

**A Good Word for Bill Messick**  
**October 26, 2005**

I learned a good bit about Bill Messick day before yesterday. I don't know Bill the provider, Bill the caretaker, Bill the grocery shopper, Bill the Christmas shopper. I have only known Bill as the one who needed to be cared for – not the caregiver. As I sat and listened to his family reminisce, I tried to put myself in Bill's place during these last few years – how frustrating it must have been to lose his independence – how wearying it must have been for Bill for the roles to be reversed from provider and caregiver to care receiver. But he handled it with his quiet grace – though I'm quite sure that his stubborn streak must have come through from time to time.

Jean smiles her quirky smile when she says that “God surely threw away the mold when he made Bill.” I could just see her mind racing with memories of 56 years together. Hang on to those memories, Jean – they will surely be what sustains you – that and God's peace. Jean and Rad and Helen Jean all agree that Bill was loving, stubborn, and strict. Bill always put family first, and his goal was to provide the best for his family. He wanted the children trained right, he wanted them to study to make a good way for themselves. Bill recognized that having children was a second chance at childhood for himself. He was playful and young at heart, even if he was one of the older fathers of his day. He had taken to heart the role of provider: he shopped for the groceries, he bought most of Jean's clothes and shoes, there would be no buying of clothes or shoes for the children without him (and those trips always ended with a Hot and Now Krispy Kreme stop), he bought all the Christmas presents – so that on Christmas morning Jean was always as surprised as the children. Jean, I believe he was indeed a keeper.

Bill had high expectations. He wasn't one to heap on the praise when accomplishments were achieved, but Helen Jean and Rad did hear about it if they did less than their best. Bill was quiet and rather private and never wanted to impose on anyone. He didn't talk much about his feelings or about his faith – but on both everyone who knew him knew where he stood on each. Bill was a man of deep love and conviction – even if he never spoke it very much. It seems to me that Bill understood that living out one's love and faith were much more important than talking about it.

Bill was a faithful employee, a faithful husband, a faithful father, a faithful grandfather, a faithful friend, a faithful church member, a faithful soldier of five years in the South Pacific with the 41<sup>st</sup> infantry, a faithful volunteer whether through the Masons or the Boy Scouts, and a faithful Child of God. What more would one want said about his life.

But it was in Bill's dying that I learned so much. One of the Hospice nurses made the comment sometime during the middle of the night some 12 hours before he died that she had found that most folks died the way they lived. There was Bill, surrounded by those that loved him and cared for him, making a way for him into death which leads to life everlasting. He had always been the provider. He had always been the one in charge and in control. And there he was dying the way he had lived – only this time it was Jean that was providing for him, it was Jean that took control of his care. It was Jean that took charge of his life so that life and death would be the best it could be. Jean, I was so moved by your love and care – the way you told him you loved him, the way you assured him of what a wonderful provider he had been, the way you told your stories of how you met – how you thought he'd never kiss you goodnight, the way you reminisced, the way

you offered him a path to rest and peace. Those vows made some 56 years have truly been lived out – “for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” Jean, well done good and faithful servant. I learned so much from watching you love him. I loved the way you picked on each other with the ability to make each other laugh – even through the trying times.

It is a holy time passing from this life to the next and surely Bill must have known that he was surrounded by love and care, provided for in every way – that he died the way he lived. And surely he must know now the peace that indeed passes all understanding – it is our best Blessed Hope – that the forever presence of God is more than we could ever imagine. God is Bill’s provider now and forevermore. Jean has said so many times “God has been so good to us.” Indeed God has and forevermore will be. Thanks be to God for Bill Messick.