

Bill Moore Remembered

Donna Belk, Certified Celebrant
Saturday, December 13, 2014
Hope Chapel, Austin, Texas

Today we are gathered to honor the life of Bill Moore and to celebrate his life.

When people think of Bill they recall his gentle disposition and tilted wit. He always carried a book and the Statesman crossword puzzle. He loved puns and practical jokes and trivia, and people often called him if they needed to know some obscure bit of information. He wore a hat every day. He loved history in general and Texas in particular; he traveled back roads with binoculars and a bird identification book. When he was at college, he teamed up with the Spelunker's Club and crawled around in caves. When he lived downtown, he left for work early and came home late because he walked the alleys of Austin studying the plants, fences and building structures. After moving out of the downtown area, he rode the bus to work; he would leave home early and get off the bus to get coffee and take his morning stroll from MLK to the jail on 8th street. He loved to observe people, and the early morning patrons and 7-11 clerks got to know him well. He always saw life as a great adventure and was able to sort the important things from the trivial.

Bill was born in Waco on February 1, 1951, and Sgt. William S. and Elizabeth Billingsley Moore adopted Bill at birth. He never had much interest in finding his birth family, as he always said his family were the people who raised him. Bill's father was in the Air Force and the family transferred to England when Bill was two years old. He said he remembered seeing the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and wanted to return one day. His mom said they lived above a tavern and when the parents went out, he would stay with the tavern owners as the tavern was located beneath their apartment. He would sit on the tavern's wood bar and entertain the patrons. When he got fussy, the barkeep would dip his finger in the whiskey bottle and give Bill a wee nip, and he would nod off to sleep on a pallet behind the bar.

When the family returned to the U.S. they lived in El Paso. Bill talked about hiding in the hills and playing in sand dunes. The Moores were in San Antonio for a short while; then Sgt. Moore retired when Bill was in eighth grade, and the family moved back to Waco. His dad bought an ice cream shop and Bill worked there for two years; that was as long as the small business survived. Bill says he ate all the profits.

When Bill was twelve years old, his parents adopted his then four year-old sister, Michelle. Bill and Michelle were very close as children, and Bill often intervened when there were disagreements between his baby sister and their parents. His parents were also foster parents and he and his sister got especially close to one child, Wayne. Bill reminisced often about the trip the three kids took with his parents to the Grand Canyon. When Wayne returned to his family, both Bill and Michelle had a difficult time. They were sad to see him go as he had become a brother to them. Unfortunately, the family lost touch with Wayne through the years.

The last trip Bill took with his parents was riding the train to Mexico. The family spent several days touring the area and they all met a woman who claimed to be Mrs. Pancho Villa, the widow of the prominent Mexican Revolutionary general. The photo is on the memorial table out front so you can see it. Bill wore his cowboy hat and Mrs. Villa stands about shoulder high next to him as though the brim was sheltering her from the sun.

Bill graduated from Richfield High in Waco in 1969 and worked for about a year in the Waco plastics factory making PVC pipe, then decided to leave his home town and go to school. He got in his trusty VW bug and drove to Buda, Texas to go to school in San Marcos. He earned his rent money by playing poker with his friends. His quiet and unassuming manner worked well for him in maintaining his poker face. Perhaps there are some poker friends here today who even helped Bill earn his rent money in the past

A friend suggested that Bill leave school and earn some money in Austin. So he packed up again and was hired at Austin State Hospital (ASH). Bill loved the job. One night one of the nurses told him he could get his Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) certificate and earn more money while still caring for the patients. So Bill worked nights at ASH and went to Austin Community College, earning his LVN in 1976. He continued to work at the hospital and transferred to the Center for the Deaf. He learned basic sign language there, which served him well after he was hired at Travis County Jail (TCJ).

Bill worked over seven years at ASH. Some of his fellow nurses who had been hired at TCJ encouraged him to apply there. In 1983 he applied, was hired, and worked 31 years at Travis County Jail and Travis County Correctional Complex at Del Valle. He worked at the downtown facility in the jail above the courthouse, and moved when they built the new jail in 1986. He was transferred to Del Valle around 2006, where he worked until his illness made it impossible for him to work anymore.

Bill valued education. He decided to go back to college again, so he worked the day shift at his job and commuted from Austin to San Marcos to attend Texas State University in the evenings. He graduated in 1988 with a BA in Political Science.

In terms of his social activities, Bill was in the school band in Waco and played the flute. Then he found the theater, and his social group broadened.

Once Bill moved to Austin in 1974, his social group expanded even more. A high school friend invited him to Thursday Night Bridge Club. Bill knew the basics of bridge because his parents hosted many bridge parties. The bridge club became his social group, and many of the people he met there have remained friends over the past 40 years.

Alana's roommate, Dana, a member of the bridge club, introduced Alana to Bill. Bill and Alana dated for a bit and one day Bill and Alana rode his Honda 350 motorcycle

down to Hunter, Texas where Bill introduced Alana to his mom. The next Thanksgiving Alana took Bill to meet her family. When they got back to Austin, Bill got down on one knee and asked Alana to marry him. She thought he was joking and told him he had to call her dad and ask for her hand in marriage if he was serious. He did! She was shocked, but said yes.

He didn't have a traditional ring so he took the ring he wore, which he bought in Mexico, and used that as their engagement ring. Bill gave his high school ring to a jeweler and asked that it be melted down and made into a wedding band for Alana. Alana sent off to the Universal Life Church for a minister's certificate for their friend, Rudy, so he could perform their wedding ceremony. Rudy became known as the Right Reverend Rudy Hyde; and he performed the nuptials on the bridge in Waterloo Park in view of the state capital building on May 20, 1978. This was a perfect setting given Bill's interest in history and nature.

Bill's sixth sense always worked overtime, and a year later, in 1979, he knew Alana was pregnant before she did. When Austin was born, Bill was smitten. He loved playing with his child. He took Austin to buildings with stairs so Austin could climb up and down; they went dumpster diving for treasures. Bill sneaked candy to Austin against Alana's distinct instructions. When Austin got older, Bill took him fishing and exploring the same alleys he had walked alone before becoming a dad. He took Austin and playmates to the LBJ library so they could roll down the steep hill behind the building, and play in the fountain there. They played in the creeks and in school playgrounds. Bill especially liked taking Austin to the Renaissance Fairs where they could be guys together. As Austin got older, they went to movies of Austin's choosing, so, Bill learned a lot about the superheroes of the 1980's. Austin and Alana were really the center of Bill's world. Alana and Bill were married 37 years when he died.

Though Bill didn't join many organizations, he had many diverse interests. He was always interested in politics. His dirty little secret was that he'd worked for the Nixon campaign when he was in high school. But by the time he was in Austin his worldview had changed. For two decades, every time Lloyd Doggett ran for office, Bill volunteered to work his campaign. Three years ago he joined the Texas Tribune (a nonprofit organization educating the public on policy issues). He took off work to attend their annual seminars and always returned home excited that he got to hear the movers and shakers on both sides of the aisle.

He loved Kinky Friedman whose public persona crossed Bill's three great loves-humor, politics and music. Bill often talked about the riotous concert that Kinky played in the early 1970s; Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys played El Tejano Ballroom in Troy, TX. It was a little place that catered to cowboys and farmers and when they began playing the conservative crowd became insulted. A riot ensued and Bill left through a window while Kinky and his band slipped out the back. Bill went to every book signing Kinky had in Austin. One of his prized photos was taken when he ran into Kinky while crossing Congress Avenue. Bill and Kinky are staring into the camera, Bill in his hat and Kinky in his, but Kinky has a cigar in his mouth.

Bill's love of different historical times varied, but he always was fascinated by the British Isles and Scotland in particular. He attended the Burns' Suppers, the Celtic celebration of the Poet of Scotland, Robert Burns. Bill even bought a kilt and sporran to wear. (A sporran is a man purse since kilts have no pockets). Bill took the challenge to eat haggis at their celebrations the last three years before his illness. For those who do not know, haggis is a sausage made with sheep's pluck (or innards), oatmeal, suet, and spices.

Bill was always interested in caring for others. He served on the board of Ecology Action, the City of Austin's Citizen's Advisory Committee for Medical Assistance Program, and Windsor Park's Contact Team, where individuals are stewards and advocates of their neighborhood, working with the city staff on implementing neighborhood plan recommendations, and serving as community contacts. In 2006 Bill was proud to have assisted in research for the TCJ protocol for opiate withdrawal and was even credited in an article by Dr. Lawrence Hauser in the *Resident and Staff Physician* medical journal.

Bill often joked that his work led him to know people in low places. Bill never treated people differently because of their economic or social standing. He said his favorite patients were the street people, because he was able to give to them when the rest of the world either ignored them, or even disdained them. It was not unusual for a former guest of the jail to approach Bill out in public to give him an update on their various health conditions.

As part of his caring nature, Bill never met an animal that didn't like him. Their cat, Pepper, used to live across the street from the Moore's for a couple of years, but when guardians of Pepper got new kittens, Pepper wasn't happy and crossed the street to get extra attention. When it got cold one evening, Bill invited Pepper in. She found a small blanket on the sofa, marked it, and settled in. After that, she was officially a member of the Moore family.

Missy, the dog, came to live in Bill's home when Bill's mother, Elizabeth, could no longer care for her. Missy was truly bonded with her man and would do whatever Bill told her. Every evening after Bill got home from work, he would walk Missy around the block without a leash. Some neighbors were initially upset, but once they saw how she loved and listened to Bill, no one bothered him about it. When Bill became ill, Missy would sit by the bed and look up at her friend, not understanding why they didn't go for their walks anymore. Now that Bill is gone, Missy moves her doggy bed in front the bedroom door as though she is waiting for him to return.

Bill loved gardening. His specialties were tomatoes and bluebonnets. His front yard is a blue carpet from February through early June. The seedlings are sprouting as we speak, though it isn't spring. Bill broadcasted seeds everywhere over the last five years, and even a house around the corner had a few bluebonnets this year. Hopefully this was a pleasant surprise for the property owners. He also tossed seeds outside the Del Valle correctional complex, so if you drive by and see the lupines blooming, remember Bill.

Bill learned to love all genres of music from his parents. His parents followed the country music circuit since his mother played and wrote music. They saw Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys every chance they got, and even traveled to Nashville for the music.

His parents were also art patrons, and Bill grew up attending theater and musicals. His favorite musical was South Pacific. There's some speculation this is why he loved wearing colorful flower-print, Polynesian- or Hawaiian style shirts. He loved all music and his last concert was Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis. His iPod included everything from Hank Williams to The Grateful Dead to the Beatles to traditional Japanese music, to friends in his favorite local band, Poor Yorick. His favorite song was *Amazing Grace* on the bagpipes.

The family wishes to extend their gratitude to long-time friends and co-workers who stayed in touch and who visited with Bill during his illness. Also to AGE of Central Texas, an adult day care center where the loving staff made Bill's last days safe and enjoyable, and Hospice Austin, who provided Bill and the family with comfort care and oceans of compassion that allowed Bill to remain at home. Bill knew he was loved and appreciated because of the kindness of his chosen and work family.

Bill is preceded in death by his mother, father and sister. He is survived by his Uncle Felix Billingsley of Houston, his wife, Alana, and his son, Austin, and his sister's four children, Kate, Megan, Travis, and Micah.

Since Bill appreciated the poetry of Robert Burns, it seems entirely appropriate to include this piece which coincidentally describes Bill so well.

Epitaph on a Friend by Robert Burns:

An honest man here lies at rest,
The friend of man, the friend of truth,
The friend of age, and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so inform'd;
If there's another world, he lives in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.

In closing, the Scottish poet, Thomas Campbell, said: "To live in the hearts we leave behind. is not to die." And that is what this celebration of life is all about - Bill lives on in each of us.