

Eric Gulbranson
An Obituary Written by Matthew Gulbranson
October 13, 1962 — July 18, 2018

Eric Gulbranson, 55, of Oklahoma City, OK, formerly of Fairmount, ND passed away on Wednesday, July 18, 2018. Visitation will be held from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm, followed by a celebration of life service at 1:00 pm on Friday, July 27, 2018 at the Fairmount United Methodist Church. Burial will be at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, rural Fairmount, followed by a time of fellowship at the Fairmount Community Center. Arrangements are entrusted to Vertin-Munson Funeral Home, Wahpeton, ND.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Pleasant Hill Cemetery.
In Memory of my Brother, Eric Gulbranson

Eric Paul Gulbranson made his galactic debut on October 13, 1962 in Colusa, California to Darryl James Gulbranson and Mary Ellen Pinkney Gulbranson, both professors and educators, although Eric grew up with a terrible aversion to school. He elicited my help from time to time to do his homework and I gladly obliged. Although Eric didn't stay too long as a child in Colusa, he resided there for a few months in the early 80's as a John Travolta looking teenager until an angry rooster chased him off. I arrived by stork in 1964 to North Dakota, followed by Daniel, born in Oregon in 1966, and little Gulbranson, baby brother Jack, entered the fray in 1968 in North Dakota, our American Siberia.

Eric was the Alpha Wolf of the Gulbranson boys pack and he loved, edified and guided us through triumphs and disappointments, gains and losses, and he eventually tapped into his middle name, Paul, to become a fearless apostle and evangelist for our Lord Jesus. He led his Uncle Ray to salvation along with many others. Finally he teamed up with our retired Math professor Dad, when they became roommates in Norman, Oklahoma. They could often be found at the Ariel Chapel praying and studying the Word of our Savior.

Growing up in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota, Eric created adventures with his brothers, and especially with me. On one occasion we found an abandoned bicycle in a dumpster and Eric encouraged me, his dutiful sibling, to take it to the top of the highest hill we could find so I could give it a test drive. I hurled full speed down the hill and discovered, much too late, that the brakes were missing in action and when I hit the bottom of the hill I completed three revolutions while still holding on to the handle bars. Eric exclaimed, “that was amazing and so cool :-) Matt, how did you hold on?”

While living in Georgetown, Minnesota, before we moved to Fairmount, Eric wanted to see if a BB gun shot was really all that painful. So, he instructed me to shoot him in the abs while he was not wearing any shirt. To make it more interesting and challenging, he walked precariously along the precipice of a damn. Eric called out, “now shoot me.” OK, I answered and fired two shots, bing, bing, hitting him squarely in the stomach. “It doesn’t hurt that bad, shoot me again.”

Another time, Eric wanted to to conduct an outdoor chemistry experiment to see if adding gasoline to a roaring garbage bin fire had the same effect as adding lighter fluid to charcoal briquettes. Eric sprinkled just a few drops of gasoline on the fire and Kaboom! We were blown back several feet, off our feet, and Eric, always first and fearless, asked: “Matt, are we alive? Are we in heaven? Did we live?”

Eric also curtailed any chance of a smoking habit by insisting we skip the one hour bus ride home after school one day and instead walk the ten miles home in order to try smoking. Eric, figuring an animal was pretty harmless, opted for two packs of camels without filters. The most amazing thing was his idea to write a permission note which read as follows: “Please sell Eric and Matt cigarettes, signed their Mom.” We smoked and walked for hours along the lonely country highway, breathing the poignant scent of the Crystal Sugar Beat factory until we both turned green and became sick to our stomachs. I reckon neither one of us ever had the desire to smoke again.

Eric was always first to make friends in a new school or neighborhood while we moved from school to school, from here to there, back and forth from Duluth to Fairmount and throughout the Midwest. Eric was outgoing, fun loving, the best entertainer and story teller. We especially loved it when he made up Mrs. Grumbay stories and spun the most hilarious, outrageous tales. I guess he got that from our Dad and his Johnny Bear yarns.

Often the Gulbranson boys would venture to Duluth, Minnesota to spend time with dad who taught math at Washington Junior High School and moonlighted as an instructor at the local Air Force Base. Eric made friends so quick with the local

cute preteen girls and neighborhood kids that before I knew it, we were jumping dirt bikes using homemade wooden ramps over obstacles ,ala Evel Knievel and racing go carts down the steep embankments of Hartley Field.

We would often play tennis and basketball with the active duty airmen . We were so good at holding our own in basketball that they called Eric, Larry Bird and me, Kevin McHale. One day we went hiking up the local mountain to pick blueberries. We were eating our spoils, enjoying the late summer breezes, and scheming on what delicious meal we would order when our Dad took us out to dinner that night. But before we could decide on the french onion soup or the bicycle burger an angry mama black bear and her cubs appeared to distract us. The she bear started charging at us, defending her cubs, so we dropped our berries, spun around and ran so fast down the hill back to the civilized world that our feet literally didn't touch the ground. I am sure we looked like either Wile E. Coyote or the road runner because our feet were flying so fast.

Many nights we ventured out into suburbia armed with apples and targeted a few passing cars. Our aim was usually quite good. Smack, splash we hit a groovie sport car broad side and ran for our lives. We heard the brakes screeching to a halt and a distant voice cursing “ I am going to kill you when I catch you - damn kids” ! Eric and I lay still and low in the hedges. The sneakers approached us; we, like cornered game, didn't know if we should bolt like a pheasant or lie still and hope our nemesis wouldn't step on us. We held our breath until his footsteps receded into the darkness.

He really loved dogs, especially Max, his German Shepherd and Dan's terrier, Samson. Eric was the most talented nature artist and he could draw wildlife so realistically. In addition to being an artist, Eric was an athlete. We brothers marveled at his abilities. He could leap and dunk a basketball with either hand jumping off his left or right leg. He could throw a football with pin-point accuracy more than 70 yards. He often had us running patterns while one of us played defense. This game could go on for hours. Basketball in Fairmount had its own life-- either organized or outside on the slab with Tim Stiles, Gary Rosendahl, Kevin Sittarich, Dave Adolf, The Hill boys, and other Fairmount legends. Sometimes we would sneak into the old school gym at night to play hours of three on three or full court scrimmages.

Eric hung out with Randy Rusten, Mike Leinen, Dave Walters, and the Wiertzema brothers. Occasionally we would find enough gas money to cruise aimlessly between Wapheton and Breckenridge, waving at cute girls in cars who never seemed to stop and say hello. Other times we would try to see how many of us would fit in the trunk to get a better deal at the local drive in movie. Eric was the one with all the charm and charisma in the world. Later he would gain Supernatural Confidence and Holy Boldness when he became best friends with God and started hanging out with the Holy Spirit.

Praying and discussing the Bible was something Eric did when he visited Mom, and the Aunts and Uncles. Eric said it was spending time with God that let him become his "authentic self." He adored his Grandma Anne and loved all kin folk on both sides of the family. He was best friends with our Mom and could talk to her

about anything, even topics that would make me blush. His favorite prayer partner was his friend, Larry, from Ariel Chapel. And nobody was tighter with Eric than Mark McGougan.

Although Eric didn't like school that much, he was prolific reader. He had more common sense and street smarts than all of us. He knew how to encourage, motivate, and inspire anyone who needed it and ironically, although he never had his own kids, he would have made the best Father. Instead our heavenly Father gave him all the inmates for sons. Eric and brothers formed an eternal quartet. He was Jack's biggest fan when he was excelling in baseball, football and basketball. Eric was so proud of Dan 's engineering intellect. He always bragged that Dan was the most giving and generous guy you would ever meet. But, Eric could be tough on us:

“Matt, always look sharp, dress like a movie star, look like Clint. You are looking good but need to tighten up, do several hundred push-up every day.” Eric would tell me, “I just swam another mile today, 40 laps, did 20 sets of 50 push-ups”

This would inspire me, occasionally, to maybe try five sets of 20 push-ups and one day I did go to the pool and swam for a mile:-) Eric, a lifeguard at both Science School and Wahpeton Park Pool, loved giving swimming lessons . On his recent trip to Greece he taught a local teenager how to swim in the ocean. He showed my kids the proper form for the crawl, He really had an affinity for the water. Eric preferred swimming in lakes and oceans, the bigger the better. He said “swim in every body of water you come across.” This inspired me to go swimming in an ice cold lake in

Norway last August with my daughters Kirsten and Camryn. It was the same lake near Skarnes where our Grand Father Harald grew up. I told Kirsten “we have to go swimming for my brother Eric, no matter how cold!” We did, we dived in, like Eric dived into life.

When Eric visited Jack at Guantanamo Bay in the Fall of 1998, there was one Sunday with Red Flag warnings of tropical storms and hurricanes forming in the distance producing large swells and dangerous rip tides. Eric disregarded the warnings and swam so far out you could barely see his head, and did not get back until two hours later. Jack yelled out, “Eric you shouldn’t be out in the water, it’s too dangerous!” Eric replied, “I was practicing my survival skills and if it’s my time to go, no better place than the ocean.”

Eric worked at Lexington Prison since 1994 spending a career investing in other people’s lives, always wanting to make the inmates’ quality of life better. Charitable work became the norm, with recreational rodeos and holiday food drives. Eric’s charm was in full throttle during the Christmas Gift Drive persuading the local businesses to make generous contributions to the prisoners’ wives and children.

Eric genuinely cared about the inmates and treated them with dignity and respect and they responded to his authenticity. Eric loved the forgotten man and I was so proud to watch him in action behind the razor wire when I visited him at work. With just a whistle and GPS (God’s prophetic Spirit), he had no fear, just love for his fellow man. Eric emphasized often that the very first Christian was a convict.

The condemned man on the cross next to Jesus who cried out “Remember me when you enter your Kingdom.”

At Lexington, they called him Coach. I call him my big brother Eric, my example, my inspiration, my hero. Eric, to me, is the Phineas of our family, the rest of us being Gene, left now to find our own Separate Peace without him. Eric told me all the money, fame, and accolades of this world won't last and don't matter. The only thing that counts is what you do for God. The only reason you left so soon is that God wanted to give you all the desires of your heart that this world can't offer. Jesus knew you hated goodbyes, and this way you will never have to endure losing your parents or your brothers. We are all so close and this pack will run strong with your memory until we are united again in our Heavenly home. Enjoy swimming in the living water, Aqua Man; you will never thirst again. You are where there is no sadness, no tears, no sickness, no darkness, and where His glorious light burns bright forever. Eternally Eric.

Eric leaves behind his parents Darryl James Gulbranson, and Mary Ellen Pinkney, three brothers who love him dearly, Matthew James Gulbranson, Daniel Ray Gulbranson and Jack Gulbranson. Along with his nieces and nephews, Ashley Marie Gulbranson, Gregory Eric Gulbranson, Camryn Hill Gulbranson, Kirsten Giselle Gulbranson, Danielle Gulbranson, Seth Gulbranson, Anna Grace Gulbranson, Gabrielle Gulbranson, Samuel Gulbranson, Luke Gulbranson and Jackson Gulbranson. One grand nephew Ezekiel and a grand niece Aurelie Beryl.

By Matthew Gulbranson, July 19, 2018