



Eugene Jessie McDonald

February 29, 1940 - March 5, 2024

Eugene Jessie McDonald was born on Leap Day, February 29th, 1940, which made him 21 (84) years old just last week.

Gene was always proud of his young age. He was born to Jack Frank McDonald and Kathleen Jewel Metz in Bakersfield, CA. Gene had two younger brothers, Jack Frank Jr. and James Neil, who both preceded him in death.

Gene joined the United States Air Force on March 26th, 1959, and served until June 1st, 1964. He had a top-secret clearance while serving. He was honorably discharged after 5 years of service. Gene married his loving wife Linda Jeanine Burton in the Salt Lake City LDS Temple on December 21st, 1961. Together, they had four children: Robert Jon, Ronald Joseph, Jennifer Ann, and Jessica Lynne. They made their home in several cities in Utah County, making their final residence in Spanish Fork.

He was a job entrepreneur and had various career changes throughout his

life, from tracking satellites for the government in New Hampshire, Greenland, and Guam to owning a successful sandwich shop in downtown Provo. He became a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after being baptized at the age of 19. He remained a faithful member of the church throughout his life. Always having a strong testimony of the gospel.

Gene is preceded in death by his wife, Linda, and children, Ronald and Jennifer. He is survived by two children, Robert (Cindy Carter), Lehi UT; Jessica (Jay) Gifford, Lehi UT; and daughter-in-law Kelly McDonald, Henderson NV; 10 grandchildren; and 18 great-grandchildren.

There will be a graveside service held on Saturday, March 9th, 2024, in the Payson City cemetery at 11 a.m.

Previous Events

Graveside Service

MAR 9. 11:00 AM (MT)

Payson City Cemetery
400 North 800 East
Payson, UT 84651

RP

“ I was friends with Gene McDonald who died this last Tuesday, March 5, 2024. We met just after his wife Linda died and just kept talking to each other a lot. The following is my attempt to write down some of the stories that he would tell me about his life before I forget them. I give no guarantee that they are accurate, but capturing what I can recall.

Eugene Jessie McDonald

Born: February 29, 1940, in Bakersfield, California

Parents: Kathleen Jewel Metz and Jack F McDonald

Wife: Linda Jeanine Burton

Some of the places he lived:

Bakersfield, California

Signal Hill, California

Provo, Utah

Patrick Air Force Base, Florida

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Vandenburg Air Force Base, California

Orem, Utah

New Hampshire

Thule Air Base, Greenland

Guam

Spanish Fork, Utah

Jobs that he held:

Growing Strawberries

Disneyland

Airman in US Air Force

Railroad Construction

Cash Register Salesman

Insurance Salesman

Jewel T Man

Sandwich shop owner

Contractor (in Greenland and Guam)

Delivering Luggage

Providing Transportation to medical appointments

Stories that he liked to tell about himself

When Gene was a boy, his mother was a member of the church and for a long time they were visited by a faithful home teacher named John Taylor who would tell inspiring stories about his days as a missionary. Eventually brother Taylor convinced them to have the missionaries come and teach the boys. At 12 years old Gene was

baptized and started attending sometimes. At the end of his senior year Gene was planning to go to a local California college (I think he said UCLA, but he may have said USC) but he received an invitation to go up to BYU. He said that invitation made a great difference in his life.

Gene remembers growing up in Signal Hill, that they had a lady in the neighborhood with an apricot tree who would let them eat the apricots, she was an older lady and was killed when an airplane crashed into her house. Here is a news reel that I believe is about this event: HD Stock Video Footage - A F-86 Sabre jet aircraft crashes in a landing approach after a supersonic training flight in California (criticalpast.com) https://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675041488_Sabre-jet_Signal-Hill-Oil-Field_Army-Personnel_demolished-houses

While living in Signal Hill, Gene witnessed a gusher when they were digging a new well.

Gene worked a lot on the family property, He spent multiple years taking care of multiple acres of strawberries. He wanted to do sports at school but never did as he had to be home to work. He attributed his strong grip to milking cow(s) every morning and evening for several years.

All his life berries were a favorite food for Gene. His favorite berry was the Boysenberry, he and his father were acquainted with Walter Knott who commercialized the Boysenberry and founded Knott's Berry Farm.

As a teenager he worked at Disneyland and once saw Walt Disney.

In the fall of 1957 Gene matriculated at Brigham Young University. Soon after, he was ordained to the as a deacon, then a quarter later as a teacher and a quarter after that as a priest.

He always liked to tell of one fall day at BYU when the weather was

warm in the morning, and he went to a football game that afternoon in shirtsleeves. It started to storm and got very cold, and a friendly young couple shared their blanket and hot chocolate.

Eugene always said that, although he was very strong in some ways, he could never do pushups or run very well. When talking about running he often told a story about him and some friends at BYU lighting some dynamite and that he learned that he could run fast and far if he needed to.

After 4 quarters at BYU Gene decided to join the Air Force and went to the recruiting office to enlist. He scored very well on the general aptitude test, and as he wanted to be in electronics, they gave him an additional math test. He remembers being done very quickly with the test and the recruiter thought he was coming out before finishing but he was all done, and he got a score higher than the recruiter had ever seen only missing one question.

Gene was trained in the Airforce to work on the Falcon air to air missile system but then ended up working on the Titan and Atlas guidance systems. His first duty station was Patrick Air Force base at Cape Canaveral where despite his fear of heights he was able to work many stories high on the rocket gantry because they closed off the view from the scaffolding with tarp walls.

While in Florida Gene attended the Melbourne Ward where he was ordained an Elder. During stake conference the stake president interviewed him between sessions and then after the conference conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood.

In December 1960 Gene was sent to San Diego for some training for a couple of weeks. During that time, he went home and attended his home ward. That day he met Linda Burton, his future wife in the young adult Sunday School class, she had come down to southern California from Payson for the holiday to stay with family.

Gene was given a slot for officer candidate school early the next

year (1961) and the Air Force sent him to get a Bachelor of Science degree from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Gene and Linda started to write and eventually Gene invited Linda to come out and visit him in Stillwater. She agreed to come, and he bought her a bus ticket. Linda stayed at the bishop's house.

Linda and Gene spent three blissful days together and decided that they would be wed later that year.

Gene and Linda were married in the Salt Lake Temple on December 22, 1961. Gene was on leave for a few days. They had issues driving up to Salt Lake from Payson, but they made it on time. Gene did not understand about the temple and one of his regrets was that he did not want to invite others to be there in the temple and only allowed Linda's mother to attend there with them.

Gene often said that marrying Linda was the greatest thing to happen to him. He says they had plenty of issues getting along but always got back together and, in the end, she helped him mature to the person that he became. He always spoke fondly of her and had her picture on the wall and on the background screen of his phone.

Their wedding in Salt Lake City in 1961 turned out to be only the first of three marriages for them. He said his greatest possession was his sealing to his wife.

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was shot. It was very memorable to Gene that he was the only missile guidance tech on site at Vandenberg Air force Base. He and his commanding officer were at their posts waiting to see if tensions between Russia and the USA might get serious enough to launch.

While in the Air Force he had a top-secret clearance and he saw the B-57 Canberra and the U-2 spy plane.

He said while in the Air Force he at one time was also working 2

civilian jobs to keep up with taking care of his family. He was working so much that finally his body just gave up and he could not get out of bed for a day and had to cut down.

One date that Gene always remembered was June 1, 1964. That is the day he got out of the Air Force.

In 1968 Gene was hired by a company that did government contract work. They had him work for a few months in New Hampshire, then 18 months in Greenland, and then for some time on Guam.

The family took a cross country trip to New Hampshire to begin his new job. On the way they stopped at Niagara Falls. He remembers that he had to sit down in the elevator because of his fear of heights. They saw what Gene believed to be about 50 police cars at the road to the island at Niagara Falls, they learned that there was an escaped murderer supposedly hiding on the island.

After just a month or two in Manchester, New Hampshire the company offered Gene a significant raise to go work at Thule Air Base in Greenland and he went to work there for 18 months while Linda went back to Utah. He was at Thule from about August 1968 to February 1970.

In Greenland Gene saw and could hear the boom of icebergs calving many miles away. He got a chance to go out on an ice-breaker ship twice and once was within 20 feet of an iceberg, he said he never saw a polar bear or the Aurora Borealis because he was too far north.

Gene had several stories that he would tell about being at Thule Air Base.

The one and only time he ever seriously tried to grow out his beard was there in Greenland. That lasted only two weeks and his company came out with a policy of being clean shaven and he had to stop.

· He arrived at the same time as a much smaller man, and he remembers that he received the largest sized parka while the other man got the smallest sized parka and they both had the same price tag even though the material from Gene's coat could have made three of the smaller size.

· There was a very small branch of the church there at Thule watched over by a brother that would fly in occasionally. On one memorable visit Gene remembered donating \$50 to the Washington DC Temple fund when their little branch was asked to donate and on that same visit from their leader, they baptized a new member into their branch. They got permission to baptize him in a water-tight packing crate that some equipment had arrived in. The baptism was in the warehouse and so they had a truck running and warmed up that they quickly put the new brother into and transferred him to the living quarters where they got him changed and then Gene confirmed him a member of the church.

· When Gene left Thule Air Base, he had to leave his parka and go across the tarmac to the plane in just his suit and tie. He says it took him the entire flight before he felt warm again.

After his time in Greenland Gene was sent to Guam and was able to take his family with him, here are some stories he would tell about Guam.

· When he first arrived in Guam, he bought a '69 Thunderbird for \$3300 (one year old and half the price of a new one). He sold it when he left for \$2700.

· While there a McDonald's opened on the island and for a time it was the largest McDonald's in the world by square feet. When he went he was the largest McDonald in the largest McDonald's. He did not like their Big Mac because they used cabbage instead of lettuce.

- *There was a friend that he taught the gospel to in Guam who was baptized, and Gene ran into him years later outside the Hawaii temple.*

- *He and Linda would go get steak dinners at the Officers club where it was inexpensive for a nice dinner.*

- *Linda got pregnant while they were in Guam and her doctor suggested an abortion. When Gene found out he immediately arranged for Linda to fly home and give birth in Utah even though he could not afford it.*

- *Gene said that they would sit in their front yard and things were so green and lush that they could hear the grass growing.*

- *Gene was very happy and emotional when the Guam temple was built and dedicated. The temple was built on the same road where he and Linda had lived.*

- *Linda wanted to go to Japan while they were so close, but they never did.*

After Guam the family moved back to Utah. Here are some random things.

- *He owned his own sandwich shop in Orem for a few years. He knew the butcher at a nearby grocery store and he would get a good price on ground steak. His best-selling sandwich was called 'Steak and Stuff' which was a cheese steak sandwich with peppers onions and mushrooms. For many years he would see people and they would tell him they missed his sandwich.*

- *Gene was ordained a High Priest in the Provo Tabernacle*

- *For many years Gene prided himself on always having 100% home teaching.*

- *While he was an insurance salesman, Gene worked with a trumpet player named Danny Newell, they ended up being friends for several years together and would often go shoot pool or play cards.*

- *When he stood proxy for the endowment of his father in the Provo temple He distinctly heard his father tell him, "Thank you son".*

- *One Halloween night when things were looking very grim Gene decided to take his life by ramming into an overpass pillar at high speeds. As he was getting ready to do this he heard a voice that told him that if he did it he would be sorry and he decided not to go through with it.*

- *He said one of the best meals he ever had was a ham dinner in Saint Anthony Idaho when he was traveling for business.*

There are many other stories that I can't recall now (not that I recalled any of those very well). Here are some things about Eugene McDonald while I knew him these past 5+ years:

- *He loved watching sports, especially BYU Football, the LA Dodgers, BYU Basketball. He also followed BYU Women's Soccer.*

- *He loved listening to Karolina Protsenko until he used up all his data plan for the month.*

- *He was a talker and seemed to always have a new and interesting story (nestled among the repeated ones 😊)*

- *He loved to eat pizza, shrimp, berries, steak, cashews, and sweets of any kind. He admitted forthrightly that he had a sweet tooth.*

- *When he could, he would go out and get food at Sonic, Wendy's, Culver's, Subway or Panda Express.*

- *He was a big fan of the Steak and Egg sandwich at Subway and the burritos at Beto's.*

- *Every week he would watch Music and the Spoken Word.*

- *We went to eat at Texas Roadhouse for their free Veteran's Day meal the last couple of years.*

- *Every few weeks he would go with Duane get his hair cut in downtown Spanish Fork.*

- *As many dads and octogenarians sometimes do, he loved to share riddles and jokes with bad puns in them that he received from one of his friends every day.*

- *Up until he died, he was convinced that any day, the Iraqi Dinar would get revalued and with the 200,000(?) Dinar (that he had purchased many years ago during the gulf war) he would be wealthy enough to pay off his house and provide each of his children with a year's supply of food. I stopped trying to convince him it was a scam a few years back and always hoped along with him.*

- *Years back Gene got himself to stop drinking Dr Pepper by switching to pink lemonade and that was what he drank every day.*

- *We would always talk about sports, family, life stories and whatever the political outrage story of the day happened to be.*

- *He had a very, very old white minivan that somehow lasted longer than he did.*

- *He bought statuettes of the Christus for each of his friends 2 or 3 Christmases ago.*

- *He told me recently that it was the happiest time in his life when he saw that his children came to help him when he started to*

have problems and had to be hospitalized.

· He had a strong testimony of Jesus Christ and trusted in Him.

*I am very glad that he is now able to be with Linda after a wonderful
adventure of a life.*

Submitted by Rob Peck

Rob Peck - March 08, 2024 at 12:37 PM