

Gene Campbell

by Mari Campbell

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Gene Campbell was born January 2, 1920 in Manila, Utah. He spent his life in this small ranching community in the valley overlooking the Ashley National Forest and the Uinta Mountains he worked in and loved.

In his earlier days he owned and operated a successful cattle ranch in Manila and Gene and his father owned and operated a sawmill and were active in the timber industry. Together, he and his wife, June, raised three children, Gary, Bonnie and Allen. He began a federal career with the Bureau of Reclamation as a law enforcement officer during the construction period of Flaming Gorge Dam, and then transferred to the Forest Service in 1963 where he served as a Forestry Technician. Quickly, Gene proved himself to be a diligent, reliable and responsible employee.

Gene's position involved timber sale preparation, timber stand improvement, planting, and fire control. His enjoyment came from working and recreating in the outdoors. He was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting and fishing, and he delighted in sharing his outdoor experiences with his children, grandchildren, and friends. Gene was easily recognized by his forward-leaning stance (as though he were walking into the wind) and his rolled up Stetson hat askew on his head! Oh, how he loved cowboy boots and Stetson hats. Because of his congenial nature, people from all walks of life were drawn to him. He made long-lasting friendships throughout his career. Cowboys to mountain men counted him as their friend.

Always active in community involvement, he was a charter member of the Daggett County Lions Club and helped initiate many programs sponsored by the club, a member of the Daggett County School Board, supported the youth through school programs and 4-H, helped promote the paving of Highway 414 from Manila to Mountain View, Wyoming, actively supported and participated in the Sweetwater County Fair, and was instrumental in bringing television reception to Daggett County residents.

On July 16, 1977 Gene was carrying out his duties as Daggett County Rodeo Chairman when he was called away from the arena, and with others, left to fight a lightning-caused fire between Spruce Creek and Cart Creek, near Dutch John, Utah. Gene was one of three firefighters who lost their lives that day when erratic winds shifted and flames overtook them. He was 57 years old.

A beautiful memorial was created by their Forest Service family and by the contributions of friends around the world to honor Gene, Dave Noel and Dwight Hodgkinson at present-day Firefighters Memorial Campground on the Flaming Gorge Ranger District. As well, three blue spruce trees were planted on the lawn at the Forest Service office in Dutch John, Utah to honor them.

Gene left his wife June, his three children and their spouses, and 14 grandchildren. Today he is surely smiling down on his 21 great-grandchildren. He will always be loved, remembered and missed by his family, friends and co-workers. They remember him for his human kindness, genuine friendliness, good humor, his generosity and wisdom. I love him for all these things, but especially for instilling these qualities in his son Allen, my husband.

