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Chadrad Communications, Inc.
226 Bordeaux St - Chadron, NE 69337
308-432-5545 fax 308-432-5601
E-mail: kcsr@chadrad.com

12/05/2011 - Gordon N (Skip) Eaton



Gordon Neal "Skip" Eaton 3-16-1937 to 12-1-2011

Gordon "Skip" Eaton, of Chadron NE, passed away on December 1, 2011, at the age of 74, at the Chadron Community Hospital, after a short courageous battle of cancer.

Skip was born March 16, 1937, in Lusk WY, to Roger and Dorothy Eaton, and was the youngest of 3 children. He has a brother Raymond who is 8 years older than he, and a sister, Ellenmae who is 3 years older than he. In 1939, his mother re-married to Martin "Slim" Hebbert, who raised Skip into a fine young man.

When his mother brought her family of 3 home to Chadron from the homestead in Wyoming, Skip was less than a year old. They first stayed with grandparents Dick and Una Roberts down on Mears Street. The next door neighbor happened to have a feisty little terrier called Skippy, and Skip's first attachment to dogs began almost immediately. People began calling him Skippy, too, because he and the dog were inseparable.

Over the years, Skip brought home many stray animals, nearly more than anyone could tolerate. No animal was too sick, too ugly or too unfriendly to stop Skip from bonding with it.

Then the family soon moved from Mears Street to 5th and Lake Street, where his mother and step-father, Martin (Slim) Hebbert built a new house. That is where Skip contracted polio, then known as infantile paralysis. No one knew how to treat it, but he did survive the paralysis, learned to walk again, and led a normal life as he grew up, mostly due to a faithful doctor and step-father who every day worked with him as he recovered.

He graduated from Chadron High School in 1955. Before graduating, he joined the Nebraska National Guard and served 2 years. He also attended barber school late summer of 1955 to early spring of 1956. He then married Wilma Sternhagen in 1956, and they moved to Gordon Ne, where he worked as a barber for Jess Springman. Then their first child was born; Terry Lee Eaton, in November of 1956.

While working as a barber he enlisted in the Navy in 1957. The little family lived in Chadron, San Diego, and Alameda until Skip's ship, the USS Pictor, was deployed to the Pacific. He was the ship's barber on the Pictor, a supply ship, as well as the ship's store keeper. He was injured in an unacknowledged accident while transporting good from his ship to another.

After Skip was honorably discharged from the Navy, he barbered with his brother, Raymond, in Chadron, until he could no

longer use his arms in certain positions to work. No one knew what post-polio syndrome was in those days. We now know pots-polio is a condition that occurs as if one is having polio all over again.

In 1963, Sydney Rae was born and in 1971, Kori Lynne was born. During this time he traveled around with a band The VanGards as a drummer with Steve Brooks and Dale Hopkins. He then worked at The Chadron State College. Skip moved the family to Kalispell, Montana in 1972, where he worked at Trailer Sales Company but in 1975, they came back to Nebraska. Once returning to Chadron, he worked in security at the College. Then in 1977 he began working for the Chadron Police Department as a Special Servicer Officer, doing animal control and enforcement for the next 18 years.

In his spare time he continued to play in different bands, on the drums, guitars, steel guitars and pianos. He was active with the Humane society as well as the Masons, the Panhandle Country Music Association, and the Black Hills Hillbillies Camping Club.

Skip enjoyed life with the outdoors, boating, RV camping, wood working, raising donkeys, oil painting and spending time with his family. He loved his wife, his children, and his family and of course just about any animal that came into his life.

Skip enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren Jesse Perry, Teryn and Tyrel Eaton, Cassandra Gottwald Lynch and her husband Rob, Chandler and Teresa Gottwald, Jacob Kruse and his wife Giselle, and Bailey Gaswick, as well as 7 great-grandchildren.

In the past years since retirement, Skip and Wilma could be found enjoying coffee with friends at Wal-Mart, camping with the Black Hills Hillbillies, being campground hosts, playing on his computer and “tooling” up and down the streets to chatting with the neighbors.

Skip is survived by Wilma, his wife of 55 years; his son Terry and daughter-in-law Pam, daughter Sydney Gottwald and Mike Fortin, and daughter Kori Gaswick and son-in-law Brent; 8 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother, Raymond Eaton, and sister-in-law, Dixie, sister, Ellenmae Armstrong and brother-in-law Bill. And, we can't forget his furry friend and constant companion, Ki.

Skip was preceded in death by his mother, Dorothy and his dad, Slim Hebbert; his father-and mother-in-law Elmer and Jennie Sternhagen, grandson Robert Eaton, and nephew Jake Eaton.

Funeral services will be held on Monday, December 5, 2011 at 10:00 AM at Chamberlain Chapel with Pastor Charlie Granade officiating. Burial will be at Greenwood Cemetery.

A memorial has been established for the Chadron Volunteer Fire Department, Friends of Pets, or the Donor's Choice. Donations may be sent to Chamberlain Chapel, PO Box 970, Chadron, NE 69337.

Online condolences can be made at www.chamberlainchapel.com

Chamberlain Chapel of Chadron is in charge of arrangements.