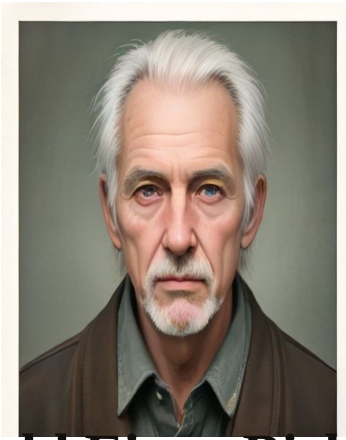




Torvald Einar Birkeland

November 8, 1944 - August 19, 2026

Ketchikan, Alaska

Torvald Einar Birkeland died in Ketchikan on August 19, 2026. He was eighty-one. Born there on November 8, 1944, he grew up knowing rain as a work schedule, not a conversation. His father kept a seine skiff running in weather that punished hesitation. Torvald learned a splice before he learned a highway south.

He spent most of his adult life on a cannery dock, first as a kid dragging hoses, later as the man who could hear a tired pump before the logbook admitted it. He did not own the boats. He kept other people's fish from becoming a story about waste. Skippers called him because he would shut a line even when the tender was already promised. He kept a coffee can of stainless hardware and a refusal to charge a village clinic what a catalog said a hose was worth.

He married Ingrid Birkeland in 1969. They raised two sons in a house that needed a new mudroom every decade. Ingrid taught at the elementary. Torvald packed her lunches with the same seriousness he packed a toolbox. After his hands stiffened he still came out for a favorite skiff, moving slower, swearing with more precision.

Friends remember a man who would jump a battery in a wet lot without calling it a favor, who could sit through a long potluck without making the rain a personality, and who owned one good parka. He liked the channel in late April, when the water finally argued with itself, and a slice of pie he never quite finished. He died in Ketchikan, the only latitude he had ever needed. The dock light is off. A lot of small boats still start because he was stubborn about a job.

Services

A memorial in Ketchikan. A walk to the dock afterward if the weather allows. A gift to a harbor-safety fund suits him.

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