

**A Good Word for Bill Earthman**  
**September 18, 2006**

You will find this an irony, I think, but one of the real joys of my vocation is found in listening to a family reminisce and talk in the aftermath of death. Those are holy and sacred moments – filled with laughter and tears - when I am invited to get to know someone – really get to know someone – even after their life on this earth is over. Cindy and Billie left it with me to pick the Scripture to be read today. I'm glad they did, for in sitting in silence with my Bible open on my lap, this text from Hebrews jumped out at me, for as soon as I read those words *and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us* (Hebrews 12.1), I couldn't help but smile. You see to best describe Bill to me, Cindy thought of the perfect story. When she was in grade school and John F. Kennedy was president, JFK put forth an initiative to get our children more physically fit and healthy. It was the "Run a Mile for Fitness" campaign, and Cindy decided she absolutely had to have the button – which was the prize. Bill went over to the elementary school track with Cindy. He was her trainer – teaching her how to breath and how to run – not yelling from the sidelines every time she made the loop, but running right there beside her. *And let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.* As far as I can tell, that is exactly how Bill lived his life. How many miles did he run – receiving no button for himself? Too many to count. But they accomplished the goal. And if you don't believe it, Cindy still has the "Run a Mile for Fitness" button to prove it. That button is a treasure, I'm sure, for it is a tangible reminder of a wonderful memory of how Bill was willing to teach while running alongside. He didn't tell you what to do, but how to do – always participating in the process. He was a team-builder that way.

And then came high school and driver's training. After church and Sunday lunch, Bill and Cindy would head to the large empty parking lots of closed stores, and he would carefully and patiently teach her how to drive. So when she landed in driver's training with two big macho know-everything-can-do-everything-football-player types, she was more than sufficiently prepared. They couldn't even start the car and about gave the instructor and everyone else in the car whiplash. Then it was Cindy's turn. She got behind the wheel, slowly accelerated, used her turn signals, and gently applied the brakes. The instructor told her to stop the car. He then turned to her and said, "I believe you've driven before." "Just with my Daddy," she said. *And let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.*

It was love at first sight for the 15-year-old girl when she first saw that handsome sailor. Billie's face lights up as she recalls a lifetime – and I do mean a lifetime – together. Almost 60 years. That's a long time. A long time of work and play. A long time of travel and hobbies. A long time of building and fixing. A long time of commitment and partnership. And in the last few years it's been a long time of illness when Billie would hardly leave Bill's side. She saw to it that she kept her vows – in sickness and in health - not as an obligation to be fulfilled, but as a promised to be lived. Billie, well done good and faithful servant. You lived life with your best friend for all of these years, and surely God has smiled at you both all the while.

Park Road Baptist Church has been home for many years. They were a part of the visitation team and of course, Tableau. Bill taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Sunday School for many years and those children loved him as much as he loved them. What a wonderful example for our children to see – men and women in leadership roles in the church – even in the

children's Sunday School department! Park Road Baptist Church helped to start another church not too far from here – Wedgewood Baptist – and the Earthman's spent wonderful years of worship and service there before returning back home. Bill was a man of strong faith.

Bill Earthman was a devoted husband, a loving father, a servant of our country, a faithful employee, a trusted friend, and a Child of God. Bill thought through problems well. He helped people and was always generous with his time and his money. He believed in *do unto others as you would have them do unto you* – and he tried to live that as his life's mission. He now stands among that *great cloud of witnesses* as one who has *looked to Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of [his] faith*. So now we hold to the Blessed Hope which is ours – that today Bill still *runs with perseverance the race that is set before [him]*. It is a race where this time, he and God run together – in one another's very presence – and the prize is far greater than any button. The prize is forever. With God. And that is Good News. Thanks be to God.

#### Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God of all great races, we give thanks this day for Bill Earthman. He was indeed your servant among us, and we would do well to follow his example – for we know that he was but following the Way of Jesus. Bring comfort to this family. May memories flood their hearts so that as long as they live, he will never really die. We are grateful to gather together this day, in worship and celebration. We do indeed find comfort and healing and hope here. And that is exactly what we need to make our way through the difficult and

painful and sad days of this life. We give thanks for Bill Earthman. And we give thanks,

O God for your presence with him and with us. Amen.