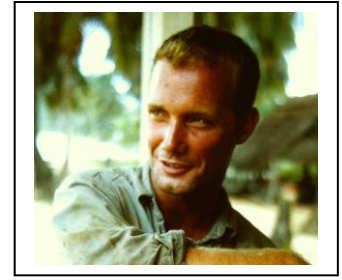


Dr. Eugene Charles Torbert

born in Hector, Minnesota, 5 March 1939

died in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 26 February 2020



Dr. Eugene Charles Torbert died 26 February 2020 at Forsyth Hospital (pneumonia). Resident for decades in the American South, Gene was born at his parents' home in the Minnesota prairie, during a snowstorm. He often spoke fondly of his youth in Hector, recounting cultivating techniques for sugar beets and other crops, mastering farm equipment, hunting pheasants, enjoying prime local dairy and Pearson's nut goodies, watching ten-cent double features, orienteering; he emphasized the library and the importance of protecting one's feet. He and three brothers each earned all-conference honors as football transitioned from eight- to eleven-man at Hector HS, where he graduated in 1957. A lifelong enthusiast for aviation and a licensed pilot at sixteen, he admired Minnesota from Cessnas. He loved maps. He served in the USAF (1957-62), particularly in South Korea, on radar bases surveilling Russia. He bowled one perfect game while enlisted, in Omaha.

After discharge, he made a pivotal voyage. In Atlantic, NC, Gene and his friend Rolfe Ericson purchased a small shrimp trawler, soon battered in storms and repaired in Jacksonville, FL. Back in business, they sailed to Corn Island, Nicaragua, aiming to catch lobsters. There, in Summer 1963, he met Barbara "Bobbie" Binning, of Lexington and Durham, NC, she on a post-commencement Methodist mission organized by Duke University. During their courtship, Gene returned to Minnesota, working the family farm and completing freshman coursework at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities during a particularly severe winter. They married on 29 December 1965 in Duke Chapel, and resided in Chapel Hill. There he studied International Relations, Romance Languages, and Golden Age Spanish literature, completing a BA (1968), an MA (1971), and a PhD (1974) in Romance Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Gene and Bobbie traveled together to New York City, Portugal, and Spain, conducting archival research for his dissertation on place names in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; in later years he visited Mexico City and San Jose, Costa Rica. His career as a professor of Romance Studies took them to UNC-Pembroke and Guilford College in North Carolina; the University of West Georgia (Carrollton) and LaGrange College in Georgia, and in his last dozen years before his 2006 retirement, Bennett College, a women's HBC in Greensboro, NC. Gene and Bobbie raised two children, Benjamin and Libbet, both born in North Carolina but raised substantially in Georgia. From 1994, Gene and Bobbie lived in Winston-Salem, near Bethania, and celebrated fifty years of devoted marriage at home in 2015. By 2009, they became proud grandparents of Wolf, son of Benjamin and spouse Shalay Hudson.

Gene's interests varied over a lifetime. Photography and music remained constant; so too careful planning, pursuit of automotive fuel economy and sturdy tires. He devoured aviation history. His whole life, he read relentlessly, he took notes everywhere. Gene and Bobbie accumulated and accumulated books. Researching genealogy, he traced nine generations of his family to Newtown, PA, and his surname to Old Norse, "Thor's children." Decades after leaving farming, he gardened extensively, adapting to North Carolina's soils. Gene maintained a lifelong dedication to exercise—hiking, jogging, cycling, swimming, weightlifting/kettle bells. He joined Golden Flower T'ai Chi in Winston-Salem, practicing T'ai Chi throughout his sixties and seventies. He remained strong in senior-hood, and as Bobbie struggled with lengthy illness; all who knew them in the 2000s-2010s report how capably and faithfully he nursed her.

Widowed, he found a new love partner, Joy Greco, of Greensboro. Gene and Joy traveled to the North Carolina mountains and coast, to see family in Pennsylvania; they attended concerts, cultural events, and her daughter Madelyn's top-level bodypainting competitions. In 2018, he reunited with his youngest brother Morris, on the Big Island, Hawai'i. After Gene's stroke in summer 2019, Joy took deep care of him. She was at his bedside with Libbet when he died.

Predeceasing Eugene were his parents Bernard (1907-82) and Grace Johnson Torbert (1916-94), three brothers, Gary (1937-2015), Arden (1941-2014) and Morris Torbert (1942-2019), and wife Barbara "Bobbie" Binning Torbert (1941-2016). Survivors include daughter Libbet Torbert and her partner Chris Stollings (Durham, NC); son Benjamin Torbert, grandson Wolf Torbert, and daughter-in-law Shalay Hudson (Saint Louis, MO); uncle Clayton Torbert (Slayton, MN), sister- and brother-in-law Michael and Martha Neese (Hendersonville, NC) and nephew Alan Neese (Warren County, IA); sister-in-law Sharon Torbert (Waikoloa, HI); nephews/niece Neal (Fargo, ND), Douglas (Woodbury, MN) and Kimberly Torbert (Bonita Springs, FL); and partner Joy Greco (Greensboro, NC) and her daughter Madelyn Greco and son-in-law Scott Fray (Reidsville, NC). In lieu of flowers, donations may be directed to Veterans Helping Veterans Heal, of Forsyth County. A memorial gathering will take place, Saturday 21 March at 2:00pm EDT, at Salem Funeral (Vogler), 2951 Reynolda Road, Winston-Salem NC 27106.