

Gene Ronald Smith 1941 – 2021



Gene Ronald Smith died at home in Mitchell, Nebraska, of late-stage Parkinson's disease on January 8, 2021, while on hospice care and with his wife, LeTisha, and daughter, Aurora, by his side.

Gene was born in Billings, Montana May 15,

1941. His grandfather had a mortuary business, and his father moved to Cody, Wyoming when Gene was four, to open a mortuary there.

A favorite pastime, learned from his father, was going arrow-head hunting. He began to appreciate

the archaeological significance of artifacts, read books on archaeological sites and findings throughout the world, and dreamed of one day becoming an archaeologist. As a high school student, he discovered a nearly complete bison in a cutbank west of Buffalo Bill Reservoir, after digging it out he used it for a science fair project earning him recognition of the Wyoming Archaeological Society, which awarded him their first scholarship.

Gene was still a high school student when he noticed a cave shelter which he felt sure could be a significant site. So, he and friend Dan Witter, with whom Gene spent a lot of time hunting Indian artifacts and fossils, went to explore it more closely at the first opportunity, and came back even more enthused. Dan's father, Bob Witter was a paleontologist with Princeton University and under Bob Witter's direction, they drew up a plan to dig a test pit. The number of artifacts in that small 1x2 foot test pit, as Dan recalled, was impressive. The cave became known as the Mummy Cave site that was later excavated by the Whitney gallery under the direction of Harold McCracken. Gene was humbled

and pleased in 2002, when Dan Witter credited Gene with the discovery.

Gene continued throughout his life to hold archaeology very dear but acquired his degree in Social Service. He was the director of the Powder River Counsel on Drug and Alcohol Abuse in Gillette, Wyoming, and remained in private practice as a drug and alcohol abuse counselor for many years. He was very active in Alcoholics Anonymous and completed 49 years of recovery in March of 2020. Never-the-less, he was always very proud that his eldest son, Gene Ronald Vernon Smith, completed his archaeology degree and has enjoyed a career in the field.

Gene had a special fondness for antiques, and having lectured on Western Art at the Whitney Gallery in Cody, he and his second wife, artist LeTisha Bonar Smith owned combined art and antique galleries over the past 28 years, and together, adopted and raised a second family.

Gene is survived by his wife LeTisha, five children, three step-children, and five grandchildren.