



James Francis McKenna

April 25, 1917 - April 26, 2011

James Francis McKenna, age 94, passed away surrounded by family on Tuesday, April 26, 2011 at Buena Vista Manor in Storm Lake after a successful and fulfilling life. James Francis McKenna was born on a family farm three miles west and one and half miles north of Early, Iowa on April 25, 1917 to Alma (Smith) and John McKenna. Both John and Alma were from farming families and very accustomed to hard work and living off the land. Jim joined John and Alma's growing family which already included older sister, Loretta. Throughout the years, siblings Margery, Melvin, Bernard and Donald would come along. With six children, John and Alma found their family complete. Farm life proved to be a wonderful blessing with many opportunities to learn life's "little" lessons. Those lessons weren't in the school room, but at the side of Grandpa Smith. One in particular was when a boy picked a fight with Jim at the age of 12. After Jim told his Grandpa about the altercation, Grandpa Smith said, "There is good and bad in all of us. However, there is more good than bad in the worst of us." Jim attended country school through fifth grade; completed grades 6-10 at Sacred Heart in Early, Iowa and graduated from Nemaha High School in Nemaha, Iowa at the age of 16. Jim's journey to college graduation was filled with determination and tenacity. Jim stayed home the first year after his high school graduation to help on the family farm. The next year he attended Buena Vista College and then returned home for two more years. In the fall of 1937, Jim found himself at Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa attending school

full-time and working at the ISU Beef Barn part-time—pulling down a hard-earned \$.25 an hour. Even with his rigorous work and school life, Jim served on both the dairy and livestock judging teams and traveled to Waterloo, Iowa; Chicago, Illinois; and Kansas City, Missouri for various competitions. Graduating from Ames in the spring of 1940, Jim was ready to take on the world. His first job took him to Fort Dodge, Iowa where he took over as Webster County 4-H Club Agent. Jim worked as the county agent for two years. It was during this time that Jim met his “bossy babe.” Jim’s cousin, Rose Evelyn Shellenberger introduced Jim to Marye Champlin, one of her fellow nursing students, and they began to date. With Marye finishing up her RN degree and Jim enjoying his 4-H job, what more could there possibly be? Enter “World War II. On March 31, 1942, Jim enlisted in the Navy. He was accepted as an aviation cadet. He was a Navy-trained, Marine pilot. Marye joined the Navy as a registered nurse. Together, they would serve their country. After a series of different training camps, Jim served his country for nearly three years as a pilot and lived in places such as Guam and Guadalcanal. Jim and Marye married the morning of February 4, 1945, at Our Lady of Victory Chapel at Camp Pendleton, California. Jim and Marye moved to Alexandria, Virginia, where Jim finished out his tour of duty. Life was good, they were good, everything was coming up “Roses” literally! Jim and Marye’s next five years took them from managing a diversified livestock farm outside of Elgin, Illinois to opening up a grain elevator in Vincent, Iowa. All the while, adding to their family. Their life really turned around when Jim and Marye got the chance to buy a farm outside of Storm Lake, Iowa. Here, on Geisinger Road, they made their home, put eight children through St. Mary’s Catholic School, teaching them how to be good stewards of the earth. Grandkids by the dozen came along, playing on Grandpa’s farm, riding the ponies, climbing apple trees and turning the farmhouse music room into a playhouse, a dance stage or a place for a slumber party. Popcorn was always a must! In 1980 they built a home on the lake in Storm Lake, but Jim did not officially retire from farming until 2001. Throughout the years he was

an active member for the B.V. County Pork Producers, B.V. County Farm Bureau, ISU Extension Council, and Knights of Columbus and served on the Board of Directors for Buena Vista Regional Medical Center. He was honored in 1958 as the B.V. County Master Pork Producer. Jim enjoyed farming, playing cards, spending time with his family, and sharing remarkable stories and experiences with all. He will be forever treasured as a generous, loyal, determined, brilliant and loving man. Jim was and always will be a true inspiration to all who knew him. Those left to honor Jim's memory are his children: Rosemarye (John) Rathke of Copperas Cove, Texas; Michael McKenna of Blakesburg, Iowa; Kathleen (Bruce) Osterman of Sibley, Iowa; Kevin (Jan) McKenna of Storm Lake, Iowa; Maureen (Brad) Strader of Storm Lake, Iowa; Stephen McKenna of Storm Lake, Iowa; Teresa (Brian) Caslavka of Muscatine, Iowa; and Melissa (Dennis) Fagan of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; 19 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; brother, Donald (Kay) McKenna of Savoy, Illinois; and sister, Margery Parrott of Long Island, New York. Preceding him in death are his loving wife of 59 years, Marye; parents; two brothers; one sister; one granddaughter; and one daughter-in-law.