



*Dr. William Gresham
Orrison*

June 30, 1943 - Jan. 15, 2025

With deep sadness, we announce the passing of Dr. William Gresham Orrison, age 81, on Wednesday, January 15, 2025. He was surrounded by love at his Lake James, North Carolina home.

Gresham's very full life revolved around family, friends, community, and service to others. A caring doctor and skilled eye surgeon, he took pride in improving, and sometimes saving, his patients' eyesight. An entrepreneur and astute businessman, he enjoyed collaborating with others to bring old buildings back to life, help downtowns thrive, and get small businesses off the ground. An active community member, he led and contributed to many worthy causes.

Gresham's formative years were spent in San Antonio, Texas, where he was born on June 30, 1943, to William Wallace Orrison, an MIT-trained civil and structural engineer, and Mary Elizabeth Dove Orrison, a school counselor. His parents instilled in him a lifelong passion for learning. Graduating from Alamo Heights High School in 1961, he set his sights on a medical career after being encouraged by a neighbor

who was an ophthalmologist. He attended Trinity University in San Antonio on scholarship, graduating in 1965 with a B.S., and entered the University of Texas Medical School that fall at the height of the Vietnam War. While in medical school, he joined the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and began active-duty service in 1968. He received his Doctor of Medicine in 1969 and then completed his internship in 1970 at the USAF's Wilford Hall Medical Center, obtaining a specialization in Aerospace Medicine later that year. He remained on active-duty while completing his Ophthalmology residency at the Mayo Clinic from 1972-74. He served as a medical officer, flight surgeon, and ophthalmologist for nearly a decade before his honorable discharge at the rank of Lt. Colonel in February 1978. Later that year, the American Academy of Ophthalmology elected him as a Fellow.

Gresham was at a crossroads. His zest for adventure and travel had taken him, quite literally, around the world, and in 1978, he applied for and was granted a license to practice medicine in New South Wales, Australia. However, a friend and fellow ophthalmologist, Dr. Larry Willis, convinced him to head instead to North Carolina in March 1978 to become a partner in Morganton Eye Physicians. Over the next four decades, he helped build a thriving regional practice with more than 175 employees, two state-licensed surgery centers, and clinics in several counties.

As an ophthalmologist at Morganton Eye, he impacted countless lives. Going anywhere in town with Gresham meant chats with appreciative past and present patients. Weekends, dinners, and sleep were often interrupted by calls to his personal phone from surgical patients with questions or concerns. He was that Doc, the rare, compassionate, and approachable one who said here is my number, call me anytime.

Gresham retired from Morganton Eye Physicians in June 2015. On January 1, 2019, he was inducted into the North Carolina Medical Society's "Fifty Year Club".

While practicing medicine was Gresham's professional calling, he was also a serial entrepreneur who loved "doing deals" and partnering on business ventures as varied as Morganton's first internet service, a radio station, and a chair company. His "home runs" offset any failures, and he made several lifelong friends along the way.

Gresham favorite "side business" was real estate, fostered early in his childhood by his widowed grandmother, Annie Gresham (Orrison) Lyons, who supplemented her teacher's salary by buying and investing in rental properties in San Antonio. He fondly

teachers salary by saving and investing in rental properties in San Antonio. He fondly recalled riding in her car as a child, watching and learning as she checked on properties and collected rent. Following her example, he went on to acquire a portfolio of properties in Morganton, Hendersonville, and Forest City, with his friend and real estate business partner, Mike Fulenwider. Together, they helped revitalize the downtowns and left a lasting mark on those communities.

Gresham's community involvement reached beyond his medical practice and business ventures. He was a life-long Episcopalian and member of Morganton's Grace Episcopal Church. He believed in the power of education and opportunity to lift people up, cared deeply about land and water conservation, sought ways to support people in need, and advocated for animal protection. An avid swimmer, runner, and hiker, he founded the Lake James Trails Association and led efforts that ultimately resulted in trails around the lake that are now the heart of the Fonta Flora State Trail. He was an early member of the South Mountains chapter of the Sierra Club, a Heritage Society member of Foothills Conservancy, a supporter of the Burke Arts Council, and an engaged board member of animal rescue groups, as well as many other organizations. He quietly provided buildings rent free for Morganton's men's shelters and supported the building of the Options shelter for women and families in crisis. During his 47 years in Morganton, he left an indelible mark on his community.

Gresham's huge heart and love for being in nature brought him a personal life full of joy. He had a special love for Lake James, where his engineer father helped him design and build a home. A shared interest in protecting the lake led to his meeting his wife, Susie, while she was working to expand Lake James State Park as the executive director of Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina. He loved spending time at the lake with friends and family, swimming, barbecuing, and boating. He also loved going to the coast with friends and family, taking long runs on the beach, and watching pelicans glide over the waves. Over the years, Gresham planted and tended many gardens, orchards, blueberry bushes, and bee hives. He cared for many pets, including Wilbur, the pig, a series of Great Danes, and his beloved dog Beau, who was by his side these last years.

Above all else, Gresham was a "helper" and a truly kind soul who was always there for friends, loved ones, and community. Cherished for his wit and self-assurance, his unconditional love and unwavering support, he was a devoted and loving partner and

husband to Susie for nearly two decades, and a beloved stepfather and grandfather.

We will carry his love with us when we next go to the woods to fulfill his last wishes...
“Let’s go for a walk, let’s go home...”

He was predeceased by his father William Wallace Orrison, mother Mary Elizabeth Dove Orrison, and sister Anne McNeel all of San Antonio, TX. He is survived by his wife Susie Hamrick Jones of Nebo, NC; stepdaughter Loren Jones of Morganton, NC; stepdaughter Arden Godek (husband Andrew) and stepgrandsons August Martin Godek and Arbuth Gresham Godek, of Nebo, NC; sister Mary Orrison of Houston, TX; nephew Tyler Swanson (wife Jean Daly) and grandnieces Nancy Daly Swanson and Frida Daly Swanson of Houston, TX; nephew Will Swanson (partner Ruth Siegel) and grandniece Nell Siegel-Swanson of Los Angeles, CA.

The family expresses deep gratitude to Gresham’s VIA Hospice & Palliative Care nurses, doctors, and staff and to the numerous Bayada and Home Instead caregivers who were by Gresham and Susie’s sides for many long months. We extend our deepest gratitude for the special loving care and friendship that Brenda Chapman gave Gresham for several years as he bravely faced failing health.

A Celebration of Life will be held on Saturday, February 1, 2025, at 2:30 p.m. at Grace Episcopal Church, 303 South King Street, Morganton, NC 28655. A reception and celebration of life will be held in the Parish Hall following the memorial service.

Gifts in memory of Gresham may be made to:

Trinity University, 1 Trinity Place #49, San Antonio, TX 78212 for The William Gresham Orrison and Annie Lyons Endowed Scholarship Fund. (www.trinity.edu)

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (www.foothillsconservancy.org)

The Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org)

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

What a nice man Dr. Orrison was. Worked with him many times when I worked at grace Ed! I loved when he took me out to see his old pickup truck but I told him it needed a new floor board as it had a hole in it! That didn't bother him, he loved that old truck! He would always give me a smile. I am glad Susie came along to help him in his later years too! Prayers for the family

—Lisa cutts

Sorry for your loss,Susie. Prayers Linda Kincaid and Jim Belote.

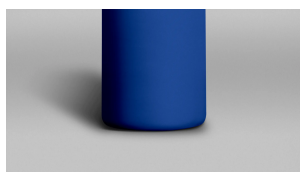
—Jim Belote

I met Gresham when we first moved to our neighborhood. My early memory is when my mother, who was visiting from ND, had a major stroke. I was sitting alone outside the ICU when Gresham saw my mothers name on the admission sheet and came up and just sat with me and talked. He also did this when I had heart surgery. He always took the time out of his busy schedule to care for others. These visits are clear in my mind and I will never forget his kindness. He was wonderful to work with in the Sierra Club and other community activities. May he rest in peace.

—Steven Lian



Dr. Orrison was my eye doctor for 37 years. I started seeing him when I was 12 in 1978 at Morganton Eye Physicians. I



have a eye birth defect and he was always so compassionate and understanding. He took extra time and care with me. I was sad when he retired. I'm sorry to hear of his passing but I'm sure he has gone on to receive many great rewards for a job well done.

—Melisa Hoyle Smith

All of us at Trinity would like to convey our sincere condolences on the loss of William Gresham Orrison. We are proud of our alumnus and his contributions to his family, friends, patients, and community. We are grateful for being a part of his journey. Please know that his family is in our hearts and prayers during this difficult time. Very truly yours, Kristine Howland, Director Trinity University Alumni Relations & Development Office

—Kristine N Howland



Gresham was always a great landlord, business mentor and friend!! He assisted my small company in providing us with rental space so that our business would have room to grow. He liked to help us with advice for our business growth and development and of course we liked to sit around and share stories!! I truly thought the world of Gresham Orrison. He was a very kind and generous person!! He will be sorely missed. My heart and prayers go out to all the family during this time!! Susie was a phenomenal care giver and rarely left his side!! She is also a great lady!! Condolences! Pam Douglas.

—Pamela Douglas

We are so sorry to hear of your loss. Dr. Orrison treated us for many years. We could trust him with our eyes. Our prayers are with you.

—Susan P Ingram

—Jean Salisbury

I'm so saddened the passing of dear Gresham. I haven't seen him in years, in fact since he was at my wedding in Winston-Salem. But Gresham was one of the first people to welcome me to Morganton and he became my friend and my doctor. I was hitting in the eye by a racquetball. It smashed my goggles. Gresham met me at his office and saved that eye. This was about 7:30 8:00 at night. He didn't hesitate. He didn't suggest I go to the emergency room. He just left whatever it was he was doing and came to my aid. My heart goes out to all who loved him.

—Pamela Merritt



My condolences to Susie, family and friends!!

—Alexis

Susie, I am so so sorry for your loss. Having read about your husband's adventures, I know you take solace in knowing how many people he helped and things he accomplished. My the Lord grant you and your family peace and comfort.

—Rachel Hahn



—Christopher Riegert



Prayers for Susie,family and friends. He was a great Doctor took care of his patients and was concerned for for each one. May God bless each one of you

—Wanda V. Smith



—Anonymous

Our deepest condolences to Susie, family and friends. I first met Dr. Orrison when I took students from the NC School for the Deaf to have their eyes examined. He always displayed a special compassion for the Deaf and engaged me in side conversations. We both had a love for the outdoors and had some good outings at the 105 farm with other Sierra Club members. May our gracious Lord give all who mourn an extra measure of grace as we navigate the grieving process. Thank you Lord for a good and faithful servant.

—Wayne and Leslie Giese