



# From Cobblestones to California: An Italian Legacy

by Margaret McDonnell

## Dreams beyond the Mediterranean

Jack Di Salvo grew up in the small Albanian village of Piana degli Albanesi in the city of Palermo, Sicily. As a teenager living in Sicily during the early part of the twentieth century, Jack likely would have been affected by the conditions surrounding him.

Organized crime was a stronghold in Southern Italy, poverty was prevalent, and more than half of the region's inhabitants were illiterate. Jack was one of the exceptions. His ability to read, coupled with his inquisitive mind, made him eager to capitalize on opportunity and aspire to dream. So, at the age of sixteen, he moved to the city of Torino, Northern Italy, where he could focus on his future and determine a brighter path.

At the time, Northern Italy was much more industrial and modern in comparison to the South. In Torino, he studied mechanical engineering while working in a factory where he learned to operate heavy machinery. He was a smart young man who

could speak seven different languages and had an aptitude for learning new information, but his aspirations proved to be more artistic than academic. Still restless, Jack returned to his home village a couple of years later where he would embrace the art of shoemaking.

In no time at all, Jack found himself making shoes for the inhabitants of his small village. With great innovation, he incorporated all that he had learned about mechanical engineering to design shoes for his neighbors. Though he was finding satisfaction in his chosen trade, his mind could not keep from dreaming beyond the confines of his simple life in Palermo.

Shortly after his return to Piana degli Albanesi, Jack suffered a terrible disappointment that would lead him in an unexpected direction. When discovering that he held the winning ticket to Italy's national lottery, he went to the post office to collect the prize of 50,000 lira. Upon his arrival, he realized that the postmaster and his wife skipped town, and Jack was never to receive his winnings. As a result, he experienced utter depression, imagining what his life could have been.

Seeing such despondence in the young man, Jack's father and uncles urged the eighteen-year-old to move to America. "You're smart," they encouraged him, "and you have all this training. Go and live your life!" It didn't take much convincing, as his time in Northern Italy gave him a taste of independence and

inspired the notion that the world had much more to offer. So, in 1907, Jack Di Salvo considered his family's advice and made the decision to venture toward a new destiny.

## From Steerage to Success

Undoubtedly, he anticipated his journey to America with great wonder and awe, excited to discover what was in store for him. The mountainous landscape and tranquil lake that was central to his home village would soon be replaced with the sights and sounds of a large and crowded American city. Suddenly, he would be one among many. One can only imagine the surge of fear that traveled through his veins, but the excitement was certain to overshadow any trace of trepidation.

The trip to America took two to three months by ship. Alongside other European emigrants whose ambitions matched his own, he traveled in the crowded steerage of the long-distance steamer, next to the ship's machinery, where space was small, and ventilation and sunlight were lacking. The long, miserable voyage provided Jack ample time to reconsider his decision, but looking back with question was not an option once the ship embarked.

Instead, he fastened his eyes forward, beyond the ship's bow, looking toward an undetermined future with hopeful optimism.

Upon his arrival at Ellis Island, the sights and sounds of the new world were unmistakable and numerous. The island looked like a costume ball with multi-colored fabrics and strangely shaped headdresses that mimicked the various countries of old. It was something to behold. Jack felt like a fish out of water, but he was not alone.

He eventually made his way to Chicago where his cousin worked as an orthopedic surgeon at Cook General Hospital. It was here that Jack studied orthopedics, learning every aspect of the anatomy of the human foot. He decided to use all that he had learned from his studies in mechanical engineering and orthopedics to further develop his craft as a shoemaker. This would be the profession that would ultimately satisfy his dream of success in this new land.

Before long, Jack moved to the Bronx, New York, and opened a small shoe store where he became known as an orthopedic shoe specialist. Soon, Jack met an acquaintance from Palerma by the name of Jennie Carbone. The two had grown up in the same Italian village, so they had known each other since childhood. The familiarity drew the two together, as each secretly longed for a comfortable reminder of home. It wasn't long before the two

married and began a new, more grounded chapter together in America.

## A Cobbler's Legacy

Jack and Jennie were equally willing to shut the door to their pasts. Though they were proud of their Italian heritage, they were eager to look toward the future with a new and seemingly bright outlook. Their birth country was impoverished and broken, so they were determined to carve out a life that was sustainable in a new and fortifiable country. This ambition fueled them, despite the difficulties they faced as immigrants.

Jack's patriotism led him to enlist in World War I. With selfless pride, he fought for his adopted country on the tenets of America, which ensured that democracy was a principle beholden to all, even the foreigners willing to fight for it.

Jennie was just as bold and optimistic as her new husband, adding just as much strength and ambition to their shared life. She too was gifted. While her husband was away fighting a war, she used

her talent as a seamstress to contribute to their burgeoning family in her own unique way.

Though Jack considered himself more of an artist than a businessman, his small store grew successful after his return from the War. With regularity, he served prominent wealthy individuals and celebrities in the area. Over the years, he influenced many people with his talent. In fact, the famous shoe designer Salvatore Ferragamo learned a great deal from Jack about the art of shoemaking. Ferragamo and his son later went on to become one of the most prolific shoe designers in history.

The famous opera singer Enrico Caruso was another celebrity who often requested Jack's services. One afternoon, Mr. Caruso visited Jack's shop to pick up a pair of shoes that he had ordered. Upon entering the shop and requesting the shoes, Jack replied, "They're not here." Though Jack was short in stature, his confidence made up for it, as he was not intimidated by people of wealth or notability. Annoyed, Mr. Caruso asked, "What do you mean they're not here?" Jack casually stated, "You're not getting your shoes until you sing for my patrons and me." Having no choice in the matter and desperate to obtain his new shoes, Mr. Caruso climbed upon one of the cobbler benches and belted out a tune in his famous operatic voice. Not only did the patrons who were milling around the shop stop to listen, but passersby on the city sidewalk instantly piled upon one another to peer through the window, in search of the famous singer. Everyone appreciated Jack's

playful character, even those who were on the receiving end of his jokes.

In addition to going to great lengths to conjure a laugh or two, Jack was a very generous man when it came to offering his services. On one occasion, he was asked to design a pair of shoes for a young lady who was born without toes. Though she was very wealthy, she was never given the opportunity to wear a nice-looking pair of shoes. Instead, she was forced to resort to large ugly boots fastened with braces. She was eager to put her most prominent embarrassment to rest once and for all.

One afternoon, the young lady and her doctor came into the shop. “You come highly recommended,” the doctor began. “Are you able to design something less boot-like for my patient?” It was clear to Jack that the woman, leaning on two crutches, was in desperate need. He was overwhelmed with compassion and, with great tenacity, put all his concentration into engineering a shoe that would help the young lady. A few days later, the girl returned with her doctor to see what the shoemaker created. Jack presented her with an attractive pair of shoes. She was delighted. After helping her put on the shoes, he assisted her with standing and slid away the crutches. She was puzzled at first, not knowing what to think. “Go ahead and walk,” Jack encouraged her. She followed his direction and, low and behold, she was walking without the assistance of her crutches. “Look at what you did,” the doctor exclaimed. “You finally gave her

reason to smile!” From that day forward, this young lady remained a loyal customer. She spent her remaining years, and her wealth, living all over the world. Despite the distance between them, she committed to buying her shoes only from Jack. For years, she sent him money from different parts of the world to procure custom made shoes. Jack changed her life, but she equally changed his in terms of his business success. His days as a lowly village cobbler were over. Jack found himself making a long-lasting mark on America.

Just as Jack was finding success with his shoemaking business, he and Jennie started their family. In 1926, the couple welcomed their daughter Rose Ann into the world. The following year, their son Salvatore William came along. They were a happy family of four when, in 1929, the Great Depression cast a dark shadow upon the streets and within the dwellings of New York City. For the average person, unemployment and economic hardship was a new reality, but for Jack Di Salvo, his business was hardly affected. Maybe it was his innately good sense of practicality that caused him to plan for a rainy day. It could have been the fact that he sold expensive shoes to wealthy people. Whichever the case, the Di Salvo family seemed unscathed, having survived the setback that had devastated so many.

## Roots in Hollywood

Though their life in New York was content, something made Jack and Jennie consider a different kind of life even during such adverse times. Maybe the city's crowds and damp winters left them longing for space and sunshine. Regardless, their decision to move led them to Dallas, Texas, in 1932. Their stay in Dallas lasted only a few years, however, as their son Bill suffered terrible nose bleeds.

In 1935, Jack moved his family farther west to Beverly Hills, California. The small Los Angeles town was the epicenter of early motion pictures.

Hollywood movie makers conjured fictional heroes out of the exploits of gangsters and the lawlessness of cowboys, displaying them on the silver screen for the rest of America to enjoy. It was a place where dreams could be realized, despite the heavy backdrop of the Great Depression. At the same time, along Wilshire Boulevard, stood small mom and pop establishments, having replaced the lima bean fields and orange

groves of an earlier time. It was here that the Di Salvo family would settle and remain for decades to come.

On the corner of Wilshire and Hauser Boulevard, Jack Di Salvo did what he had always done best. He opened a business and soon made a comfortable living as a shoemaker to the stars. From actresses like Loretta Young to dancers like Gene Kelly, the Di Salvo name was notable in the world of custom-made shoes.

After renting a home for a short time on Doheny Avenue, the Di Salvo family bought their first home, located on Almont Avenue, for \$5,000. Jack was thrilled with the mild California weather and the rich vegetation that surrounded the region, most notably the abundance of fruit trees. He'd boast to his relatives about the cherry tree growing in his front yard. "You wouldn't believe it," he'd tell them. One year, Jack awaited his brother's visit from Dallas. The visitor would surely anticipate seeing the famous cherry tree in full bloom, but that year proved to be too wet or too dry to produce any fruit. Considering how much he bragged about the tree; Jack devised a plan that would protect him from embarrassment. Before his brother's arrival, he purchased a pound of cherries from the central market downtown. He then proceeded to tie pieces of black silk thread to the branches of the tree from which he hung the store-bought cherries. Jack was convinced that his brother would be none the wiser.

In California, Jack provided his family with a comfortable life. He generously opened his home to Jennie's mother and sister; despite the financial burden it may have caused. The women worked as seamstresses, making wedding dresses for department stores nearby.

## Adventures on Almont

Jack's son Bill grew up to remember a happy childhood on Almont Avenue. He experienced the typical joys of childhood as he and his group of pals spent their summer days playing stick ball in the open lots nearby or roller skating up and down the neighborhood streets. Bill often played hard and suffered the same sort of injuries any average boy would suffer. On one summer afternoon, while playing outside with his friends, he ran full tilt and fell onto a thorny palm branch that tore apart both of his knees. As a result, he was confined to his home where his mother and grandmother were busy sewing lace to the bodice of dresses. Bill's energy drove the two women crazy. Desperate to contain that energy, they put him to work. By the end of his recovery, Bill was an expert at lacemaking.

The boy was a self-professed spoiled brat, having received more attention from his mother, aunt, and grandmother than his sister had ever

received. Any true Italian knows that sons are regarded in a special way. In step with tradition, the adult women in the household doted on their only boy. Even as a child, Bill was able to recognize the unfairness. Though he loved and respected his older sister Rose Anne, he was helpless in the favoritism he received.

The Di Salvo family added an extra member to the family when they adopted a dog named Fluffy. One summer, Jennie and Rose Anne went out of town for a few days, leaving Bill and his father to attend to Fluffy while they were gone. The two men were given strict instructions on how to feed the dog. Boil the beef heart, chop it up, and put it in the dog's bowl. "Okay," Jack graciously agreed. As it turned out, he had an entirely different view of how to feed a dog. On the first morning following the women's departure, Jack got up at 5:00am, went to the kitchen, chopped some onions, and put the onions in the dog's bowl. "Come on, Fluffy," he called for the dog. Bill witnessed his father lock the dog in the garage with a big bowl of water and the bowl of onions. "Dad," Bill protested. "You can't do that!" Jack replied, "Just go to school." Bill went to school, and his father went to work. Upon their return later that afternoon, Fluffy was happy to see them, the water bowl was empty, but the onions remained. The next morning, Jack proceeded with the same routine. "Dad!" Bill protested again. "Don't worry about it. Just go to school," his father demanded. The afternoon's events resulted in the same as the day

before. Excited dog, empty water bowl, untouched onions. The next day, the morning routine was repeated to young Bill's distress. That afternoon, upon their return home, Fluffy expressed his usual excitement, the water bowl was empty, and the onions were gone. "You see?" Jack questioned his son. "He'll eat onions." Bill relished his father's sense of humor and his ability to make light of a situation.

Bill was like his father in many ways. While they both appreciated humor, they also knew that using one's brain will get one further in life. Jack and Jennie were devout Catholics who found value in a Catholic education. When they enrolled their two children at Good Shepard Catholic School, both Bill and Rose Anne skipped a couple of grades. Catholic school was academically demanding. As a result, Bill pulled straight Cs throughout. Despite the challenge, it was a good experience. One of his most memorable teachers was his music teacher, Sr. Louise. Even ten-year-old Bill recognized her youth and beauty. One day, when the class was walking down the stairs, Bill tripped and fell. Of course, he was immediately self-conscious, having fallen directly in front of his peers, but Sr. Louise would save him. She broke out into laughter and sang, "Oh, Salvatore, you fell for me!" Bill, his classmates, and his favorite teacher laughed uncontrollably at the short episode, saving Bill from crying of embarrassment.

After graduating from eighth grade, Bill's parents encouraged him to enroll in junior seminary.

Not only was it Catholic, but it was free. Bill spent three years in junior seminary before flunking out. He couldn't stand the priest who taught Greek, so Bill ended up failing the class. He was given the opportunity to make it up during the summer, but he had a different plan for spending his summer that did not include studying Greek. He planned to get a job. Even during his years in the seminary, Bill knew that his future did not consist of the priestly sacrifices of poverty and chastity. He somehow knew that his future goals consisted of money, success, and girls.

It was around this time that Bill started noticing girls. He and his family attended the wedding of the daughter of his father's second cousin. Being of Sicilian descent, any Di Salvo family wedding was a grand occasion, even in Southern California's Inland Empire. The afternoon mimicked a scene from *The Godfather*. Groups of men in black suits and fedoras, smoking expensive cigars, and comingling from table to table amid secret handshakes. Of course, feasting was central to this gathering, and dancing, lots of dancing.

Young Bill met a gorgeous girl at this celebration, and they danced. They danced and hung out all night long until Bill's father pulled him aside to say, "You wanna get married?" Bill was surprised at the question, as he still considered himself a tender age, so he replied with a definitive, "No." His father continued, "Do you wanna be in the mafia then?" Again, "No!" Shrugging his shoulders with a smile, Jack said, "Well, you're dancing with the daughter of

the head of the mafia, and she's not married. She seems especially fond of you too.” Bill replied, “Thank you,” and proceeded to the parking lot where he spent the rest of the evening alone.

## Lessons in Virtue and Resilience

In addition to handing down his sense of humor, Bill's father influenced his son in other ways as well. Simply through his example, Jack tried to instill the ways of living virtuously through hard work and dedication to family. Bill saw his father go to work each morning, just as the sun was rising and return home late in the evening. Soon, Bill began to hone his own skills for success by getting his first job. Though he had considered working for his father in the family shoe store, the teenager found a better, higher paying wage at the corner market. Even though he was only a teenager, Bill had a keen sense for the business of bargaining.

After a summer working three jobs, Bill spent his senior year at Beverly Hills High School. Compared to the Catholic school of his youth and three years of junior seminary, public school was a breeze. He maintained straight B's without even studying and played for the school's baseball team.

The ease of the curriculum allowed him to continue working after school and during the weekends. In addition to working at the corner market, he worked as a theater usher and gas station attendant. At one point, Bill was making more money than his father, but Bill's entrepreneurial spirit was rooted as a direct result of his father's example, bridging the gap that existed between two generations of men.

During World War II, Bill's father struggled with his shoe business for the first time. He survived the Great Depression even though it devastated most Americans, but the War was a different story. He lost twenty of his twenty-one cobblers to the draft. As a teenager, Bill suddenly realized the vulnerability of his father. Seeing him financially affected by the sign of the times was a great lesson for Bill to embrace. He learned the importance of saving his money for that rainy day. The years during the war rained hard for the Di Salvo family, but they would survive it by staying intact as a family and trusting in God's will.

As high school graduation approached, Bill's counselor advised his parents to send their boy to trade school, but Mr. Di Salvo had a different plan for his son. Jack's business connection pulled some strings and got Bill into Loyola Marymount University. Bill may have lacked the grades to get him into college, but because of his work ethic outside of the classroom, he was able to pay his own way through college as well as help his sister.

## LMU Tales: Poker, Palaces, and Partnerships

Bill's experience at LMU could have been written into a Hollywood movie script. He befriended the children of Latin dignitaries and mafia leaders. The experiences left him with fond memories that he'd later recall.

His favorite instructor was Fr. Sullivan, professor of logic. According to Bill, he was a fantastic guy who used the fundamentals of poker to teach his students a valuable lesson about gambling. Some might consider the priest's tactic of using cards to make decisions based on probability was ingenious, but what he was really doing was cleaning out his students. One by one, each fell victim to Fr. Sullivan's iron will of discipline as the priest studied his own hand of cards while analyzing the probability of his young opponents' before going in for the kill. He concluded each class with the same important lesson. "You see, you shouldn't gamble," he warned

them, with a devilish smile, as he scooped up their money.

Then the Milano boys came to LMU. Bill knew nothing about the Milano family's connection to the mafia back east. He didn't find out until years later that Mr. Milano moved his sons from Ohio to Los Angeles to give them a Catholic education away from the mafia. Though the old man's intention was good, it soon proved futile. Bill immediately befriended Pete Milano, and the two college kids successfully rigged a continuous poker game in the school's rec room. Pete did the backing while Bill did the mechanics, and they split the profits. Though they did not heed Fr. Sullivan's important lesson about gambling, they learned a thing or two about sweeping a poker game.

The Milano family lived in a paleaceous home on Sunset Boulevard. Bill spent many afternoons at this house. Being the son of a humble shoe cobbler, he was in awe of this home. With its sweeping staircase, stenciled ceilings, and mosaic fountain in the foyer, Bill thought he walked into the setting of a fairytale. Mr. Milano, though he barely spoke English, would often be found in the library. From Bill's perspective, the man seemed so small, sitting in a comfortable chair in the corner of a massive library lined with wall-to-wall books. Bill would often come by after school and see the man reading in his favorite spot. It was a curiosity to Bill that this man, so clearly intent on education, was involved in the mafia.

Bill would often stay at the Milano mansion for dinner. On one occasion, he was introduced to Mickey Cohen, the infamous mafia leader. He was a very polite man who never uttered a foul word in Bill's presence. Of course, Mr. Cohen had all kinds of funny and outrageous anecdotes that he'd share at the dinner table. During one meal, he learned that Bill's father was a shoemaker, and his interest piqued. "Oh, I have bad feet." Mickey explained. "I think I'm gonna have to see your dad." Sure enough, Jack Di Salvo soon began a long business relationship with Mickey Cohen by providing him with custom-made shoes. Even while the famous mobster spent time in jail, Mickey coaxed the judge to give him permission to have shoes delivered, all on account that he "couldn't walk real good."

Rigging poker games, nightclubbing along Sunset Boulevard, and sharing family dinners across the table from mob bosses proved to be memorable experiences for Bill. In addition to his participation in harmless college antics, he was a proud founder of the famous LMU radio station.

## Adventures in Uniform

Following college, Bill met Rita Martino at a social gathering at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Westwood. They hit it off right away, having their Italian roots and Catholic faith in common, not to mention their love for music and dancing. They married on September 21, 1950, just six months after meeting, and soon moved to Fort Org where Bill was stationed in the Army. This, of course, was at the start of the Korean War, so Bill was sent to Germany where he served as a medic.

Bill's years in Germany were like episodes right off the pages of M.A.S.H. After arriving in Germany, Bill soon found himself at odds with his General. He was a mess of a man who drank too much and seemed easily threatened by Bill's confidence. He often became enraged to see Bill, his junior officer, gather commendations from superiors and move quickly up the ranks.

On one occasion, Bill was on duty in the MASH unit when he found himself on the precipice of performing surgery. Around midnight, a group of MPs came roaring into the unit, carrying among them a tiny Irish sergeant with a beer stein stuck in his head. The guy was just over five feet tall with the looks of Barry Fitzgerald. Blood poured from his head and down his face. It was payday night, so the group of MPs went into town to celebrate and get drunk. At some point during the night, a couple of Germans, twelve feet tall compared to the small sergeant, beat him up.

Though the little man remained jovial, blissfully unaware of the severity of his circumstance, Bill knew that the sergeant would die if the bleeding was not stopped. The hospital was eighty miles away, so Bill and his aides had to think fast.

Meanwhile, upstairs on house arrest sat a talented young corporal who could surely help. He had been working as a surgical technician in Korea when he received orders to relocate to Germany. Bill knew how much this corporal wanted to return to Korea, so he made him an offer. If the corporal agreed to perform the surgery, Bill promised to get him back to Korea.

The young corporal accepted the offer. He proceeded with the surgery, removing the beer stein from the drunk sergeant's head as Bill sucked up the blood. He tied off the bleeders in his scalp, filled him

with sulfur powder, and gave him a few shots of penicillin before sending him off to the hospital.

The next day, the receiving doctor at the hospital called Bill, demanding answers. “Did you do this?” he asked Bill. He continued, “This is a hell of a job. You saved his life.” Upon hearing this, Bill’s commanding General was furious with him. “How dare you practice medicine without a license,” he roared. Later, the surgeon general called to ask who performed the surgery. He bestowed Bill with commendations while his own General gave him excoriations. In the end, Bill saw to it that the talented young corporal who helped him was sent back to Korea as promised.

Bill would often reflect upon his time in the Army with pride and reverie, cherishing the friendships he fostered and the antics he devised. Like his father, he was a man who used his connections to get things done.

When one of his commanding officers put him in charge of planning a party that would sway officers to spend their money on the base instead of in the local German bars, Bill concocted a plan that resulted in converting the officers’ club into a glorified barn dance. He contacted the local mayor and borrowed props from the Opera House, hay from local farmers, piglets from local ranchers, and a 20-piece orchestra. Everyone was required to dress as cowboys, so when a full bird Colonel arrived in his Army uniform, Bill put him in “jail.” Everyone but

the colonel thought it was funny. It wasn't until the colonel won the hog calling contest from behind bars that he was released from "jail." In the end, Bill's event made more money than any other event at the club, resulting in his rise to First Lieutenant in charge of the Officers' Club. This was another occasion that infuriated his General. He witnessed Bill receive commendations, followed by perks that only officers of higher means received.

## From Military to Civic Leadership

Bill's talent for taking initiative, being resourceful, and networking with others to get things done helped him throughout his military and civilian careers. After the Army, Bill returned home and started a career in insurance. Di Salvo Insurance Agency opened in 1960 while Bill and Rita were raising Michael, Richard, and Cherie. Bill was a good provider for his children, soon becoming one of the most successful in the insurance business. His clients included celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Michael Jackson, and Bill was idolized by other agents. He loved the work that he did and taught others all that he knew about commercial liability, helping them to improve in the field that he grew to know so well.

Things were ideal until Rita was diagnosed with breast cancer and succumbed to the disease in 1966. Their youngest child, Cherie, was only five years old at the time. While the loss of his wife was devastating, Bill relied upon his strong faith to get

him through the grief. Knowing that the pain of cancer had ceased at the end of a long battle and that an entirely new life awaited his wife comforted him. In the end, it was his family that got him through it, soon finding refuge in the generosity of his parents. For four years, he and his three children lived with them, giving his kids the “familia” that became an important part of their formative years. Having grandparents around to share in mealtime gatherings, listen to childish concerns, and celebrate small triumphs created a safe and joyous place for Bill and his kids. These were memorable years for Bill’s children, as they helped soften the heartache that comes with losing a parent.

Being a single father left a significant void in Bill’s life, so his desire to remarry persisted. In 1970, his quest to find someone to fill the emptiness ended when he married Jody, and the couple had three children. David, Christina, and Anthony provided Bill a second chance at being a father. Any regrets that he may have had the first time at fatherhood, he would try to reconcile this time around. He was the same provider, but to this new generation of kids, he spent extra time on the small moments that always end up being the most monumental to children. Coaching his son’s little league team, spending Sunday afternoons at Hamburger Hamlet after Mass, and cheering on his beloved Dodgers from the stands; this time around, Bill proved to be the all-around father. Bill and Jody would eventually divorce, but

the two shared a twenty-year marriage. Even after the separation, Bill remained loyal to her.

Though he was not the sentimental type, Bill never hesitated to offer what he could to solve a problem. Whether one of his kids needed advice or money, he was there to give it. His best advice to his children centered around learning. Education was important to Bill, and he considered his own college education a blessing. He set high standards for his children and advised them to focus on learning all they could about something they truly loved. “If you really know your stuff and love what you do, then the work won’t feel like work at all,” he offered them.

Bill’s own passion for his profession was evident in the fact that he worked until his body refused it. Just two blocks south of his home, his office of sixty-one years remained a comfortable haven because of those who worked alongside him. Heidy, Robin, Tori, and Kate were his angels, serving as irreplaceable team players and friends. For Bill, the legacy that one leaves behind is in the work that was completed and the relationships that were built.

In addition to his day-to-day job, Bill was an avid community leader. He loved Beverly Hills and made it his mission to participate in making it even better. He was a proud representative of the Beverly Hills City Council, advocating for those he served and making sure their concerns were considered. One of his most notable accomplishments was combatting the persistent problem of mosquitoes in the area. He

helped successfully devise a plan that would aggressively suppress mosquito-borne illnesses. As a result, in 1992, he became a trustee of the Los Angeles County West Vector& Vector-Borne Disease Control District.

Because of his big heart and generous spirit, his legacy will live on in the positive changes he created. He loved the idea of being a small part of something truly big. Giving of his time and money was worth every second and cent if it ensured that others were taken care of, and their voices were heard.

## Graceful Endings

In his final years, when his body began to fail him, his spirit never surrendered. He continued to foster relationships that would be remembered long after he was gone. When Bill met Richard, his caregiver, in 2019, he was reluctant at first. After being admitted to the hospital with pneumonia, he received a diagnosis of lung cancer. Bill's daughter Cherie realized it was time for her father to accept regular assistance. While recovering in the hospital, Richard walked into the room, eager for the introduction. "What the hell is he doing here?" Bill questioned Cherie upon the first sight of Richard, knowing exactly what was up. Richard understood Bill's resistance and ignored the remark. Once the two started talking, Bill instantly became comfortable.

At ninety-two, Bill might have seen his future written on the wall, so his trepidation in hiring Richard to help with daily routines meant giving in to the inevitability of what lay ahead. Throughout his

life, he had been the one that others relied upon, so it was difficult for him to start this new chapter because it meant relinquishing his most prized role. It wasn't long, however, before he and Richard bonded, and a mutual admiration formed.

To Richard, Bill was one of the special ones. He recognized Bill's genuineness, especially when it came to the way he treated others. He was a good person who respected everyone equally, providing each with the same dignity while realizing the power of his own kindness in shaping someone's self-worth. Though Bill didn't want to be a burden, he knew he needed the help and learned to accept it with humility. He and Richard spent afternoons watching old movies and episodes of *Gunsmoke* or cheering on The Fighting Irish. Often, Richard would simply sit and listen to Bill reminisce about his days in the Army and the trouble he got into with his superiors. The two would laugh at the stories and find comfort in one another's company.

In addition to Richard's companionship, Bill had other angels who brought joy to his concluding days. Berta, Zamia, Rachel, and Christina became reliable anchors. The peace that Bill experienced, even in the face of cancer, was made possible because of those who attended to his needs and provided him with invaluable friendship. Most profoundly was his daughter Cherie whose sacrifice and steadfast commitment led to her father's remarkable happiness during his final sunset.

When an adult child takes on the responsibility of caring for a parent, despite the enormous emotional toll, it reflects one's ability to prioritize love over judgment and forgiveness over unspoken regret. It results in a peace that overwhelms the soul, awakening the life that had been and giving way to the legacy that remains.

