



Eugene Marion Espy

April 14, 1927 - August 22, 2025

Eugene Marion Espy of Atlanta, Georgia, formerly of Macon, Georgia, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on August 22, 2025.

Gene was born on April 14, 1927, in Cordele, Georgia, the son of the late Alto Lee Espy and Iona Peterman Espy. His extraordinary life began with an idyllic childhood that endowed him with a zest for living and learning.

Gene became Cordele's first Eagle Scout in 1943 and stayed involved in Boy Scouts through troop leadership and mentorship. He graduated in 1944 as the Valedictorian and Senior Class President from Cordele High School. Gene left the Georgia Institute of Technology to proudly serve his country in the U.S. Navy. Returning after World War II, he played clarinet in its marching band and joined the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity. Gene became "a helluva engineer" as he graduated in 1950 with a B.S. in Industrial Management. His support of Georgia Tech and its football team remained strong along with his love of Sousa marching band music.

Ever curious, Gene embraced all the adventures that the outdoors offered as he explored his hometown and the world beyond. As a boy, he rode his bicycle out to Lake Blackshear to fish. He built beautiful wooden powerboats, taught himself and others to water ski using his homemade skis, and explored caves and waters all over the Southeast. An excellent sailor, Gene sailed 300

miles solo down the Ocmulgee River to the Intracoastal Waterway. He told captivating stories of his 740-mile solo bicycle trip at age sixteen and hitch-hiking in college. Gene even rode his beloved motorcycle up Stone Mountain just for the thrill.

At age 24, Gene became recognized as the second thru-hiker of the Appalachian Trail and secured his place as one of its legendary pioneers. A winter mountain hike in college had inspired Gene to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail and “see God through nature.” Gene succeeded in his 123-day thru-hike of 2050 miles on September 30, 1951, by reaching Mt. Katahdin where he knelt down and thanked God. He returned over the years to section hike and support other hikers. Gene delighted in visiting the Amicalola Falls State Park Visitor Center to meet hikers, tell stories, and see his 1951 hiking equipment on display.

In 2011, Gene was honored as one of six inductees into the charter class of the Appalachian Trail Hall of Fame. Honoring the sixtieth anniversary of his summit on Mt. Katahdin, his city of Macon, Georgia, declared it as Gene Espy Day. Although he wrote his autobiography, “The Trail of My Life,” and often gave speeches and interviews, Gene always expressed interest in others’ outdoor adventures and encouraged people to “keep going one step at a time” through life’s challenges. Gene’s impact as an enthusiastic ambassador for the Appalachian Trail will continue.

As an engineer, Gene was well-recognized for his problem-solving and time management ideas. While his early career included overseeing the building of shrimp trawlers and the manufacture of clothing, he spent thirty years as an aeronautical engineer at Robins Air Force Base.

A true gentleman known for his kindness, generosity, and wry sense of humor, Gene actively helped his community. As a long-time member of Highland Hills Baptist Church, he faithfully served as a deacon, Sunday School teacher, and

much more. Gene was a member of the Macon Exchange Club, the Macon Lions Club, the Macon Touchdown Club, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, ALDHA, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, and the Georgia Wilderness Society, which established The Gene Espy Award.

Gene was predeceased by his parents and his brother, John Lee Espy. He is survived by his devoted wife of 71 years, Eugenia, his daughters Ellen Holliday and Jane Gilsinger (Jim), his granddaughters Courtney Holliday (Brandon Abernathy) and Amanda Gilsinger, and numerous nieces and nephews. His exemplary love of God and family guided his life. Gene will be greatly missed, but will live on in so many hearts and hikes.

The family will greet friends on Saturday, September 6, 2025, from 10-11 AM at Highland Hills Baptist Church, 1370 Briarcliff Road, Macon, Georgia. A memorial service will follow at 11 AM with a reception afterwards. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donations to the Appalachian Trail Museum, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, or Highland Hills Baptist Church.

Cemetery Details

Sunnyside Cemetery

East 8th Ave.
Cordele, GA 31015

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 6. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Highland Hills Baptist Church
1370 Briarcliff Road
Macon, GA

Memorial Service

SEP 6. 11:00 AM (ET)

Highland Hills Baptist Church
1370 Briarcliff Road
Macon, GA

Tribute Wall



“ *Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Eugene Marion Espy.*



September 03, 2025 at 04:40 PM



“ *Legendary is a word I would use to describe Gene. He led a full and productive life. I read his auto biography book a few years ago. He did some truly amazing things. When ever the AT is discussed, his name most surely will come up.*

Larry Brown - August 28, 2025 at 05:09 PM



“ *Met him on base about 30 years ago, he was such a nice humble guy and great engineer im told. Prayers for his family.*

Rohn Ussery - August 27, 2025 at 03:05 PM



Wonderful man,I was able to see him before I did my AT. In 5 Parts.Sent me a personal letter of encouragement that I still have.He was a small man with a big heart and love of the outdoors.,Glad he had a long life.May his family find peace in this time.

Basil Youman - September 04, 2025 at 02:51 PM

DB

“ Eugenia, Ellen and Jane, my sincere condolences to you. You all and Gene were great friends for all the 32 years Paula and I lived in Macon. I won't try and recall all our experiences. One that comes to mind was how nice you were to keep Bryan while we went to get Laurie. He was a big baby and when we returned, you Eugenia had him in your arms. I think we also went to many Little Theater performances and enjoyed Shoney's strawberry pie on the way home.

Your old friend,
David Bonner

David Bonner - August 25, 2025 at 07:20 PM

JE

“ Mr Espy's book on his hike of the Trail was both inspiring and entertaining. His soft demeanor will be missed.
Eugenia, Pat and I will not be able to attend the funeral, but we will be thinking about you.

Jimmy Elliott - August 25, 2025 at 03:36 PM

BC

“ Gene was my Boy Scout Explorer Post Advisor in Cordele in the early 1950s. He was a great man and was my inspiration for attending Georgia Tech. I was fortunate to have several opportunities to talk with him in Macon over the years and share some memories. Rest in peace Gene.

Bill Comer

Bill Comer - August 25, 2025 at 03:31 PM



“ *Beautiful Dreams was purchased for the family of Eugene Marion Espy.*



August 23, 2025 at 12:29 PM