Jerry Allen

Nelsen, 68

October 31, 1954 –

January 17, 2023

Jerry Allen Nelsen was

born October 31, 1954 in

Sandpoint, Idaho beginning

a new chapter for a family

who loved adventure. Proud

parents Wade Nelsen and

Faye Rasmussen Nelsen

welcomed their first-born

baby into the Heron and

Noxon, Montana

communities where he was

the joy of his grandparents,

aunts, and uncles. The

family expanded to include a

brother, Terry, and two

sisters, Susan and Sandra.

The four made countless

memories that led to favorite

stories listeners never grew

tired of hearing – most often

fondly told over spirits,

laughter, and love. The

family moved frequently

during the childhood years

following the dam

construction trade

throughout the Columbia

River system. They settled

in Orofino, Idaho during the

construction of Dworshak

Dam when Jerry was in

junior high.

It was in Orofino that

Jerry found a place to call

home. It was here that he

made lasting friendships

and met the love of his life

and wife of 48 years in high

school German class, Janis

Newman Nelsen. Jerry was

a gifted multisport athlete

performing particularly well

in basketball and football.

He also enjoyed academics

and his love for learning was

ever present. He was well

recognized for these

achievements including the

honor of being named an

All-American high school

athlete for football in 1973.

He led the Maniacs in

scoring, pass receptions,

and had the highest yards

per carry average. He knew

then that he wanted to

pursue a career in coaching.

He was a proud member of

the OHS graduating class of

1973 and was offered

several collegiate

scholarships in both

basketball and football.

Choosing to keep his talent

close to home, he attended

Lewis Clark State College in

Lewiston, Idaho. He played

LCSC Warrior basketball for

the four years he was there

and earned a Bachelor of

Arts degree in education as

a P.E. major with a minor in

History and Health. Jerry

and Janis were married in

June of 1974.

The couple spent a brief

time living in Santa Fe, New

Mexico before returning to

Orofino to build a life. Jerry

began his 34-year service to

District 171 schools. Over

the years he held many

roles as an educator, coach,

and administrator. He spent

summers working in

wildland fire and continued

his own education earning a

master’s degree in

Educational Administration

from the University of Idaho.

He truly loved his career,

colleagues, and students.

Jerry was a devoted,

involved husband and

father. Janis and Jerry’s

unshakable union brought to

the community three

children – Stephanie, Sean,

and Heather. Jerry spent

their childhood coaching

little league teams and

shuttling kids to various

activities. Hunting, fishing,

camping, boating, stocking

the woodshed, motor sports,

road trips, nightly games of

“pig” and “horse” in front of

the old backyard hoop,

movie nights, and board

games…it was always a

family affair. The Nelsen’s

were like the five

musketeers. These bonds

turned into trusted

relationships, and it was not

uncommon for Jerry’s grown

children and cherished

daughter-in-law, Savannah,

to reach out for his

mentorship, advice, and the

benefit of his quick wit and

wonderful sense of humor.

He adored babies –

especially his grandchildren

whom he viewed as perfect

in every way and who felt

the same for him.

Oftentimes a parent who put

a child in a timeout would

find that said child had been

jailbroken by Grandpa and

given a cookie or two. He

never hesitated to tell the

world how proud he was of

Marrin, Adelin, Conner,

Rhett, and Lennyn. There

was no doubt the grandkids

had a champion in Grandpa

Jerry. He also adored

animals and the family pets

could count on him for a lap

to sleep in and extra

milkbones.

After Jerry’s retirement

from his role as principal of

Orofino High School, he and

Janis relaxed into ranch life

near Cavendish, Idaho.

Jerry valued the peace and

tranquility of rural living,

keeping horses and mini

ponies and enjoying a

slower pace. He was still

active in the school system

during this time serving as a

school board member and

substitute teaching at the

nearby towns of Kendrick

and Deary. When his term

on the board ended, he

started substitute teaching

in District 171 schools as

well. He was still actively

involved in many

organizations: Rotary, Board

of Controls, Idaho

Secondary Principals

Association, and the

Freemasons to name a few

– usually holding leadership

offices. Serving his

community through

education and volunteerism

was truly his calling and his

dedication never wavered.

He led by example, always

valued the connections he

made with others, and

taught us to approach

anyone we meet with an

open heart and open hands.

He was preceded in

death by his loving parents

Wade and Faye Nelsen of

Noxon, Montana; uncle Dale

Rasmussen and aunt

Audrey Rasmussen of

Heron, Montana, uncle Don

Rasmussen and aunt

Barbara Rasmussen of

Chico, California; and

cousin Allen Rasor of

Everett, Washington.

He is survived by his wife

Janis Nelsen; children

Stephanie Nelsen of

Spokane, Washington, Sean

Nelsen (Savannah) of

Genesee, Idaho, and

Heather Nelsen of Spokane,

Washington; grandchildren

Marrin Teel, Adelin Nelsen,

Conner Nelsen, Rhett

Nelsen, and Lennyn Nelsen.

His dear aunts Karen “Kay

Kay” Rasor (Lee) of Trout

Creek, Montana and Peggy

“Pinkie” Nelsen of Noxon,

Montana; his brother Terry

Nelsen (Teresa) of Orofino,

Idaho, his sisters Susan

Stade (Ron) of Richland,



Washington and Sandra

Szambelan (Dave) of

Spokane, Washington. As

well as a great many

beloved cousins, nieces,

nephews, and very good

friends.

A celebration of life will be

held Sunday March 26,

2023 in the Orofino High

School Gymnasium with

reception to follow. Further

details to be announced at a

later date. In lieu of flowers,

donations can be made to

the Orofino Rotary

Foundation and mailed to

PO Box 482, Orofino, Idaho

83544. The funds will be

used for scholarships in

Jerry’s name.