Greta Simmons was a remarkable woman, a woman who dedicated her whole life - and her whole heart - to caring for others. She was a deeply devoted and supportive wife, a loving mother and doting grandmother, and a woman who cared for so many as a nurse. Greta could make anyone feel better, simply by being near her.

Greta’s story began on a hot August day in 1922 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which was such an exciting time in this country. The Roaring 20s were beginning to roar, and Prohibition was the law of the land. The automobile and the airplane were becoming a part of everyday life for many, as Americans celebrated a newfound prosperity. On August 15, 1922, Walter and Josie (Randall) Nidy had their own reason to celebrate, with the birth of a beautiful baby girl, a daughter they named Greta.

She was the oldest of three girls, her little sisters Ethel and Ala would later join Greta on the family farm in Fulton, located on 44th Street. In addition to running their farm, Greta’s parents also worked as school teachers. Being the oldest child, Greta had plenty of responsibilities around the farm, from her chores to helping take care of her little sisters. As a result, the three girls grew up very close to one another, remaining so throughout their lives.

A very bright young girl, Greta learned to play piano as a child, and her education-conscious parents sent her to Athens High School rather than Vicksburg High School, because town of Athens had a better reputation then Vicksburg. Greta was an excellent student, and graduated from Athens in 1938, at just 15 years old. Because she was so young, Greta had to wait a year before she could continue her schooling. When she turned 17, she enrolled in the nursing program at Bronson School through Western Normal (now Western Michigan University), and earned her Registered Nurse degree in 1943.

While working at Bronson Hospital, she met a handsome young man named Charlie Simmons. Charlie was in the hospital after a car accident, and was as taken with his lovely nurse as she was with her patient. The two began dating, and quickly realizing it was true love, they were married that same whirlwind year, on New Year’s Eve, 1943.

Not long after they became newlyweds, Charlie enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and Greta moved to San Mateo,
California near the Navy base there. She took a job as a nurse at Mills Memorial Hospital in San Mateo while Charlie was in the service. After Charlie was discharged, the couple moved back home to Vicksburg, Michigan.

Once back home, Greta continued her nursing career. Over the years she worked for many places including being the company nurse for Ingersoll Steel Division, working for Dr. Rasmussen, at Franklin Memorial Hospital in Vicksburg and Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo. Charlie was an industrious man, and like so many veterans, returned home and started his own business, called CM Simmons Excavating Company, in 1949. Greta helped support her husband by managing the books and running the office, even while working as a nurse. She became quite proficient in her job and eventually also learned how to bid contracts.

Sadly, during this time Greta suffered several miscarriages, and Greta and Charlie’s son David died shortly after birth in 1955. Always a strong woman of great faith, Greta persevered, and never gave up hope. Then, in 1958, she and Charlie were blessed with a healthy, happy baby boy, a son they named Richard. His birth was the greatest day of Greta’s life, filling her with such overwhelming happiness.

Greta left the career she loved behind, to care for the child she loved more than anything. She could also devote more time to their growing excavation business, became the full-time office manager.

Of course, Greta had many other interests outside of work, as well. She was a life member of the Eastern Star, and was a past Worthy Matron of Lotus Lily United #262. She also played the organ for many years at the Eastern Star services, and became well-known for her musical talent. In addition, she was also a member of the Daughter of Nile and Aviatrix. Her involvement in these organizations not only built lasting friendships and memorable times, but they were an extension of the caring and giving person that made Greta so special.

Greta was also a woman of great faith, who attended church regularly her whole life. She was a member of the Vicksburg EUB Church, and later the Methodist Church. She was very active in the church, as well, and enjoyed teaching Sunday School. Most recently, Greta attended Lakeland Reformed Church. Later in life, after her beloved Charlie died, she returned to her health care roots and donated her time as a hospice volunteer.

Always a bright, talented woman, Greta also possessed a strong creative streak, and enjoyed writing poetry, doing needlepoint, reading and playing the organ, giving her plenty of creative outlets.
Of course, Greta’s favorite times were always spent with her family, especially her beloved grandson, Cameron Richard Simmons. Cameron was truly Greta’s pride and joy, and she doted on the boy endlessly. She was a very big part of his life, and loved spending time with him, taking him to the movies or having sleepovers. They had a very close, special grandma-grandson relationship that meant so much to her.

Greta formed many special relationships with those around her, though. She was a special lady, with a quick wit, unique sense of humor and loved to make a joke. She was such a personable, caring woman, who could strike up a conversation with anyone, and genuinely enjoyed talking to people.

Greta will be remembered as a remarkable woman, such a caring, compassionate lady. Greta began her career as a nurse, yet as a wife, mother, grandmother and friend, she never stopped caring for all those around her, for her whole life, with her whole heart. She will be so greatly missed.

Greta Simmons died peacefully at Tendercare of Portage on Thursday, August 24, 2006. Learn more about Greta, view her Life Story film, and visit with her family and friends Sunday from 2-5 and on Monday from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m. at the Life Story Funeral Home, RDMG, Vicksburg, 409 S Main. Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the same location. An Eastern Star Rites will be conducted by Lotus Lily United #262, Order of the Eastern Star Monday evening. Members of Greta’s family include her son Richard and his wife Terri Simmons of Portage, her pride and joy, grandson, Cameron Simmons, a sister Ala Cooley of Climax and 3 step children: Jim, Bob, and Bill Simmons and several nieces, nephews and cousins. She follows in death her husband Charlie, a son David and a sister Ethel Crotser. Please visit Greta’s memory page at www.lifestorynet.com, where you can read her life story, archive a favorite memory or photo, or sign the guestbook. Memorials may be made to Hospice Care of SW MI or to any of the Shriners Hospitals.