

Gary Lloyd Nielsen

August 6, 1937 ~ April 25, 2024

Legendary Salt Lake City drag racer, Gary Lloyd Nielsen, passed away on April 25, 2024, at the age of 86.

Gary was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on August 6, 1937, to Hubert and Isabel Alexander Nielsen. He grew up in the Holladay-Cottonwood area. When he was six years old, he came down with Polio and was paralyzed for several weeks. Miraculously, he made a full recovery and was able to walk again.

He enjoyed playing and watching sports. His father, who was a professional baseball player for the Salt Lake Bees, coached his baseball team. Gary was also an aspiring artist and loved to draw. However, his greatest fascination was with cars - he built his first car when he was only 12 years old.

He graduated from South High School in 1955. He met Bonnie a couple years later and they fell madly in love. They eloped to Ely, Nevada, and were married on July 21, 1958. They were later sealed for time and all eternity in the Los Angeles, California LDS temple. They were married for 61 years and had five children together.

Gary joined the Marine corps reserves and served for six years. He loved racing cars and became a professional top fuel drag racer. He built his own race cars and set many records. In 1960, Gary and Bonnie opened Salt Lake Raceway, the first drag strip in Salt Lake City. They later moved to Anaheim, California, where they lived for 30 years. They opened an auto parts store - Performance Auto Parts - in Fullerton, which he managed until he retired.

Gary enjoyed camping and going on road trips with his family. He also loved snow skiing and went on many fun ski trips with Bonnie and their children. He was also quite possibly the BYU football team’s greatest fan and loved watching their games.

Gary and Bonnie retired and moved to Sandy, Utah, in 1993. In their later years, they enjoyed going to vintage car shows and swap meets together. They loved traveling with their children and grandchildren and visited more than two dozen countries, including most of Europe, Egypt and Turkey.

Gary and Bonnie were devoted members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and they held many callings throughout their lives. They served on five service missions for the church and did a lot of charity work for those in need.

Gary will be remembered by all who knew him for his kindness, generosity, friendliness and sense of humor. He will be dearly missed.

He was preceded in death by his wife Bonnie, his daughter Lori, his son-in-law Ken, his grandson Joshua, his parents, and his brothers: Robert, Hubert "Buzz," and Brent.

He is survived by his children: Leslie (Kevin), Mishelle, Kristina (Cesar), and Steven; twelve grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and his sister Dorothy.

A viewing will be held Friday, May 3, 2024, at Larkin Sunset Gardens, 1950 E. Dimple Dell Rd (10600 S), Sandy, Utah, from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Funeral services will begin at 12:00 noon on Saturday, May 4, 2024, at the Pinecrest Ward, 2080 E. Pinecrest Lane, Sandy, Utah, with a viewing 1 hour prior to the services at the church. Interment to follow services at Larkin Sunset Gardens.

If you would like to watch the recorded services, please click on the blue "Watch Services" button above.