Jimmy Hoeker was a wonderful man, and truly a horse of a different color. He was a unique man, so strong yet supportive, so tough yet tender. Jimmy was a beloved husband, son, brother, father and friend, a master machinist, and an expert farrier, too, fitting just the right shoes to his horses. Jimmy’s own shoes will be impossible to fill.

Jimmy’s story began on a cool fall day in 1969, as the leaves began to turn in Muskegon, Michigan. Those were such turbulent times in this country, during the peak of the Vietnam War, when protests rang out across the country. On October 7, 1969, James and Joyce (VanGennep) Hoeker found a reason to celebrate, with the birth of a baby boy, a son they named James Joseph.

Jimmy joined his brother Phill and sisters Jeanne and Jodi in the family’s home in Muskegon, where his dad worked for Sealed Power, while his mom cared for the kids and the home. They were a proud Dutch family, and Jimmy grew into a proud Dutch man, who enjoyed being “frugal” all of his life.

They were also a close-knit clan, and Jimmy grew up very close to his Grandpa Ollie and Grandma Sadie. Ollie helped instill a love for hunting and fishing in his grandson, two of Jimmy’s lifelong loves.

Jimmy was always a strong boy, and was a star for his Bantam football team, which his dad coached. When Jimmy played, it was the best team his dad ever had. Jimmy also played baseball (and later softball as an adult), and played hockey on the rinks his dad would make him in the winter.

Jimmy was a very bright young man, unusually intelligent, and was even placed in the gifted and talented program in school. He loved to learn how things worked, and figuring them out from an early age.

Naturally, Jimmy was always quite the handyman, much to his parents’ chagrin. When he was only three or four, he found some paint in the garbage can and painted the neighbor’s new yellow Camaro! When he was just a bit older, he was playing in an unfinished house, and he stained all the walls with brown stain. One Christmas he got a tool kit with real tools, and he promptly sawed one of the basement steps in half! That was Jimmy, though, once a rascal, always a rascal.

Jimmy eventually attended Muskegon Reeths-Puffer High School, where he lettered in football and was a very popular student. He was elected to the
Homecoming Court his senior year, and named “Class Cutup” before graduating in 1988.

Jimmy also had a great love for horses, and after he watched family friend Terry Weaver at work as a farrier, Jimmy knew that’s what he wanted to do, too. So Jimmy attended farrier school in Oklahoma, learning the skill of shoeing horses. He was a natural, and prided himself on being able to correct the gait of almost any horse.

Jimmy was also a gifted machinist, a big, strong man who loved working with his hands and muscles. His machinist talents were very much in demand, as well.

He eventually moved to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where he put both his skills to good use. He also met the love of his life there in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains.

One night he was out with some friends and was introduced to a beautiful young woman named Shelly Chilcote. Shelly was a true cowgirl, whose boots caught Jimmy’s eye. He was especially impressed they actually had horse manure on them! She couldn't believe she found a man who admired her lifestyle! They became fast friends, and before they knew it, they were getting married. The happy couple tied the knot in 1999 in Gatlinburg, with a huge party afterward for family and friends on their farm.

Eventually, the newlyweds moved north to Muskegon, together with Jimmy’s new stepdaughters, Miranda and Megan. They bought a beautiful farm on Hyde Park Road in Muskegon, which was such a special place for all of them.

Jimmy just adored all three of “his girls,” and doted on his new daughters. He was very active in their 4-H Club, coached Megan’s softball team, and even sponsored the Reeths-Puffer Equestrian team, serving as the team’s farrier, too. Horses were a passion for the whole family, as the girls helped Jimmy in the barn, and they also loved going to the rodeo and showing their horses at the fair every year, too.

Jimmy loved the simple moments with his girls best of all, from hopping in the van and heading off to parts unknown with Shelly, or just watching Scooby-Doo with the girls on Saturday mornings (while wearing his Scooby-Doo boxers!). And nobody made a better Sunday breakfast for his family than Jimmy did.

Christmas mornings were especially wonderful, mostly because Jimmy was as much of a kid as his girls, and he delighted in seeing them so happy.

Jimmy loved every kid he met, being just a big kid himself, and his nieces and nephews loved him, too. Everyone loved Jimmy, though, and he had so many good, lifelong friends. Just a few of his favorite buddies were
Mike Unger, Mark Walters, Mark Schneider, Corn-Fed Nate, Darrell Branum, Terry Weaver, Mark and Jeff Faulkner, Jerry Cox, David Baker, Scott Makowski, Tracy Wozny, Troy Chalco, Bob and Ray Bergin, Kyle Firsky, and Troy Fox. He loved everyone, and everyone loved him.

Jimmy loved “man’s best friend,” as well, with his trio of canine companions, Daisy, Shorty and Jack, who went everywhere with him. Jack wasn’t just a dog to Jimmy, he was his boy, a little person.

Jimmy had many other interests, including playing the guitar, with his own eclectic tastes. Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, AC/DC and Led Zeppelin were just a few of his favorites.

He loved the outdoors, from hunting and fishing, to canoeing with friends and family. He was also an avid gardener, just like his granddad, and loved working outside around the farm. Jimmy was enormously proud of that farm, and loved showing it off to people.

Sadly, Jimmy died very unexpectedly at his beloved farm on Wednesday, February 20, 2008, at the age of 38.

Jimmy was such a wonderful man, so strong and supportive, so tough yet tender. He was a master machinist, and an expert farrier, too. Jimmy was a beloved husband, son, brother, father and friend, and a man taken from us too soon. More than anything, Jimmy’s life was a gift to us, a gift we will cherish and remember forever. He will be so greatly missed.

Jimmy is survived by his wife, Michelle; parents, James & Joyce Hoeker; grandmother, Sadie VanGennep; mother-in-law, Nancy Postema; 1 brother, Phillip (Stacy) Hoeker; 2 sisters, Jeanne (Geoffrey) LaHaie & Jodi (Daniel Seabolt) Mitchell; 2 stepdaughters, Miranda Petrie & Megan Zuber; several nieces & nephews.

Services are scheduled for Tuesday, February 26, 2008, 1:00 PM at the Clock Chapel with Rev. Andrew Ford officiating. Interment at Restlawn Cemetery.

Visitation is Monday, 2-4 & 6-8 PM & Tuesday, 1 hour prior to the service at Clock Life Story Funeral Home. In lieu of flowers please consider donations to the family. Please visit www.lifestorynet.com to share a memory or photo of Jimmy, or to sign the online guest book.