



## Louis G. Mills

October 14, 1944 - July 7, 2018

Louis George Mills, Born in Trenton, Michigan October 14, 1944. Died, July 7, 2018.

Louis first became interested in Metalwork at about 7 years old when he saw some Japanese Tsubas in a junk store his parents were visiting.

Fast forward to the 1960s when he was in Air Force and became fascinated by a Japanese sword he saw in an antique shop. After he got out he bought a house and became interested in working on cars, a passion which lasted all his life. His latest two include restoring a 1955 F-600 truck and a 1927 Chevy sedan. Interest in automobiles led to interest in welding, which led to metal working, and then making sculptures from junk. His wife Marge told a story of going to his house for the first time and seeing an engine in the kitchen sink! Louis said, "Not true, that was a transmission!"

In the 70's he became interested in guns and knives and heard about Damascus steel and was fascinated. He decided to learn to make Japanese swords because they were said to be the very best in the world. He loved a real challenge. Louis realized that he knew nothing about blacksmithing, not even how to make a fire. Louis took classes at Greenfield village at the Henry Ford Museum near Detroit. He set up his own forge in 1974 and worked in isolation making Damascus steel, having never seen any in person.

In 1978 he saw that Daryl Meier was teaching a class so off he went to Carbondale, Illinois for a great experience and a lifelong friendship. He began to make Japanese style blades and learned that almost everything that was written on the subject at that point was wrong. Nonetheless, he self taught himself enough Japanese to gain information from books and magazines. His wife Marge helped him with the clay for heat treating because she was a potter.

In 1980 he went to the ABANA conference in California where Yoshindo Yoshihara was demonstrating. Yoshindo later wrote a book on the Art of the Japanese Sword and became a living national treasure in Japan. Louis went on to work with Yoshihara three

more times and Yoshindo answered any question that he could think of to ask. That was his apprenticeship. Louis teamed up with metalsmith and jeweler Jim Kelso who made many handle and sheathes for Louis's blades.

In 1984 he received a prestigious grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts and made a series of blades.

Louis smelted his own steel from pure iron powder and charcoal, which he also made himself. He proceeded to forge Traditional Japanese blades for the next 30 years. He also made the Habakis and storage scabards. He did his own finishing and polishing with traditional water stones, all by hand. He was a great teacher as well as life long self taught student. He made rare and beautiful work.

At the same time, Louis and Marge, his wife of 33 years, bought raw land in 1987 and built a farm out of nothing. Louis cleared the land and built the timber frame barn with stone foundation almost singlehanded. He built the out buildings, and much of the house. They raised sheep and Louis built another building that was the woolen mill where Marge cleaned the wool, dyed it, and spun it into yarn. They grew and baled their own hay. They developed an amazing and abundant organic vegetable garden. He had an incredible green thumb.

Louis Mills was a very humble and kind hearted soul. He was generous to a fault with his friends and strangers alike. He was soft spoken and readily shared with any information he had gained from hard work and experience. He was a tremendous talent in Japanese bladesmithing, organic gardening, and as a loving and kind life partner for Marge.

He is greatly missed and there is a void that will never be filled. Thank you Louis, thank you for everything. Rest in Peace.

At this time a service will not be held per his and his family's wishes.

# Comments

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“ Louis it was an honor to have known you. David Renner



David Renner - July 20, 2018 at 08:12 PM

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“ My dear Louie has gone away forever, but his memories linger on. I keep hearing more and more stories of things I never knew about him and it is so comforting to me that friends are sharing with me. He was kind, gentle and generous. He even apologized to mosquitoes before swatting them. He had a cat that would occasionally curl around his shoulders while he was forging. Our animals loved him and came running when he entered the pasture. We all miss him dearly and I will go on a new adventure in life without him to hold my hand. Please keep sharing stories with me.

Marge

Marge Mills - July 15, 2018 at 09:09 PM

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“ Dear Louie,  
You were mom's rock. Thank you for loving her truly, madly, deeply. Your passion for the land, animals, growing your own food and making friends of a feather were unmatched. Some of the millions of little things I remember most; forging beautiful Japanese blades, restoring old cars, building barns, building two houses, mowing fields of hay year after year, mowing the grass, clearing the land, making a beautiful farmstead, raising sheep and chickens, walking to the house with a wire basket of warm fresh-laid eggs, being chased by the rooster, driving mom to her art lessons, festivals and social groups, exercising with Tori, eating meals with mom, watching mom's favorite British sitcoms with her, telling us to visit more frequently, making a blacksmiths documentary and YouTube videos, driving mom to faraway places hours away, so she could learn new arts, and so much more than will fit here. There could be a book about your life.

Love,  
Gina



Gina Betti - July 13, 2018 at 08:51 PM

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“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Jim Kelso - July 09, 2018 at 04:42 PM

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“ 3 files added to the tribute wall



Scott Lankton - July 09, 2018 at 07:34 AM

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“ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSfurMT0TY0> A short video by Tony Mann of Louis forging.

Scott Lankton - July 09, 2018 at 06:43 AM