



Dan Nickels
1946-2022

The fire grew cold in Dan Nickels forge only one day before his life's fire departed. He had been watching over a friend complete his project before the coals were racked out for the last time at Black Rock Forge. He shared space and knowledge to the end.

Daniel Arthur Nickels died December 24, 2022, nine days before the birthday he shared with his twin brother. He was born January 2, 1946 in Farragut, Idaho where his father's post-World War II duty station was housed. During the war, his father had served in TGuam as a military doctor. Dan passed peacefully at his home after an extended illness which he bore with much fortitude and courage.

He attended Central Grade and East Bay Grade Schools, graduating from Traverse City High School in 1964. Dan was an Eagle Scout and also received his Pro Deo et Patria Award also. He attended Michigan State University where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Forestry. While at MSU he enrolled in ROTC, joining the Army after graduation. He served as Captain in Vietnam as a Military Intelligence officer where he met his first wife and her family. He married Dilinh Doan. Dan was extremely supportive and instrumental in the immigration of the Doan family and contributed to their successful assimilation in the United States. To this day, they remember him fondly. He later married Ruth Ann Bailey and adopted her three children, Brandy, Courtney and Tyler. Later in life he shared a close relationship for many years with Sue Noakes.

His true calling was that of an artisan blacksmith. Dan's trade was his lifeblood. He had the gift of being able to visualize a

gate, a railing, a tool, a sculpture, or a flower and hammer it out of a square rod of iron. He never stopped learning. Dan was regarded as a master worldwide. His passion for creating iron-art was matched only by his hunger to teach and he shared his fire with everyone from ages 8 to eighty. His students mourn the loss of their mentor and teacher. Dan's lifelong dream was to leave his working studio as a classroom for blacksmiths.

Dan's heart was as soft as his art was hard. He was generous with his possessions and a prolific writer. He chose phrasing and sentence structure straight from the 1800's that reflected his old soul. He had a gift for poetry and prose and humor. His poems expressed his deepest feelings and heartache. He shared these with his brother and his brothers-in-arms whom he supported and who supported him with a fierce love. His life experiences motivated his desire to study the military history of all the wars fought by the USA.

Blacksmiths mark their work with a touch mark or "tic mark" and Dan left his tic mark all around the world -- England, Italy, France, Belgium and many states in the Union. He was one of 500 blacksmiths selected from blacksmiths worldwide to forge a commemorative panel honoring those who died at Ypres, Belgium during WWI. His work can be seen all around Traverse City in doorways, homes and signage. Look for an "N" tic mark.

During his travels he made lifelong friends. Some were residents of the places he visited. Another was a mentee blacksmith, Derrick Bliss whom he took with him on his journeys to Ypres, Belgium, England and Italy. Derrick was his blacksmith son.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Dr. Mervyn Nickels, Loretta Nickels and two sisters, Margot Nickels and Nancy N Nickels. He leaves a twin brother, Michael Nickels and two sisters, Nedra Williams (Fitch Roberts Williams) and sister, Rita Selden, three children, nine nieces and nephews, and three grandnieces and a grandnephew. Among his grandchildren is one aspiring blacksmith granddaughter.

Graveside service with military honors will be held at Oakwood Cemetery at 11:00 on May 18th, 2023. Immediately following will be a Celebration of Life at Mike's shop, 5774 Supply Road, Traverse City. May 18th is a Thursday, the traditional day that Dan's blacksmith forge was open to anyone wishing to learn the secrets of iron. In lieu of flowers, memorial funds can be donated to "The Daniel Nickels Memorial Acct." at 5/3 Bank, US 31 South, Traverse City. If mailing a check for his memorial fund, it can be sent directly to 5/3 Bank, 102 West Front Street, Traverse City, Michigan 49684 attn. Heather with "The Daniel Nickels Memorial Acct." on the pay to line. This will directly fund a blacksmith scholarship at the John C. Campbell Folk School, where Dan got his start.

The family is being cared for by Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home (www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com) This obituary and additional tributes may be read there.