



Janice "Penny" Erickson

April 22, 1936 - April 22, 2025

An informal Celebration of Life for Janice "Penny" Virginia Erickson, New Hampton, IA, formerly of Superior, WI, will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, May 17, 2025, at the Bertha Community Center. Inurnment will be held at the Germania-Moran cemetery in Bertha, MN.

Janice died Friday, April 11, 2025, at Hillcrest Living Campus in Sumner, IA.

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Arrangements are with Hugeback-Johnson Funeral Home and Crematory, New Hampton, IA.

Tributes may be left at [www.hugebackfuneralhome.com/obits/janice-penny-virginia-erickson](http://www.hugebackfuneralhome.com/obits/janice-penny-virginia-erickson)

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Janice was born to Margaret (Schneider) and Gustav Carl Messer in Staples, MN in 1936. When her baby brother couldn't pronounce "Janice," she became Penny, a nickname she went by all her life. She grew up surrounded by family, siblings, and neighbors on a busy family farm in German-American Bertha, MN. Although the Great Depression was ever-present, it was a time of happy memories: sneaking sugar to make fudge (thinking mother Margaret wouldn't notice the scent of chocolate in the air), driving the Model T, or stealing a pie meant for company from town.

After graduating from Staples High School and Business School, Penny moved to Minneapolis and worked as a bookkeeper, including a stint on the

typists' floor at the Northwestern National Life Insurance on Loring Park. (This was later renovated into apartments, which was discovered when grandchild Max rented one!) She married Lou Harpel in 1956 and welcomed Joni Lynn (1958-1959), Lee (1960), Lon (1964), and Holly (1966). After they divorced in 1979, Penny's life entered a new chapter. Penny met Vernon Erickson on a blind date. After their marriage in 1982 and eventual retirement, they moved to their beloved lake home on Lake Amnicon in Superior, WI. They spent many good years participating in the Tri-Lakes Civic Club, where they hosted many a fish fry, meat raffle, and pontoon boat regatta; worked on craft projects together; and made many good friends. All who lived around the lakes in that era knew Penny and Vern!

Upon Vern's passing in 2014, Penny moved to New Hampton to be closer to daughter Holly and son-in-law Reed. She lived with Holly and Reed near Mikkelson Park for 11 years, enjoying the Christmas lights especially. Penny enjoyed "Crafterday" (full days of crafts!), penny slot machines, classic country music, Vikings football, shopping (especially making up boxes of little gifts for loved ones), and "making memories" (something she said often). She never met a casino buffet, an As Seen on TV kitchen gadget, or a Pink Squirrel she didn't like. Although full of life here on Earth, she was excited to return home to the family farm and see her mother and dad once again, including reuniting with baby Joni Lynn and husband Vern on the other side.

After surviving multiple cancers and COPD, Janice sustained several strokes and was called home peacefully on April 11, just a few days shy of her 89th birthday. The family thanks the staff of MercyOne New Hampton Medical Center, Senior Life Solutions, Northern Iowa Therapy, and Hillcrest in Sumner, IA.

Penny is survived by her children, Lee Harpel, Lon Harpel, Holly (Reed) Palo; grandchild, Max (Chris) Winebrenner-Palo; best friend and sister Joan Stark, brother Roger "Butch" (Carol) Messer; and childhood friend of the family, Sonny Dovenmuehler.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Margaret and Gustav Messer;

daughter Joni Lynn Harpel; spouse, Vernon Erickson; siblings DeNola (Ed) Pearre, Barbara (Al) Smith, Evangeline "Pat" (Bob) Williams, Bob (June) Messer, Anna (Bill) Shea, Donna Messer, and Gordon "Swede" Messer; brother-in-law Dean Stark; and soul dog Katie.

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Cemetery Details

Moran - Germania Cemetery

22477 430th St. & 225th Ave.
Staples, MN 56479

Previous Events

Celebration of Life Open House

MAY 17. 10:30 AM (CT)

Bertha Community Center
205 2nd Ave
Bertha, MN 56437