

Earl W. "Fagin" Brown

Earl William Brown died peacefully at his home, with family at his side, on Jan. 2, 2009. Earl was born in Helena on March 11, 1924 to Edward C. Brown and Leslie L. (Hankins) Brown. The youngest of four children, he lived with his family in an apartment above Brown Brothers Lumber Company, a business owned and operated by his father and uncles.

After graduating from high school, "Fagin" (as his buddies dubbed him) enrolled at Carroll College. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, he joined the Navy, serving in the 7th fleet as a radio operator in the Philippines until the Japanese surrender.

When Earl returned from the war, he learned that his father had died. He headed west, and attended the University of Portland for one year, but returned to finish his degree at Carroll. He then earned his advanced degree in mathematics from Notre Dame, and came home once again to work for the Montana Hardware Association.

While back in Helena, Earl met a small town Minnesota girl with bright blue eyes; and on May 16, 1952 he and El'n-Marie Bergquist began their life together. They soon moved to Seattle where Fagin worked as a salesman for National Cash Register, and where their three sons – Paul, David and Peter – were all born.

Fagin was a warm, genuine soul who truly enjoyed people, and he had a gift for putting others at ease. It was this quality, and his quiet intelligence, that made him such a successful salesman and manager. Earl was promoted often, and with each promotion came a move to another market. Earl and El'n-Marie raised their three sons in Seattle, Dayton, Minneapolis, Denver, and Escanaba (MI).

After his retirement from NCR, Fagin realized his long-held dream of moving back to Montana and opening a hardware store. They decided on Bozeman, and built the building at 2630 West Main. Earl and son, Paul, operated Brown Brothers True Value Hardware Store from 1977 - 84.

When that venture ended, Fagin returned to sales, working for Sweda Cash Register in SLC and finally as National Sales Manager for Symbol Technologies on Long Island, NY. He and El'n-Marie moved to Portland, OR in 1991 to be closer to David's and Peter's families, and in the spring of 1999, returned to Montana, the home they loved best.

Fagin was a true Montana native. As a young man, he spent many hours hunting ducks, pheasants and grouse with his trusted Golden Retriever, Louie. It has long been Fagin's fond hope that when the time came for him to leave this earth he loved so well, Louie would be there to greet him at the gate. "Then," he said, "I'll know I'm in heaven."

He will be deeply missed by his family and many dear friends. He was a wise man and a gentle man; devoted to his wife, proud of his sons, smitten with his daughters-in-law; and blessed with five wonderful grandchildren. We will forever hold in our hearts the twinkle in his Irish eyes.

Earl was preceded in death by his parents; his brothers Ernest and Edward, Jr; and his sister, Elizabeth. He is survived by his wife of 56 years, El'n-Marie; sons, Paul of Long Island, NY, David (Nancy) of Portland, OR and Peter (Kerri) of Bozeman; grandsons, Kevin of Eugene, OR, Ethan and William of Bozeman; granddaughters, Claire of Nashville, TN and Laura-Marie of Bozeman.

A memorial service celebrating Fagin's life will be held at Hope Lutheran Church on Wednesday, January 7th at 3:00 p.m. The family suggests that gifts in his memory be made to Warriors & Quiet Waters, or to the charity of their choice.