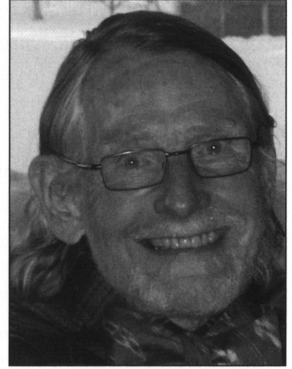


### GENE F. WHITE 1934–2008

Gene White created an extraordinary life. At age 12 he climbed his first Colorado peaks with local Boy Scouts; in 2007, at age 73 and already battling leukemia for four years, he absolutely relished a 10-day hut-to-hut hike in his beloved Alps.

I was privileged to know Gene for some 35 years, and to share many wonderful times with him. In fact, everyone who knew Gene would probably agree: going on adventures large and small and having a great time doing it was the essence of a friendship with Gene. Few of us recall the exact first time we meet a future friend. Yet I always remember the gathering where I was introduced to Gene and his wife Betsy. A tall, good-looking man in his late 30s, he was simply unlike anyone else. He dressed in his own style. On this occasion he wore an elegant



Gene White in 2008. Betsy White

shirt and bow tie, together with an embroidered Asian waistcoat and loose Pakistani cotton pants. And what I learned about his life was equally unusual. A civil engineer specializing in water projects, he had already spent many years earning a living in outlandish-seeming places such as Peshawar, Bangladesh, and Sulawesi, Indonesia. From these challenging outposts, he and Betsy made trips to fabled mountain areas. What impressed so much was that they lived in such challenging cultures, raised three children while doing so, and thought so little of it. I reflected that my pals and I, with our climbing trips abroad, were dilettantes passing through; we never got to grips with the locals. Gene embraced life head on. He got to grips with everything.

Born in Denver on July 26, 1934, Gene had already climbed in the Colorado Rockies and French Pyrenees when he entered Dartmouth College. However, as with others before and since, it was with this legendary college club that his real climbing began. After his freshman year, he and his companions made first ascents in the Purcells, British Columbia. Gene was a superb skier, and in 1959 made ski ascents of the Grand Combin and Monte Rosa with Stu Krebs. He then skied the very challenging Haute Route. Obviously feeling his oats, he wrote to a friend, “We slaughtered the hell out of various European groups we met on the route.” He would be in Chamonix that summer and confided, “We boys have big plans.” After writing the letter he got back on the Vespa scooter on which he was tooling around Europe and headed up to more climbs in Arctic Norway. That summer he was executing the big plans, climbing the Grepon, Zinal Rothorn, and Matterhorn, among others.

In 1961, and now married, he and Betsy sold everything they had, went to Europe and bought a Volkswagen. Their game plan was laid out in Walter Pause’s *100 Best Ski Runs in the Alps*. Unfortunately it was in German, but that did not slow them down. They completed a dozen of these fabled ski runs before driving to Cairo, where they dropped off the car. Intent on climbing Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya, they took a boat up the Nile.

The Peace Corps was then in its infancy, and legendary climber Bob Bates was director of the Nepal program. Here was an idea! Gene and Betsy signed up for a two-year stint. With 20,000-foot peaks visible from the city, Peshawar, Pakistan was a great posting. Gene became in effect the city engineer, allowing the actual department head to indulge in endless cups of tea. In 1964 Gene and friends attempted a new route on Tirich Mir. They made several first ascents on outlying peaks over 19,000 feet. In 1967 he made the second ascent of Malika Parbat with Trevor Braham.

To many, the Peace Corps might have been the extent of their involvement with the developing world. Not Gene. He joined engineering firms that extended his overseas work. Every few years he received home leave, which invariably started with a decompression trip to the Alps. He and Betsy eased into the Western way of life with climbs, fine cheeses, and vintage wines. One time they rented cycles in Dijon and rode the "Route des Grands Crus," promising themselves they would not drink any wine before 11 in the morning. In 1969, with Betsy, he climbed Huascarán, she being the second woman to climb the higher south peak. Getting in shape for Huascarán inspired Gene to take up running, which he did with typical flare. He completed 35 marathons and eight 50-mile runs before leaving the sport because of a leg injury. In like fashion he was a strong cyclist, completing century rides every year.

In 1973 the Whites bought a home in Berkeley—one cannot say "settled in Berkeley." Some years they were there, some years the house was rented out as they moved to Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and so forth. They learned to speak Urdu, Pushto, Indonesian, and French along the way. Gene greatly appreciated oriental rugs and became a one-man rug bazaar. Few of his friends do not have one of the rugs he brought back; if you could not afford one, he gave you one. When the Whites were in Berkeley, they resumed their friendships and interests as if they had never left. In 1980 they left again for an attempt on Makalu II.

The Tetons were always a favorite area. In 1993 they bought a cabin in Victor, Idaho, with a view of the Grand. Betsy was now employed by the Asia Foundation, eventually heading their Indonesia and Afghan programs, while Gene worked on consulting jobs. Thus semi-retired, he was in his element in the Tetons. He loved telling everyone he had skied "124 days" last season.

Wherever work took him, Gene found something to climb. Sacred mountains in Sri Lanka, unnamed peaks in Shimshal or the Barun Valley in Pakistan, high points in Albania, and volcanoes in Indonesia are on his list. He was generous in imparting his mountaineering skills to others; whether taking his six-year-old son up a wall in Eldorado Canyon, novice Boy Scouts into the Sierra, or coercing his co-workers in Asia into visiting remote passes and glaciers.

In reflecting on the many times we shared, what stands out is Gene's sheer enthusiasm at being on an adventure—his infectious, conspiratorial smile; his love of the local way of life; his quiet competence and strength on the trail. One day we reached a high pass in the Alps. Tired after hiking for many hours, Betsy and I were content to drink in the view. But not Gene. He saw a minor prominence nearby and, although already weakened by leukemia, he hiked to the top. I like to think of him hiking on still.

Gene is survived by Betsy; their children Eric, Greg, and Laura; and four grandchildren.

CHRIS JONES

*Brief obituaries of other AAC members may be found at [www.americanalpineclub.org](http://www.americanalpineclub.org)*

#### NECROLOGY

Vincent Boussellairé  
Wei Cui  
B. Franklin Heuston  
Edmund Hillary  
Pavle Kozjek

Gary L. Lee, M.D.  
Robert L. Max  
Jim Nasti  
Alan David Nelson  
Dr. Michael Petrilak, Jr.

Kenneth M. Prestrud  
Carloyn Randall  
William R. Stall  
James M. Welton  
Gene F. White