

Stephen Wilhite, inventor of the meme-favorite GIF, has died

March 24 2022, by Tali Arbel



This photo provided by Webby Awards, Stephen Wilhite accepts his Webby lifetime achievement award on May 2013 in New York. Wilhite, the inventor of the internet-popular short-video format, the GIF, has died. His wife, Kathaleen, said Thursday, March 24, 2022, in a phone interview that he died of COVID on March 14. Credit: Webby Awards via AP

Stephen Wilhite, the inventor of the internet-popular short-video format, the GIF, has died. He was 74.

His [wife](#), Kathaleen, said Thursday in a phone interview that he died of COVID on March 14.

Wilhite, who lived in Milford, Ohio, won a [Webby lifetime achievement award](#) in 2013 for inventing the GIF, which decades after its creation became omnipresent in memes and on [social media](#), often used as a cheeky representation of a cultural moment.

Wilhite was working at CompuServe in 1987 when he invented the GIF. "I saw the format I wanted in my head and then I started programming," [he told The New York Times](#) in 2013, saying the first image was an airplane and insisting that the file had only one pronunciation - a soft "G," like Jif [peanut butter](#). Those using the hard "G," as in "got" or "given," "are wrong," he said. "End of story."

In that interview, he said the '90s-era [dancing baby GIF](#) is a favorite of his.

"There's way more to him than inventing GIF," Kathaleen Wilhite said of her husband, who loved [trains](#), with a room dedicated to them in the basement of their house with "enormous train tracks," as well as taking camping trips. Still, even after he retired in 2001, "he never stopped programming," she said.

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