Stephen D. Noles was a man who could handle whatever he was offered, and do it well. He had a deep love for his family, was a dedicated worker, and a motorcycle enthusiast.

Stephen had a full life and a big heart, but he also told you what was what. Stephen was truly a remarkable man.

In 1946 the first meeting of the United Nations was taking place, the possibility for communication between earth and outer space was established and the Cold War was just beginning, but in a town called Mattoon, Illinois there was a couple of people who had more important news of their own. Ethel D. (O’Dell) and Kenneth L. Noles welcomed the birth of a beautiful baby boy, on May 7th, and compared to the rest of the world’s happenings, this topped the charts.

Stephen’s father was a truck and greyhound bus driver and his mother stayed home to take care of the children and the rest of the household. This was a busy job as Stephen was the fifth child of eight! He was a wonderful little brother, if sometimes up to a little more mischief than the little angel he might have seemed to be. He was always in some kind of boyhood trouble, and never without that impish little glint in his eye!

Stephen and his brothers, Charles and Ken, were especially close as young children being barely a year apart in age, Stephen being the youngest. The three were inseparable. They were always doing one mischievous thing or another. They ended up being quite lucky, as some siblings drift apart with age, but these three stayed tightly knit their entire lives. Later their brother David joined the close group, even though he was much younger and they remained very close to the end. When Stephen was only six years old, his parents divorced, and four years later his mother remarried, David was born, and the whole family packed up and moved to Van Buren County, Michigan. His youngest sister, Melanie was born there making a total of eight children.

As a teenager, Stephen loved motorcycles and muscle cars. He even owned a Corvette! This was a love that would follow him for the rest of his life.

While Stephen was in high school he held a part-time job as a farm laborer and also worked in a saw mill. After he graduated from Bangor High School he worked at a camper trailer factory in Elkhart, IN. By this time, Stephen was married and had a daughter named Tammy. He served his country in the Marine Corp from January of 1966 to January of 1968, most of the time aboard a ship in the Mediterranean.
Afterward, he got a job at General Motors as a die setter and kept his position there until his retirement in 1999. While he was working, he attended Kalamazoo Valley Community College part-time for two years.

When Stephen was 24 years old his mother and stepfather divorced. He immediately stepped up to the job of caring for his two younger siblings, David and Melanie. He never questioned that his family needed him and he just gave all he had to making sure those children were well cared for. He became a father figure in their lives for the next 11 years. He even bought his sister a car during that time.

It was at work that he met Mary Pence. She was working in the cafeteria and each day they would talk as Stephen went through the line. It wasn’t long before his blue eyes, big grin, and honest voice won her over and the two started dating. At first he was a Harley-looking dude: his wardrobe mainly consisted of jeans and black t-shirts, and he was pretty scruffy most of the time- but when he started dating Mary, he cleaned right up! After four years of a loving relationship the two tied the knot at McKanley Chapel on August 5, 1989.

The two settled in, and on December 5, 1991 had a son they named Stephen Levi. This was one of the greatest moments in Stephen’s life. He became “Mr. Mom,” caring for Stevie in the late hours, because he worked second shift. He was an expert at calming their young child, and it allowed for Mary to get some much-needed rest.

As Stevie grew, his dad watched him play all kinds of sports including, soccer, baseball, basketball, football, and track! They also loved to watch sports on television in their “Man Den.” What a perfect place for the father and son to hang out!

Aside from working, (his latest job as a part-time custodian at the upper elementary in Schoolcraft) and spending time with his family, Stephen also loved to fish and go hunting for geese, deer, and pheasant. He used both a bow and a rifle, and for a while he raised Brittany Spaniels for hunting; his most beloved dog was “Liz.” Although he raised dogs for hunting, he also had Yorkies and cats, to appease that soft heart of his.

When he was working at GM he enjoyed meeting friends and Mary at the Continental Bowling Alley. He also enjoyed playing horseshoes and watching NASCAR, even going to
Joliet, Illinois to the track. He was an avid motorcyclist until he had a serious accident in 1990. And of course, he always read the newspaper.

After a well fought battle against lung and brain cancer, on May 17, 2008 while at home with his loving family, Stephen went to be with his Lord.

Stephen was a man with a generous heart, who always wanted the best for the people he loved. He always had a story to tell, and loved to talk all the time! He was a very opinionated man, but was so kind and compassionate to others, that he gave himself more than anything else. Stephen was a wonderful and amazing man, who will be greatly missed.

He was preceded in death by his father, Kenneth Noles. Members of his family include his wife, Mary; son, Stephen Levi; daughter, Tammy (Derek) Pence; grandchildren, Whitney and RJ; his mother, Ethel Mince; his father and mother-in-law, Charles and Anna Pence; brothers and sisters: Linda Hull, Edna Wade, Charles (Hilde) Noles, Ken (Ann) Noles, Chris (Wally) Stricklin, David (Lisa) Mince, Melanie (Mark) Lillie, many nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews.

To learn more about Stephen's life, friends may visit with his family Monday, May 19th from 4-7 p.m. at the Life Story Funeral Home-Betzler, 6080 Stadium Drive, Kalamazoo. Funeral services will be held Tuesday, May 20th at 1:30 p.m. in the same location, with his Brother-in-law, Pastor Mark Lillie, officiating. Private interment at Ft. Custer National Cemetery will precede the service.

Please visit Stephen’s personal memory page at www.lifestorynet.com where you may archive a memory, sign the guest book, or make a memorial contribution to the West Michigan Cancer