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Collierville's Glen May dies in Calif. rocket blast

By Tom Bailey
[Contact](#)
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He loved rockets so much that some people called him "Rocket Man."

Glen May built a rocket-bike, a rocket go-cart, even a rocket-powered canoe.

"I was the one who lit the rocket," said his father, Roy May, his eyes glazed red with grief on Friday.

"It had so much power it stood the boat straight up in the air," he recalled of that day about five years ago on his 6-acre lake in McNairy County.

Glen, a 45-year-old Collierville native, was killed in California this week testing an historic rocket for the private, manned SpaceShipTwo.

The Collierville High grad was a propulsion technician for the company building it, Scaled Composites LLC.

And Scaled Composites is making the rocket ship as part of a commercial fleet for billionaire adventurer Richard Branson and his Virgin Galactic.

Glen May's mother, Shirley Booth of Collierville, had logged on to her computer early Thursday evening just to check for new e-mails.

But the Internet news headline that automatically appeared on the screen made her immediately concerned.

Explosion in the Mohave Desert kills two.

The accident wound up claiming three lives and critically injuring three others.

Booth knew her son would be one of the people involved in testing the rocket motor for Scaled Composites.

"The detail on the Internet was descriptive of what he tells me they did when they're testing them," Booth said Friday.

Several phone calls later, the company confirmed her son's death.

She sat late Friday morning looking at old photos, letters and mementos in the sun room of her and her husband, Melvin Booth's, home.

He's Glen's stepfather and deputy director of public works for Shelby County.



Booth Family photo

Collierville-born Glen May always loved rockets. He built a rocket powered go-cart when he was a boy.

Shirley Booth pulled from a briefcase two toy soldiers, those green plastic ones less than 2 inches tall.

Glen had sent his childhood toys into space in 2004 with the historic SpaceShipOne, the first privately developed manned space flight.

They were the type of soldiers he would position around the toy rockets he launched as a child, pretending the soldiers fired them.

"He's always been interested in rockets since elementary school," she said.

As he grew older he joined rocket clubs.

The hobby connected him with someone who began working in California with Scaled Composites. The friend urged Glen to come, too.

"He went out there when they were starting SpaceShipOne," Shirley Booth said.

"You've heard people say they live on the edge? He was forever living on the edge."

Glen went sky diving, deep-sea diving, hang gliding, gliding and -- what do you call it? -- rocket-riding.

She pulled out photos.

Glen jetting on a go-cart, orange heat spewing from the rocket.

Glen on a rocket-powered bike as it whirs by a parked SpaceShipOne.

She pulled out another, older photo. Two boys sitting on a couch.

"That's him with the black eye," she said, smiling. "He never backed away from anybody."

She pulled out an orange-handled wrench. She wondered aloud if Glen kept it because he used it on SpaceShipOne.

She pulled out a letter he'd written while serving in the Army in Korea.

He wrote of the thrill he felt from parachuting from a helicopter, and how the chopper "climbed like a rocket."

She pulled out a stack of his business cards.

She turned some of them over and pointed something out.

Glen had written:

"R is for Rocket."

"S is for Space."

Services had not been arranged Friday.

-- Tom Bailey: 529-2388

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