

reading the newspaper from cover to cover while FOX News was on. He loved talking politics and in a calm and controlled manner, you always knew which side he stood on. He had a deep passion for cars and was a true expert when it came to all things automotive. Whether it was identifying the make and model of any vehicle or explaining the mechanics inside and out, he had an unrivaled knowledge and love for cars.

What he loved most was the relationships he built with his family and friends. Whether it be in person or on the phone, he highly regarded time spent with each one and was always available to offer his love and support with such humility and wisdom. To him, the bonds he shared with those closest to him were the greatest treasures of his life, and he leaves behind a legacy of love, loyalty, and forever cherished memories.

Thankful for having shared his life are his daughters, Julie (Harlan) Nielsen, Sioux Falls, SD; Mary (Chuck) Runge, Hartford, SD; and Marie (Bret) Merkle, Harrisburg, SD; ten grandchildren, Drew Nielsen, Kaylee Runge, Liz (Michael) Minor, Nick (Rylee) Runge, Lexi Runge, Angela Merkle, Sarah (Brandon) Miller, Ellie (Alex) Davies, Hannah (Shaeden) Scheidt, and Josh Merkle; 11 great-grandchildren, Maverick, Eleanor, and Otto Minor, Reese Runge, Graham, Nolan, and Lennon Miller; Everly, Oaklee, Ivy, and Atlas Davies; sisters-in-law, Marie Pletka and Linda Pletka; brother-in-law, Art Winckler; and many beloved nieces, nephews, cousins, and their families.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Agnes; his parents, John Sr. and Frances; and his brothers, John Pletka, Jr., Bob Pletka, and Joe Pletka.



“You have family, and you have friends. What more do you need?”
~BJ Pletka

In Loving Memory



Bernard James Pletka

August 2, 1937 – February 3, 2025

In Loving Memory
Bernard James Pletka
1937 - 2025

PRAYER SERVICE

7:00 p.m.
Friday, February 7, 2025
St. Leo Catholic Church
Tyndall, South Dakota

FUNERAL MASS

12:00 p.m.
Saturday, February 8, 2025
St. Leo Catholic Church
Tyndall, South Dakota

CELEBRANT

Fr. Darin Schmidt
Fr. Joe Forcelle ~ concelebrant

MUSIC

Kathy Koenig – organist
Amazing Grace
Prayer of Saint Francis
Be Not Afraid
You Are Near
How Great Thou Art

PALLBEARERS

Drew Nielsen, Nick Runge, Josh Merkle,
Michael Minor, Brandon Miller,
Alex Davies & Shaeden Scheidt

INTERMENT

St. Leo Catholic Cemetery
(at a later date)

Bernard James “BJ/Gus” Pletka was born on Monday, August 2, 1937, in Mitchell, SD, to John Joseph Pletka, Sr. and Frances Elizabeth (Plumb) Pletka. He passed away peacefully surrounded by his loving family on Monday, February 3, 2025, six months and one day after his 87th birthday.

Bernard James Pletka grew up in Tyndall, SD, attended Tyndall Public School and graduated from Tyndall High School in 1956. He always dreamt of going west and began to fulfill that dream when he traveled to Pierre, SD, where he got a job working on the Oahe Dam. He saved enough money to head further west and set out for California. He worked in a glass factory in Oakland and a furniture factory in Pasadena. With his earnings, he bought his first Harley Davidson motorcycle and later traded it for a black 1948 Lincoln convertible.

When he returned from California, he continued his education at Southern State Teacher’s College where he took one year of pre-engineering, one year of auto body, and three semesters of automotive training. In October, 1960, he was drafted into the Army and completed his basic training at Ft. Ord, California. After basic training, he successfully completed his personnel training at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, where he received the title of Personnel Administration Specialist. He was assigned to the 285th Transportation Co. at Fort Eustis, Virginia. He spent three months at the Air Force Base in Thule, Greenland. In 1962, he boarded a ship and headed for Christmas Island in the South Pacific and was there for a couple months. He was awarded the Carbine Sharpshooter award and the Good Conduct Medal. He was honorably discharged from the Army on October 12, 1962.

On November 6, 1964, he married Agnes Mae Winckler in an intimate evening ceremony at St. Leo’s Catholic Church in Tyndall. Together they made their home in Tyndall where they poured their hearts into raising their three daughters, Julie, Mary, and Marie.

In 1970, he purchased a piece of land on the southwest edge of Tyndall and built BJ’s Automotive, one of his most favorite places on earth. Whether fixing a simple issue or tackling a major overhaul, he always approached his work with patience, honesty, and a genuine love for what he did. His shop wasn’t just a place of work – it was where he built lasting relationships, shared stories, and helped others.

He lived a very big life in a small way, authentically and with purpose, and made a profound impact in the lives of those around him. He loved driving around Tyndall and talking about days gone by. He especially loved sharing stories from his time in the Army and often reminisced with great detail about the people he met, the places he went, and the experiences he had. As a lifelong learner, you would often find him sitting at the kitchen table