



Merle Duane Shoemaker

October 2, 1944 - August 29, 2026

Peoria, Illinois

Merle Duane Shoemaker died in Peoria on August 29, 2026. He was eighty-one. Born there on October 2, 1944, he grew up knowing the tractor plant as a clock that did not sleep, and he learned a torque spec before he learned a highway. A fastener, he said, is a kind of promise: it holds, or the whole story comes apart in a field.

He spent twenty-six years on an assembly line that fed machines the rest of the country used without thinking. He started as a helper. He ended as the man who could tell, from the sound of a gun, whether a shift would hold. He kept extra gloves for the woman whose morning had already been too long. He would not let a supervisor invent a portion that made the tally a liar. On the mornings a line sat he still opened his locker.

He married Anita Shoemaker in 1966. They raised a daughter and a son in a bungalow with a maple that dropped more work than shade. After Anita died in 2010 he kept her saucer on the drainboard for a season, then gave it to a granddaughter who liked cereal at odd hours.

Neighbors remember a man who froze extra cornbread in coffee cans and left them on porches after a funeral. He disliked a speech, loved a clean station, and could tell you which year the plant switched from one fastener to the next. He died in Peoria, in a city that had always been enough. The line still opens somewhere. Someone else will count the gloves.

Services

A gathering at his church hall in Peoria. Friends may bring a covered dish. A gift to a plant-workers' hardship fund is welcome.

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