

Eugene Hobbs Obituary

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Eugene "Gene" Hobbs Jr.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2017, Gene passed away peacefully at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center, after a valiant and hard-fought battle with cancer. His final days were spent with his loving family gathered at his bedside to commemorate the Christmas holiday. Gene was 76.

Gene Hobbs Jr. was born in Burley, Idaho, on Jan. 16, 1941. He was the second of three sons born to Ruby Garrett Hobbs and Eugene W. Hobbs Sr.

Gene grew up in Boise and was fond of telling people he was a member of the Borah High Class of 1959, the first class to ever graduate from the brand new (at the time) high school. He attended Boise State Junior College before receiving his bachelor's degree from Idaho State University in 1964. Gene later earned his master's degree from the University of Idaho.

From an early age, Gene learned the value of hard work and determination. He worked as a pin-setter for a bowling alley as a child in Boise. By age 12, he and his younger brother, Ben, spent their summers in nearby New Plymouth, Idaho, working on a small acreage unsupervised except on the weekends, when their parents would come over to help out.

While working summers for the U.S. Forest Service during college, Gene discovered his true calling and in 1961 began what would become an adventurous and highly regarded career as a smokejumper in Idaho and Alaska. The camaraderie he shared with his fellow smokejumpers forged a bond and lifelong friendships, which Gene treasured. He made a total of 134 jumps and was very proud of having earned his 100-jump pin.

Gene's career as a smokejumper came to an abrupt and violent end in 1973 when a parachute malfunction resulted in him being pulled forcefully from a plane while in flight to a fire. He hit the ground below with only a damaged chute to slow his decent. As his horrified crew circled his motionless body lying face down on the ground they began to radio in the coordinates for a body-recovery team, when against all odds they saw Gene force himself over onto his back. When the rescue team was finally able to reach his remote location, they found a barely conscious Gene, who had suffered multiple traumatic injuries, including a broken neck.

It was the beginning of a long, arduous road to recovery, with months of hospitalization and rehabilitation. The accident that ended his career as a jumper clearly defined who Gene was as a person and the way he always faced down whatever circumstances were thrown at him on his own terms. He never backed down and he never gave up. Gene dealt with it and he moved on.

In the spring of 1964, Gene joined the U.S. Army Reserves, attending personnel specialist school at Fort Ord, Calif. In 1968, he was called to active duty at Fort Knox, Ky., to serve as a personnel specialist for soldiers returning from Vietnam. True to his nature, Gene excelled at this role, earning an Army Commendation Medal for "the loyalty, initiative and will to succeed that he demonstrated at all times" while on active duty.

In 1966, Gene began teaching high school in Orofino, thus leaving his summers free to pursue the smokejumping work that he loved. Gene, as it turned out, had a real knack for teaching and spent the next 31 years working for the Orofino school system as a teacher, coach and junior high school principal. He was instrumental in getting the wrestling program started at OHS, and his years as a wrestling coach were some of his favorite times teaching.

Gene and Lois Diane Gangewer were married Sept. 1, 1968, in Beersheba Springs, Tenn., on his grandmother's 91st birthday. Together they had two sons, Travis Eugene Hobbs, who died as an infant, and Trevor Robert Hobbs, now living in Clarkston.

An avid outdoorsman, Gene often could be found on the banks of the Clearwater River or Dworshak Reservoir, trying to net whatever fish was in season. He also enjoyed countless hours hunting with his brothers-in-law, friends and nephews on the Gangewer family farm. The Buck's Place was somewhere that was especially dear to his heart.

Gene was preceded in death by his parents, Eugene and Ruby Hobbs, an older brother who did not survive infancy and first-born son Travis Hobbs.

Gene is survived by his wife of 49 years, Lois Hobbs of Lewiston; son Trevor Hobbs of Clarkston; brother Ben (Jeanie) Hobbs of Roseburg, Ore.; as well as numerous nieces and nephews, who will be forever grateful for the memories they made with him.

There will be a celebration of life for Gene starting at 2 p.m. Saturday in the Seaport Room of the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston. The family asks that any donations in Gene's honor be made to his favorite charities: Jackson's Pay It Forward Foundation, 3527 Eighth St. C., Lewiston, ID 83501; or the National Smokejumpers Association, 2335 300th St., Ventura, IA 50482.