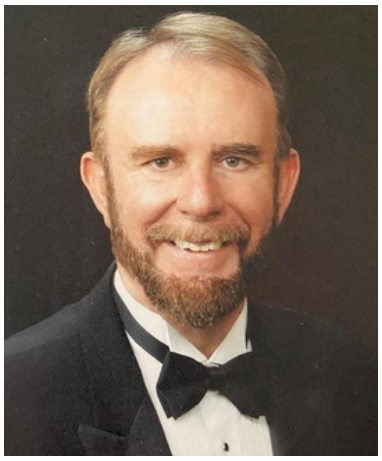

Gary Allen Fife

February 16, 1947 ~ May 2, 2022

Gary Allen Fife was a quiet hero. He did not like to be the center of attention. He lived a life of challenge and adversity, of adventure and the pursuit of knowledge, hard work, and kindness, devoting his life to his family and service of others…and he was taken too soon. But he left behind a lifetime of memories that we can celebrate! And although his accomplishments were many, it is the impact he had on every member of our family, and the memories and stories, that give the truest picture of the man we called father, husband, brother, grandfather, and father-in-law.

Gary loved a good story. It is through these stories that we want to share his life history.

When his children were asked how they thought their dad would want to be remembered, his daughter Amber said: “Dad would love to be remembered for his family. I think he was the best dad in the universe! He would like to be remembered as a climber who could climb difficult-rated climbs at 75 years old (and older! …but he can’t prove that now) and loved to win 10K races. He was dorky like me and we loved to wear the same dorky shirt from our races.”

His daughter Sabrina commented on Gary’s love of projects and willingness to help, remembering “when Gary and his brother Ron built the addition onto the Sandy house, I remember helping them a little but mostly admiring them doing all the work themselves. Gary enjoyed that project and it made such a change to the house. He was always working on some project and took great pleasure making things with his hands.”

Granddaughter Audra Fife describes her grandfather as “goofy, yet serious…helpful, and supportive.”

His wife, Yvonne, recalls: “he loved to teach his grandchildren math, science, and art…whenever they came over to visit or remain for overnights, he would get so excited to have ‘projects,’ mostly art projects, waiting for them.”

Evan Fife, Gary’s grandson says: “Grandpa taught me hard work – helping him build a grill house, gardening, pulling weeds, painting trees, woodworking. He also got me into coin collecting – he gave me over 300 coins!”

His life was a rich blessing. This quiet, quirky, gentle man, a little shy, and so incredibly smart, who cared so much for his family, leaves an empty space in our lives that is almost more than we can comprehend.

Gary Allen Fife, born February 16, 1947, to Robert and Frieda Fife in Salt Lake City, passed away on May 2, 2022, after many weeks of intensive hospital care and multiple surgeries, following the tragic accident that ultimately took his life. Gary was an athlete and loved to run – he ran or walked between 4 and 7 miles every day, often before sunrise. It was on February 16, his birthday, that he left early for his daily walk, and was struck in the crosswalk by a utility service truck.

In the shock and grief that followed, Gary’s family rallied round him, all of us helping him and each other to fight this last difficult battle. When it finally became too much, his body could no longer overcome the pain and challenges, he slipped peacefully away to join his beloved mother Frieda and father Robert, his granddaughter Rachel and

grandson Christopher, and so many of those he loves. We wish we could have gone with him!

Gary married his sweetheart and love of his life, Yvonne, in the Logan LDS Temple and celebrated 48 years of marriage together. As is evident from the many remembrances from his family and friends, Gary was always desiring to lend a hand where help was needed. Gary earned two master's degrees, one in Architecture as well as a Master's of Business Administration, and enjoyed spending his professional life as an architect, however, he devoted all of his life to his family and church service.

Gary was one of seven children; his siblings have said "he is so amazingly smart!" As a child, Gary relished the time that the Bookmobile would drive through his neighborhood so he could check out free books by the dozens. He read through them and acquired knowledge line upon line. Yvonne recalls: "Gary seemed to have this computer in his brain that almost perfectly stored huge amounts of information, and then recalled it when necessary. It is interesting that family members and others constantly asked Gary questions about any topic. He did not expound his knowledge, but he was quiet, and then related it when asked or when it was needed."

Evan remembers going with Grandpa to the Pima Air and Space Museum on a day trip over spring break one year. "Grandpa spent the whole time teaching me all the stuff without having to even read the signs," Evan says. "He was super knowledgeable."

Although the pain at his passing is immense, Gary lives on, not just eternally, but in the memories and lives of his family and friends, his children, grandchildren, his brothers and sisters, and his beloved wife Yvonne. Sharing memories of Gary has been a great joy!

His son-in-law, Todd Phillips, recalls: "I don't know when I first took Gary climbing, but it's hard to think about climbing in Arizona and Utah without him. The memories we shared, the laughs, all blur together even when I so desperately want to pick each one out like a page from a book and examine each one, reliving it over and over. He took to climbing incredibly well. From learning footwork to body position to actually leading routes, he loved it all and couldn't get enough. This is how I remember him."

Matthew, his grandson, recounts that he thought of grandpa as "mischievous, sort of a giant gremlin…I remember he had this trick he showed me, where you'd both be sitting down and he'd grab just above your knee…and laugh as you go 'AUGH'…just the biggest, well-meaning goblin, ha! And sometimes he'd tell obvious fabrications, like explaining that cars run on gopher power or whatever, and he'd be grinning and look at you through his eyebrows."

One of Sabrina's early memories was "riding on Gary's shoulders as he walked across a creek – going from rock to rock. So, he was about 6'3" and I remember feeling that I was up pretty high. I remember hanging on to his beard and really hoping we both didn't go down. He loved the mountains, and I did too."

She also recounts being "11 or 12 when he took Cassandra and me up to the mountains to learn to ski. I remember after we had gone a few times, Gary took me to the ski shop and bought me a green ski suit with black and white racing stripes down the sides. He also bought me my first pair of skis. I felt so cool in my new suit and skis. We learned at Snowbird, not the easiest spot to take a beginner. But I remember that Gary had a lot of confidence in my ability to do it. I'm pretty sure he had never had any formal training himself so there weren't a lot of technical tips, but lots of goodwill. He was patient and loved it that I was eager to learn and tough enough to tolerate the cold and many falls.

"For me, that was the start of a lifelong love of spending time in the mountains of Utah and many, many days of skiing with my husband and 3 children. Some of my happiest memories are in the mountains, especially on a big powder day!"

His grandson, Jeremy Ewer, recalls their adventure last summer up at Snowbird, searching one night for an open shop at the resort so they could get a few needed supplies. "We tried the usual place, but it was closed, so we kept going along the path in the dark to the other resort. We arrived at the shop, and he bought me my favorite beef jerky. As we walked back, Grandpa pointed out different constellations and we compared our knowledge of astronomy – we both love the night sky!"

Amber remembers "when I was in elementary school, dad would read to me every night, lots of books, but Alice in Wonderland was the book I most remembered. He would fall asleep so I would nudge him awake again, poor guy."

She says, “my favorite memories are doing projects with dad. That is actually my love language, spending time with people. And spending time with my dad. Dad and I fixed toilets the day before his accident. That and climbing made it the best last day with my daddy ever.”

His daughter, Cassandra, shared this memory: “When I was in high school my bedroom was in the basement of the Utah house, and Dad had a drafting table office in what was then the basement family room...he would be up drafting late at night. At first, this made me crazy, but since I'm a night owl, I came out one night to get a glass of water and said I was hungry...so he said, ‘let's go get Chinese food’ and we jumped in the jeep, and he took me to this awesome Chinese restaurant in Sugar House...at 1:00 am in the morning! We got home at 3 am, laughing ourselves silly. It was amazing! Going for midnight Chinese food became our favorite late-night adventure.”

She also remembers that one Friday, “Gary was packing his car up and I asked him where he was going. He said ‘Santa Fe, New Mexico. Do you want to come?’

“And I said ‘heck, yeah!’

“So I threw stuff together in a duffle bag and we left within the hour, and drove all night (his crazy friend came and helped drive).

“I remember laughing and eating and going to an art fair where he bought me a turquoise necklace. I love spontaneous adventures, unplanned crazy last-minute trips...it was so cool that Gary did too!”

Alicia Fife, Gary’s daughter-in-law, relates that “the times and memories that I cherish most with Gary are when he brought a sense of calm concerning our babies. He would leave me at ease every time he was involved. I never worried when our babies were with him.”

She continues: “one memory that is imprinted on my soul is when I was pregnant with Zeke. Every time we had news, good or bad, he was there to experience it all in such a quiet, stoic, and realistic way. I am so grateful for the time that we had living so close to him!”

His granddaughter, Bella, loved the miniature house kit that Grandpa gave her for Christmas. They spent a couple of Saturdays working on the intricate house before Bella gave up because it was too complicated. But she knew Grandpa would have kept working on it, helping her even though it would have taken a really long time.

Another memory from Sabrina: “When Gary was finishing his Architecture degree, he also spent time making pottery. I remember going with him to the ceramics lab at the U. He gave me clay and let me make my own little pots on an electric potter’s wheel. It was kind of scary to have the potter’s wheel going, but Gary always assumed we could do anything and didn’t worry about giving us sharp tools or working on things like an electric potter’s wheel. He even had my little pots fired.”

Continues Sabrina, “my favorite memory is when Gary took Cassandra and me on an early summer trip to white water raft down the Colorado River in the 70s. This was long before the lawyers had taken the fun out of everything, and the rapids were raging! I loved it! It was so fun to be on the big rafts and having to help paddle so that the raft wouldn’t turn over.

“We camped at night on the shore and the guides cooked food over the fire. It was about the coolest thing I had done in my life up to that point. It was high adventure when one of the rafts turned over and everyone went under. Luckily the food stayed dry, and we were able to eat that night!”

As these stories illustrate, Gary Fife was unique, a rare soul. We will hear personal memories from his sons, David, and Richard Fife, but Gary’s wife and sweetheart, Yvonne, shares this final tribute:

“I have no idea how I was ever lucky enough to have married a man who honestly has it all. Gary is brilliant, compassionate, creative, and kind. He has supported me and has truly been the wind beneath my wings in every endeavor (crazy or worthwhile) that I have ever pursued. I’ve felt his pure love in every aspect of my life.

“Through the many amazing 48 years that we have been married his quiet strength and devotion have made me become a better person.

“He makes me laugh every single day and treats me with adoration many times when I don’t deserve it. I feel that he’s not far away from me even now. He’s just moved further along a beautiful path that all of us will walk someday. Gary is my hero, my warrior, my eternal mate, and my forever friend. He is my king.”

This quiet hero, this gentleman who loved us so deeply is no longer here to take care of us and teach us. But we know he lives on! Gary lived a life that was rich and meaningful, and we rejoice in every minute of it.

~ compiled and written by Cassandra Ewer, 5/16/22

Gary Fife passed away on May 2, 2022.

In addition to his parents, he is predeceased by his brother Robert Fife, grandson Christopher Ewer, and granddaughter Rachel Ewer. Gary is survived by his wife, Yvonne Holtz Fife, and his children: Cassandra (Richard) Ewer, Sabrina (Reed) Porter, David (Alicia) Fife, Richard (Carly) Fife, and Amber (Todd) Fife Phillips. Surviving grandchildren are Matthew Ewer, Jeremy Ewer, Alexander (Lindsey Walker) Porter Katherine Porter, William Porter, Evan Fife, Elizabeth Phillips, Audra Fife, Bella Fife, Zachary Phillips, Asia Fife, Noah Phillips, and David "Zeke" Fife. Gary's surviving siblings include Lynda Turcsanski, Dennis Fife, John Fife, Suzanne Fife, and Ronald Fife.

A celebration of life was held on May 17, 2022, at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2233 S Wade Dr, Gilbert, Arizona, USA.

Graveside Services will be held from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM on June 11, 2022, at Larkin Sunset Gardens Cemetery, 1950 E 10600S, Sandy, UT 84092, USA.

~ compiled and written by Cassandra Ewer, 5/16/22