where he remained his entire career. Together Gary and Debbie were blessed with three amazing children: Keidra in 1978, Courtney in 1980, and Kyle in 1984. As fathers go, Gary was the very best, and his family was always his primary focus. Vacations were special times including a trip to Hawaii for Christmas in 1988 to visit Debbie's sister and going to Florida to visit Grandma White. Traditions were also deeply cherished, and one of the favorites was when they

headed out to Tammen's Tree Farm in Essex to cut down their Christmas tree on the weekend after Thanksgiving. Gary was there for every school or extracurricular event and activity, and he was his children's strongest supporter. There was also the time he delivered a snowmobile in freezing cold temps with no winter weather gear since it was important to his son, the unforgettable sunglasses episode during Kyle's baseball game, and his crappy brown truck that could only be started with a screwdriver. As his family grew to include a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law, Gary was thrilled, and he was filled with unspeakable joy to welcome three grandchildren, Cooper, Grayson, and Brady, into his heart. With adult children Gary was still their biggest supporter as he was there to follow his daughter up to school during a snowstorm, provided endless amounts of support and help when his grandson was in the hospital for what seemed like a lifetime, and to support his son and daughter in a 5k no matter what time he had to get up. He loved playing or working around in the backyard with his grandsons, and just last Sunday he fulfilled his grandson's Christmas wish by surprising him with the air hockey table he wanted. Over the years Gary was a man of many interests. Softball was a part of his life from the time he was nine well into his adult years as he played with Jerry's Tap, Herscher Merchants, Tobey Truckers, and the Kankakee Feds. He caught a minimum of six games a week and at tournaments caught as many as six games a day. The battery of Dale Pfeiffer/Gary Jensen was well known throughout the softball community. Gary and Debbie loved being together as a couple, too, and trips to Hawaii, Las Vegas, and jaunts to the gambling boats with their brother and sister in law were among their favorite times. During January for the past two years they were able to relax, golf, and spend time with family while staying at The Villages, Florida. Gary was a member of St. Margaret Mary's Catholic Church, an avid sports fan who enjoyed watching the White Sox, Black Hawks, and the Bears. With unending love for his family and friends, Gary Jensen was a blessing to those around him. Although he was taken from his loved ones too soon, the

footprint he leaves behind will never fade away. Gary W. Jensen, of Herscher, died on November 22, 2014. Gary is survived by his wife Debra; two daughters and one son in law, Keidra Jensen of Lisle, IL, Courtney (Dale) Meredith of Limestone; son and daughter in law, Kyle (Melanie) Jensen of Limestone; 3 grandchildren, Cooper and Grayson Meredith, and Brady Jensen, 2 brothers and sisters in law, Ron (Mary) Jensen of Littleton, Colorado, Terry (Billie) Jensen of rural Kankakee; and his sister and brother in law, Anita and Brent Wendling of rural Kankakee, IL. Gary was preceded in death by his parents and his mother-in-law, Regina White. A gathering of family and friends will be on Sunday, November 30th at the Kankakee Chapel of the Schreffler Funeral Homes from 2:00-7:00 p.m. The funeral will begin at 10:00 a.m. at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Herscher on Monday, December 1, 2014. Burial will be held at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery on Monday at 12:30 p.m. Memorials may be made to Ronald McDonald House or Jean's Genes Relay for Life team. Please visit [www.schrefflerfuneralhomes.com](http://www.schrefflerfuneralhomes.com) where you can learn more about Gary's life.

# Tribute Wall



“ Gary Jensen

February 03, 2023 at 04:30 AM



“ Debbie & family-So sorry to hear about Gary's sudden death. We all have great memories of Fastpitch softball, and Gary & his family are a big part of that. What a great guy he was-a competitive guy with great sportsmanship! Our families condolences to you Debbie, and your kids-Stu & Jerri Cann

Stu & Jerri Cann - December 14, 2014 at 04:40 PM



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Stu & Jerri Cann - December 14, 2014 at 04:40 PM



“ Debbie and families, So sorry to hear of the very sudden loss of your husband/loved one. We will keep you and yours in our daily prayers. Ron, Michele, Clayton and Tyler Crawford

Michele and Ron Crawford - December 03, 2014 at 09:05 PM



“ Our prayers to the family during this sad and difficult time

Chris and Lynn Lichtenberger - November 30, 2014 at 04:02 PM

VW

“ THIS CHRISTMAS WONT BE THE SAME WITHOUT YOU. WE ALL GET TOGETHER AND PLAY 31. THE WHOLE FAMILY PLAYS. WHAT A GOOD TIME WE HAD. I WILL CHEERISH THESE TIMES WE HAD... YOU ARE A WONDERFUL PERSON. YOUR JOB IS DONE. REST IN PEACE. GOD IS LOOKING OUT FOR YOU NOW. LOVE AND MISS YOU.....

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**VICKI WEBBER** - November 27, 2014 at 02:54 AM

LH

“ *Debbie and family, there are no words to express my deepest sympathy at the loss of Gary. God has called home a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, and friend. I remember the fun times we had at card club and all the exciting games with Tobey's Construction Slow-Pitch Softball team. Know that God is with you all to comfort you in the days ahead. As your children and grandchildren gather round you Debbie, look into their eyes and watch their smiles. They are Gary's legacy and through them he will always be with you. My family and I have you all in our thoughts and prayers.*

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**Lynn Hartman** - November 26, 2014 at 04:02 AM

TM

“ *Remembering times shared at youth group events and highschool happenings. We are SO SAD to know that this good guy is gone now...way too soon. Our sympathy to Debbie and all their family, and to our friends Ron & Mary, Terry & Billie, and Anita and Brent. We pray that you'll find comfort and peace, somehow, as you grieve your loss. Our hearts break for you all.*

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**Terry and Linda Meyer** - November 25, 2014 at 10:38 PM

BB

“ *Debbie, Jeff and I continue to have you and your family in our thoughts and prayers. Bill*

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**Bill Briggs** - November 25, 2014 at 04:19 PM