

## Jimmy Scott

by Mary Gulbranson Parnell

Jimmy Scott was a long time clerk of Eric's at Lexington, better known as LARC, until he was miraculously released around 2008 from prison. And, no one captures Coach's impact greater than Jimmy in his Eulogy.

Jimmy wrote his letter of tribute shortly after hearing the news of Eric's death. Jimmy Scott was also present at the funeral in Norman with a fellow inmate, Leon Pannell. I was able to have a chat with both Jimmy and his friend, Leon.

Danny Gulbranson had placed his cell phone at the back of the church so I could hear the funeral. Turns out if he hadn't done that, there would be no record of that great day.

Afterwards, Danny Gulbranson handed off the cell to Jimmy so we could visit, and then later to Leon Pannell who told me more Eric stories.

Jimmy told me about a notorious basketball game that Eric designed playing the Bloods and the Crips against each other to work off their gang-banger steam, to lower some of the in-house tensions. So there they were, in the gym, playing a fast game of rag tag, run and shoot B-Ball, when all of a sudden a riot broke out. Jimmy thought that the danger was serious. So, with no weapons, there was no way to contain these street fighters, Jimmy ran as fast as he could to the supply room and came back with a bat, fearing blood. But Coach had it under control. One ring leader was raised off the floor in Eric's left hand, and the other was raised off the floor in Eric's right hand. He was shaking their heads together as he waved them in the air. "All right boys, let's play ball." And the rest of the game proceeded without incident.

The legend that grew in the institution was that Coach had a supernatural strength, witnessed by many and bruited about. Of course, Coach, a man of the Word, was even rumored to have a Samson-like strength, though Coach never would have said so. He just continued to swim, lift weights and keep buff, the most admired attribute a man can have as an insider.

After visiting with Jimmy, he handed the phone to Leon Pannell who told me about the first time he had ever seen coach. Leon said *that every prisoner has to find his pecking order. The first thing they have to do is get strong, lift the weights, do the push ups, so they can earn the right not to be bothered, so they can live as best as they can without incident.*

*Well, it was rumored that there would be a new officer. It was evening, and the new guy, Eric Coach Gulbranson, had the job of seeing that everyone was locked down. As he walked down the corridors, the men had their noses pressed against the bars. Leon said Coach was the biggest, "most buff man" that LARC had ever employed, so immediately that was respect and currency in the nether world of prison. But to Leon, Coach appeared to be bathed in light. He was glowing, Leon said over and over.*

The legend had its beginnings.

# The Legacy of Eric Gulbranson

10/13/1962 – 07/18/2018

From a former Inmate, Jimmy Scott

Eric was my dear friend and my mentor. I worked as a clerk for the Coach for over fifteen years when I was in prison. Our friendship continued after I was released. I loved the coach! He was my friend!!! My heart goes out to Eric's family. My heart is completely broken.... I will truly miss my friend. I would like to attend Eric's funeral and I would like to speak to his father and brothers. Coach spoke of his dad and brothers often and I would like to have them know the impact that Eric had in my life. Eric prayed for me, mentored me and encouraged me every single moment that I was around him. He was a very special person to many people and he truly loved the Lord. He showed it in his day to day actions and he loved the unlovable. He was genuine. It is difficult to work in a prison as long as Eric and still have a heart and soul for people. But he did. That's exactly how Jesus is. I will never forget Eric Gulbranson for as long as I am on this earth. And I just want to say, "Thank you Eric, "Coach" for the impression that you left on my life.

I have been totally crushed from the moment I heard about Eric. I went through part of my mourning process late last night. I am not ashamed to say that I cried and continue to cry every time I think of Eric or see his picture. In my heart I feel that I will never get over losing my dear friend. I also know that only "time" can begin to heal our broken hearts. Eric's legacy will live for many years to come and he will never be forgotten in that prison.

Eric had a special gift. He dealt with and controlled some of the most dangerous people on earth, even when trained corrections staff could not deal with situations, Eric could. He just had that affect on people. He didn't do it with force or intimidation, it's really hard to explain! He just had that gift. I have so many memories and I had so much fun around Eric. His ministry wasn't just inside that prison. Eric did much more behind the scenes; in often visited former inmates in hospitals and nursing homes and helped many in need.

The story about Eric and his Christmas bike drive struck a flood of memories in me because Eric, Mary Gann and I started that bike give-away over 18 years ago. I was Eric's clerk in the recreation department at the prison when we began the program. The first year we started with 4 bikes, two boys' and two girls' bikes, and we did a Christmas drawing in the visiting room with the inmate's families. Since that time and with Eric's vision the program blew out of proportion! Not only were bikes given away but an entire gym floor of toys as well. Not only did Eric do the Christmas program but he raised money for four other charities, like the American Cancer Society, Ronald MacDonald House, St. Jude's and one other that I can not recall. We raised thousands and thousands. What really made it unbelievable is that we

did it right out of the prison through the recreation department. I will never forget those times and the memories. I have of my friend. I miss him so much! My heart really aches!!!

One memory of Eric I will carry until my last day on earth is when he came to work on day and said, "Jim, God put it on my heart to pray for your release. He said, "I want to put a fleece before God and pray that he will open doors for you to go home." I agreed, but in the back of my mind I thought, I know all things are possible with God, but I'm serving a life sentence and that's a huge prayer request. Well, God honored Eric's fleece and I've been home for nearly ten years now. God has blessed my life in so many ways and most of it is because of Eric and the influence he had in my life. There is so much more to that story but I wanted to share that with you guys.