

on the corner “Bill”

By Robert Docter, Editor-In-Chief

Sweet is the scene where genial friendship plays the pleasing game of interchanging praise (Oliver Wendell Holmes).

Friendship goes deep when the parties share life experiences, live common values, and have a loving attitude toward one another. I shared such a relationship with Bill Bearchell (1929-2013). Our families caught the flavor of our joy and found the same refreshment—wife to wife, child to child, family to family—and allowed us to generate our own rich memories from common experiences. All of those memories bring a warm smile.



Our families did much together and knew each other well. Our moods moved in parallel. We never lived close. It was always a drive, but the arrival was always worth it. When the children were young, the entire group was present everywhere we traveled. As they grew older, the size of the group diminished until it was just we few, we happy four, we band of brothers and sisters in his giant motor home.

During a few decades we traveled through all of the states in the western U.S., Canada, Alaska and Hawaii, and in the later years two cruises. During the first one, we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversaries.

We were both married the same year, and we celebrated our 25th anniversaries together by reciting our vows in Honolulu at a Salvation Army chapel officiated by then Divisional Commander Major Glenn Austin. The audience consisted of a single stray dog who followed both couples down the aisle and wandered around during the recitation of our vows. The dog confused Glenn so much he had me marrying Grace and Bill to Diane. We corrected him, but at that point the decorum of the process went to the dogs.

We had a few other breakdowns of the vehicle type along the way, and each time while sitting along the road we directed Grace to start praying. Invariably, within less than five minutes, an unbidden rescue vehicle appeared around a curve. That's power. On these trips we never overspent; Bill was

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never frivolous with money. He was an interesting combination of both frugal and generous.

I'm fairly certain the only thing Bill enjoyed spending money on was his rolling stock. He always had great cars—up-to-date and comfortable—but I think his favorite might just have been his rebuilt 1928 Model A Roadster.

As we finished each trip, while saying good-bye, Bill would always say, “another link in the chain of memories.”

He said the same thing to me in 1964 in transit as the Tabernacle Band returned to Los Angeles from our first European tour. We sat next to each other in an old three-tailed, prop-driven Lockheed Constellation on take-off from Gander, Newfoundland, when the engine outside our window blew. POW! Gander has a long runway, so the pilot had room to abort the takeoff. With the plane now under control and coming to a stop, Bill looked over and said those words: “another link in a chain of memories.”

He was an amazing man—oops, there's that word, “amazing”—often uttered, it seems, about almost anything. On hearing it, Bill and my wife, Diane, would add words from a play written (I think) by Bob Tobin for the Hollywood Tabernacle. As the word, “amazing,” was used, they would always add: “But it's true.”

And, of course, in the life of Bill Bearchell, it is “true.” He lived a complete life, a life of integrity. He succeeded at everything he did and seemed so blasé about it.

He completed his formal education with a doctorate.

As a Marine officer, he flew fighters off aircraft carriers—the most desired job in the corps.

As a musician, he played the most challenging, visible and difficult instrument in the brass band—the soprano cornet—and loved playing the piano and organ.

As an educator, he knew how to relate to youth and rose to become the principal administrator of a large school.

As a husband, Bill was warm, loving, protective, caring, considerate and patient. His love and concern for Grace and her continued care were among his final words.

As a father, he and Grace raised a family, and at an appropriate age their children spread their wings because they gave them the love and confidence necessary to seize their freedom. There was always humor in the house, always love, always fun, and always discipline.

Bill was deeply spiritual. Every morning began with devotions—studying, making notes, praying. He was consistent in his faith. His belief system was solid. He lived it in a manner that caused others to want it. He never imposed it.

As an officer in The Salvation Army, he brought his entire history, his ethos and ethic, to the men and women with whom he worked in the adult rehabilitation centers of the West. They enjoyed him and respected him.

In retirement, he and Grace filled in at many appointments, especially if there had been a recent breakdown, and always left them sometime later with the flag flying higher and brighter.

Of all his many skills and attributes, all of his professional positions, I think he and Grace loved this responsibility of Army officership more than any other.

And now, this link in a chain of memories—formed with our own memories—lives on as we cherish the contribution of Bill Bearchell to the life of each of us.