

# Eulogy for Bill Wolber

Teresa Wolber

The last two years of my dad's life have been a blessing. I watched my father reconnect with a new life, with my brother Paul and family and the Bridgepoint community. I called most Sundays and we talked about politics, work, kids and the mundane things that make up each day. Although I knew each time we spoke I should cherish it as it could be the last, I was still unprepared for the abruptness of my dad's death. Although mercifully unexpected it left me feeling cheated out of that last talk, the last time I could tell him how much he meant to me and that I loved him.

The afternoon of his death my brother and I went back to his apartment. As I rummaged around trying to find his important possessions I found a surprising gift. It seems that my father had enrolled in a writing class and he had several composition books filled with essays. Over the past several weeks these compositional pearls have been like a continued conversation with my dad. Many of the essays are about his youth, his summers at Torch Lake as a preteen, his idolization of his brother Joe, and the big influence of his sister Gerry. He wrote about overcoming his nerdiness with girls. *"It wasn't that I didn't like girls I was terrified of them. Mostly I was tongue tied and bereft of any meaningful speech when in their presence,"* about meeting my mother, Vel, and his very funny and tender proposal where he *"proceeded to set forth a list of my faults and failings. I got maybe three-quarters through when I*

*saw her eyes misting up. She made me stop and so I took out the little black box with the little engagement ring. Then Vel really did start crying."* She accepted his proposal.

His compositions remarkably encompass all of the themes that I associate with my father. His opening essay was on the healing power of music and it's ability to *"catalyze the emotions, replicate a memory and even drive us to the point of tears."* He wrote about another of his great loves: football. Unbeknownst to me, as a junior at Michigan he had tried out for *"the Big10's new 150 pound football team. I was taking physical chemistry and thermodynamics that fall, and sprained my wrist so that I missed taking a month of class notes so I had to drop out of the tryouts. I wouldn't have made the team anyway."* He also wrote about watching his oldest son Paul go out for football in eighth grade. *"You have to understand he was probably the most miserable lineman in the city of Detroit. He'd get knocked down by the opposition and pick himself up crying—but he'd pick himself up. He was bound to be a football player. At the end of the season there was a football dinner for the team and parents. The coach distributed letter sweaters. I kept my eye on Paul. He was on the fourth string I couldn't believe he expected one too. Finally the coach gave out one more sweater. I couldn't believe my eyes! My son's face was lit up like the rising sun. It wasn't just an award for a sport it was an*

*acknowledgement of perseverance. I've never been so proud of him."*

My father wrote about his work. He wrote missives on how to solve truck fires and building dew point hygrometers so that rocket engines wouldn't freeze up. You see my dad was not only a capable engineer and physicist but he was gifted as a team manager. Transitioning from Bendix to Cummins he writes, *"In 1980, I started a new job on a Monday after early retiring on a Friday, supposedly to be the sensor guru for one of the premiere diesel engine companies in the world. On Wednesday two weeks later, the man who hired me changed jobs to another company. On Friday I was given the care and feeding of the Electronics Department, thirteen electrical engineers out of about 500 others who didn't know an electron from a screw driver and were all younger than my own kids."* He found himself again mentoring young engineers and especially enjoyed furthering the careers of women in the mostly male dominated world of automotive engineering.

My Dad wrote about people. He wrote about his neighbor, Kim Tyler *"Kim was an age to be my granddaughter and we became fast friends. It was the late afternoon of a March day when I had my heart attack. I thought I'd put out the trash but when I had taken it down my steep front drive, I slumped to the ground. People boiled out of my neighbor's houses. I asked Kim to help me back into my house. 'Nonsense,' she said, 'I'm calling 911.' From being my friend, Kim was my lifesaver."* He wrote about spending a day with Ben Franklin, also an inventor, engineer and consummate Renaissance man, *"In spending my day with Ben, I would*

*especially try to explore his curiosity, a drive I share with him. I'd be content to let him set the pace, whatever he was curious about today. If the subject was wise sayings for his Almanac, I'd be content to do my best to follow his lead and maybe I could even match a curious item that he would add to his repertoire. Wouldn't that be fun!"*

He also wrote a scathing letter to President Bush on how best to deal with Iraq. I'll just leave that subject as my father often did in his writing, *"but that's another story."*

Ultimately the strongest theme in his writing was his love for his wife Vel, his children and grandchildren. He writes fondly of the *"cracker box house built of bits and pieces during the War, with its temperamental coal furnace and the railroad tracks beyond the back yard which eventually cracked the basement foundation."* It was where he and my mother first made a home, *"it was a source of great misery and the site of great love."*

I would like to read one essay in its entirety. Call it a final word to his children and grandchildren from a man who loved them dearly.

### **Teaching My Kids**

*The first thing I have to tell you is that the teaching was mainly by Vel, especially in the preschool years. On what was most important, we agreed that they should grow up to be good people. They should strive to learn well, to be useful people, but that was not the first priority. When each saw a way to make a difference, to help someone, to be a loving person, then putting him or*

*herself on the line was what we wanted our kids to feel, a need to fill the job.*

*By and large, I think that we succeeded pretty well, especially Vel. She taught our kids by example. They learned to help when they could by watching her help others. And we also held a high standard for their interpersonal relationships. Now that they are grown, they have the usual problems, but I can see that they are the kind of people I'm proud of, the kind who are always asking how they can help. I like the kind of people they've chosen for friends. I'm pleased with the way they've gone about teaching my grandchildren. There isn't much I'd want to change about teaching priorities.*

*- Bill Wolber*