

THE ST. AUGUSTINE'S PARISHIONER

St. Augustine's Catholic Community

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The way home

For Bill Borgen, St. Augustine's Parish feels like home. Maybe that's why, when Bill is filling his role as usher on Sunday mornings, he greets everyone as if he was welcoming them home too. It's a natural instinct.

The way Bill found his way to St. Augustine's, though, is a story unto itself.

He was born in Calgary, and lived in the small town of Rockyford until his family relocated to Red Deer when he was 11. Bill's father grew up in Norway, where he performed mandatory military service. Coming to Canada in 1927, he met Bill's mother Evelyn, who had grown up on a farm just south of Rockyford. Bill's father was the foreman on a road paving crew, his mother, a telephone operator.

Bill has no siblings, but he grew up with seven close cousins. Early in school he was drawn to the opportunity to tutor other students. It was enjoyable to help others learn. When he completed high school he entered the University of Alberta and completed a degree in mathematics and a year in education. He began teaching high school in Edmonton. It fascinated Bill that it was easy to teach some kids, while others presented significant challenges. And so he ended up at the university, studying counselling, and after a time spent as a school counsellor, continued at the doctoral level.

While studying math at U of A, Bill met a young woman named Katharine Niwa.

It took some time but Bill mustered the cour-

age to ask her on a date. And so, what began as an evening at the symphony, led to a wedding five years later, on August 22, 1970, at Annunciation Church in Edmonton.

Katharine was raised a Catholic. In fact, the first Catholic church built near her home town of Acadia Valley was on land donated by her family. Although Bill, too, was raised attending the United church in Rockyford, he was not moved to carry religion forward in his life. He supported Katharine in her spiritual life, and sometimes attended mass with her.

In 1974, they welcomed their first child, Jeff, into the world, and six months later Bill began a PhD in counselling psychology. Katharine returned to her job as a high school math teacher to support the family. By the time Jeff was two, Bill had completed his PhD, and was offered a one year position at UBC in Vancouver. Although Bill was hesitant to leave Alberta, Katharine encouraged him to take the leap. One year at UBC would become much more.

Going West

In 1977, the family moved from their first home on the coast in Richmond to Point Grey, and by 1982, children Jennifer and Craig had joined the family. They attended mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, but there was no space for restless young children, so Katharine looked for other churches to attend. She found that St. Augustine's Parish accommodated small children very well. Katharine liked the Oblate culture and so the family became full time members at St. Augustine's in 1978. Bill was coming to mass more regularly.

Before their first child was born, Katharine had become pregnant, but with serious complications, so serious in fact, as to be life threatening. Were it not for Bill's parents visiting from Red Deer, the result could have been far worse. As it was, Katharine was in hospital in critical condition.

While driving between home and Katharine's bedside, Bill began to pray. It was time to connect his spirituality with the church. He also decided he would try to make a deal with God. If Katharine's life were saved, Bill would join the church.

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Family Ties

St. Augustine's parish has been built over decades. On the strength of commitment from families and individuals, this community has grown into a rich and diverse society. Many families have spanned the generations in this parish, and put their children through elementary learning at St. Augustine School. They've contributed to the parish in ways big and small and helped build a culture of caring and support along the way.

The Colwills are one of those families.

We sat down with Bruce and Sheila, two of seven siblings raised by Bea and Sterling

Colwill, to talk about legacy and growing up, their parents and being kind.

Their story doesn't begin in British Columbia, but at the other end of the country. Bea and Sterling both grew up on farms, Bea in Pleasant Grove PEI and Sterling in Northam, across the island from Bea's folks' farm. Although their homes were only seven miles apart, they never met in PEI. They were very likely in the same grocery store at some point but it wasn't until the two families relocated independently to Toronto that Bea and Sterling became acquainted with each other.

Perhaps it was their similar rural upbringing, or Bea's love of laughing coupled with Sterling's inimitable joke making that brought them together. Either way the chemistry was

obvious and the couple dated for seven years before getting married in 1960. Bea was twenty-nine and Sterling thirty-one.

Bea worked at a credit union in Toronto, her intuitive business sense making her a valuable employee, while Sterling worked as a maintenance engineer for Turnbull Elevators.

Sterling climbed the ranks within the company and was eventually transferred to Vancouver to manage the office there. By now sisters Doreen and Sheila had turned this couple into a family of four. Sterling went ahead to Vancouver in October of 1964 and Bea, Doreen and Sheila arrived three months later.

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Both of them fulfilled their end of the bargain, and Bill joined the church in 1982.

Within a few years, Bill was elected to the pastoral council, and in 1997 was asked to be an usher. In the early 2000's both Katharine and Bill took on the role of coordinating the ushers, a role that Bill still fills today.

Katharine was diagnosed with cancer in 2012. She died in April of 2014. It's hard to imagine the grief that Bill experienced, and as he tells the story today, it's easy to see that the emotions are still raw, right below the surface. He credits the St. Augustine's community with being one of his major sources of strength and support during that time.

In 2015 Bill ended a seven year term as department head at the university and began a sabbatical. He needed time away to grieve the loss of his wife, to let his emotions take their course in his spirit, and to try to gain some perspective on how things might be as he moved forward.

Today he's back at work, and there are some solid anchors that keep him focused... the St. Augustine's community, his children and their partners, his grandchildren and Katharine's legacy. Her memory continues to help him forward.

Bill was elected to the Pastoral Council in 2015. He is inspired by the involvement of parishioners in continuing to make St. Augustine's a welcoming parish, and a place that feels like home.



Bill and Katharine

Family Ties *(con't from page 1)*

The company Sterling worked for was sold soon after and he found himself out of a job, with a young family and a new house to pay for. He turned his energies towards building his own business as a contractor, doing construction and home renovations. He hired freelance trades as he needed them, and eventually would involve his children in some of the lighter work. To this day they're all handy with either a hammer or a paint brush.

The family was now six, as Bruce and Suzanne had joined the team and by 1972, when the family connected with St. Augustine's parish, Myrna and Elaine had been born, and Marion rounded out the Colwill brood the following year.

Financially, things were tight back then, but Bea and Sterling insisted on a few things that they were willing to make sacrifices for.

All the Colwill kids attended St. Augustine's School. In addition, they were determined to contribute to their parish however they could, financially and otherwise. During the early years in the parish, Bea took in boarders on the top floor of the house and provided after school care at the family home. She cooked for everyone and ran the constantly busy household.

Every month of May during the celebration of Mary, Bea would create a Marion altar at home. She attended mass every day of lent, and eventually became a lector, collection counter and Eucharistic minister for shut-ins and the elderly. Sterling was a member of the building committee during the years when the parish centre was built. He was a member of

the St. Augustine's men's prayer group, an usher and a member of the Knights of Columbus. Along with usher Dennis Bruchet, he helped build and set up the nativity scene that is still erected at the church each Christmas.

When St. Augustine's parish wanted to sponsor a refugee family in the seventies, the Colwills were determined to contribute. But money was still scarce. Instead, they renovated their basement and housed the family for many years. That family still considers the Colwill house "home" and Bea and Sterling as "mom" and "dad".

No matter their financial situation, Bea and Sterling wanted to set an example for their kids. They showed them what it means to be charitable and selfless, and what joy there is in giving even when it's hard, or perhaps, especially when it's hard. They were living examples of Christianity, generosity and spirituality. One needs only to spend time with any of their seven grown children and thirteen grandchildren, all of whom have received a Catholic education including five through St. August-

tine's, to see that their work has been more than fruitful.

Bruce and Sheila, like the rest of their siblings are immensely proud of what their parents did, the sacrifices they made and the legacy they leave for them.

Bea died in July of 2017. Needless to say it was a devastating loss the family still feels every day. But Bruce and Sheila make it clear that her memory will be carried on. For example, in her memory Bruce's daughter Rachel had a small bee tattooed on her arm with the word "kind" below it. Be kind. That's what Grandma used to say.

Sterling turned ninety in February of this year. He has a hard time getting around and some of the memories have gotten a little less clear. But he's still quick with a joke and a smile. His kids have written their favourite family memories in a book that stays beside Sterling's bed. It's filled with stories of love and sharing and giving and kindness. Above all, the Colwill kids know how important it is to be kind.

That's what their Mom used to say.



An Alpha Story

by Francesco



It was originally not my intention to participate in Alpha due to the time commitment necessary and feeling apprehensive and unsure about my ability to participate effectively. It was through the encouragement and support of a dear friend and my affection for St. Augustine's parish that I decided to participate in Alpha and it has been a wonderful decision.

throughout the series of encounters with other people of faith, I found a tremendous amount of joy and peace in sharing our experiences, views and feelings about God and we all grew in friendship and understanding. It truly was a time of grace and blessings for myself, and I believe for the other participants as we felt our faith and understanding of God move us forward and closer to one another and to God. The weekly meetings were anchored by great videos that stimulated lively and touching conversation about LIFE and its true meaning. I recognized that we are all on a journey towards God but not on the same path and so patience, understanding helped to see how God leads us all home by various ways and through various people we meet. It was an

amazing opportunity to learn more about myself and about relationships of faith and of hope for the future in a time of so much change.

The evenings at Alpha were a time of conviviality and friendship where we shared food prepared with care and concern and we all felt welcomed and able to share our beliefs and doubts and concerns in a peaceful and grace filled place.

Without hesitation I would recommend participating in Alpha in any capacity that you can as it will open the door to a deeper and better appreciation of our faith, of our community, and of living and sharing the Gospel in an active manner.