

Michael Thomas Gray, a lifelong Californian and computer engineer who helped pioneer the use of microprocessors during the dawn of Silicon Valley, died surrounded by his family on Aug. 16, 2019 at Silverado Berkeley Memory Care Community. He was 87.

Born April 2, 1932 in Yuba City, CA, Mike grew up in neighboring Marysville. An altar boy and Boy Scout, he attended Catholic school and graduated from Marysville High School. He and his childhood friends, Eldon Johnson and Les Carpenter, remained his buddies throughout their lives. As soon as Mike learned to read, his mother, Helen Gray, introduced him to the town library, and he quickly made it his second home, enamored especially with how-to science and magic books. He built his first crystal radio from plans in a Boy Scout manual and almost blew up the family garage in high school during a chemistry experiment to make fireworks. His father, Eugene Gray, taught him to swim and fish in Donner Lake, and to drive at the age of 13. Gene also taught his son sing harmony, instilling a love of music that led to the Glee Club in high school and lifetime of choir and barbershop quartet singing.

When the Korean War broke out, Mike enlisted in the Air Force. He trained as a radar technician, and spent the war stationed in England as part of a bomb scoring detachment where he helped train Strategic Air Command bomber crews. While in England, he bought an MG sports car, and then an Austin-Healey which came back with him to the States. On his tour of duty, he also learned to ski in Switzerland, caught a Folies Bergère show in Paris, and stood in Trafalgar Square to see Queen Elizabeth II's coach during her coronation.

After his 1954 discharge, Mike attended the California Institute of Technology under the GI Bill. At Caltech, he studied under Linus Pauling and Richard Feynman on his way to earning a physics degree.

In 1958, Mike married Dorothy Kamer from Alhambra, and before long the couple were settled in Los Angeles and expecting the first of their six children over an 18-year marriage. In addition to starting a family, Mike began his association with California's infant computer industry. Setting aside plans for graduate studies, he joined a small company, Scantlin Electronics, and worked with its founder and data processing pioneer, Jack Scantlin, building and marketing the Quotron Stock Quotation System, which electronically recorded Wall Street ticker tape data, searched for the last recorded transaction of a specified stock and printed the results. The Quotron was a revolutionary online system, with local server systems in cities and data terminals in brokerage offices connected to a central computer via modems, that preceded the Internet by more than 20 years.

Following a move to northern California and the future Silicon Valley in 1965, Mike co-founded Cybercom, with the goal of replacing data entry punched cards with a magnetic tape recording system. He became friends with Bob Noyce, the Intel co-founder and CEO who also sat on Cybercom's board of directors and designed the world's first microprocessor chip. The Intel connection continued after Mike started his own consulting firm, Gray Computer Systems, in the early 1970s when Noyce gave him five of the first 8008 model chips which he used to design a groundbreaking computer terminal for entering medical records.

A few years before, the Gray family had moved to Los Altos and restored a Victorian built by

Sarah Winchester, heiress to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company fortune. Another adventure came in the summer of 1971 when Mike loaded his children into a used VW camper to tour the country and visit his Montana, Wisconsin and Vermont family branches.

Mike remarried after his 1976 divorce, and he and Jean Plesset Taylor found happiness together as his career progressed over the next decades. Mike returned to the consulting business, forming Gray Associates with Jean and, later, engineer Jay Doty as partners. They focused on developing fax modem technology to send data files and documents between personal computers and eventually over the internet. Gray Associates also created a test system that allowed fax machine designers to analyze communication problems with other fax products and improve compatibility. Rockwell, the chief supplier of modem chips to the fax industry, recommended the system to its customers, and sales took off. In 1996, it became the Telegra Corporation with outside investors, an office in Santa Clara and 19 employees, and Mike began giving seminars on fax and data communications technology internationally. Two years later, Hewlett-Packard capped the company's rise by acquiring it.

In his retirement, Mike and Jean enjoyed traveling and visiting their shared children and grandchildren. During their long marriage, they built a home in Truckee, where he helped found the Tahoe Truckee Mountaineer Barbershop Quartet. Mike and Jean also live in Los Gatos and San Francisco as well as Culver City, Encinitas, San Diego, Roseville in California, and Portland, Oregon. After Jean passing in 2015, Mike eventually returned to California to Berkeley, to be closer to more of his children and grandchildren.

Mike loved camping and wilderness hiking, climbing Gray's Peak with his sons in 1988. He also enjoyed cooking Chinese dishes, playing the piano, watching movies, and going to the gym. Mike and Jean were also active in the UC San Diego Osher Lifelong Learning Program, where Mike taught very popular classes on California history.

He is survived by a brother, Chris Gray; five married children, Michele Rosenblum, Daniel Gray, Jeremy Gray, Timothy Gray and Matthew Gray; two stepdaughters, Karen Bryan and Lisa Taylor; and 11 grandchildren ranging from 4 to 26 in age. Preceding him in death were his youngest child, Teddy Gray, and his beloved wife, Jean.