



William Earl Bonham

March 19, 1925 - July 1, 2020

William E. "Bill" Bonham

We are deeply saddened by the sudden death of William E. Bonham on July 1, 2020, at the age of 95. Please join the family in a celebration of Bill's life in the Pecan Orchard at 4402 West Berrendo Road, on Friday, July 10th, at 9:30 a.m. Please bring masks and folding chairs and park on Ruth Road off of Berrendo just west of the Relief Route.

Escorts in quads will transport guests and their folding chairs to the orchard.

Bill and his twin brother Bobby were born to Earl and Lillie Greening Bonham in Long Beach, California, on March 19, 1925. Lillie's mother traveled from a homestead in New Mexico to assist with the birth. While the twins were small, Earl and Lillie moved back to New Mexico and settled in East Grand Plains, where siblings Jimmy and Tommy were born.

Bill attended East Grand Plains School and fought to protect his two younger brothers from bullies. He attended Roswell's first high school, which had been built by his father. Earl also built the Chaves County Courthouse where Billy and Bobby played on the thin stone ledge that visually separates the basement from the first floor. Bill used to play with his friend Bob Baker at the Hondo River where they liked to wiggle down into the quicksand to see how deep they could sink.

When America entered World War II, the twins were permitted to leave high school ahead of graduation to enter the armed services. Bill joined the Army Air Force because he wanted to fly. He flew B-22s, B-29s, and cargo planes, and he could fly anywhere in the mainland U.S. as long as he took a trainee navigator with him. He had several near-fatal escapades but was able to pull out of them by daring and quick-witted flying maneuvers. Bill deployed to Germany at the end of the war and was given the job of evicting German families temporarily so their homes could be used by U.S. troops. Bill never wanted to return to Europe as a tourist, saying that the U.S. was far preferable to any country in Europe. The Air Force offered Bill a promotion, which he declined because he didn't want a desk job.

Bill and Bobby entered Texas Tech in Lubbock. While there, they rescued an elderly couple whose house was burning down by rushing into the burning house and carrying the

man and his wife outside.

Bill returned to Roswell to start farming. He married the love of his life, Betty Jean Baker, on September 2, 1945. They rented a hundred-acre farm northeast of Roswell where daughter Brenda was born in 1949. Bill bought a lot in town on East Mathews next to St. Peter's rectory and built a garage apartment. The family lived in the apartment while Bill built a duplex in front of it. They moved into the duplex where son Bobby was born in 1951. They bought a 240-acre farm on Berrendo Road and lived in a two-room house while Bill built the house on the farm where son Richard was born in 1954 and daughter Betty Ann was born in 1959.

Bill constructed a land leveler, which he pulled behind his tractor, and shaped each field so that every row would drain water from the irrigation ditch to the end of the row. Bill irrigated by setting siphon tubes, then checking the water every few hours until time to change the tubes to another set of rows. He raised cotton and alfalfa. He baled hay at night when the moisture was at the correct level so the leaves would not fall off the alfalfa.

Bill and Betty took their children to First Methodist Church and volunteered in Sunday School, prayer groups, Vacation Bible School, and church services. Bill served as chairman of the church board for a number of years, and was head usher for 50 years. Every October, he hosted a chili cookoff, hayride, and bonfire at the Bonham farm. He was active in the church's Cowboy Bell Scholarship program. He was also a friend to the Poor Clare sisters and shook the Monastery's pecan trees every year at harvest time.

Bill partnered with Jack Woods at American Moving and Storage in renting a warehouse; he then built Roswell Self Storage, which was managed by daughter Betty Ann. Sons Bobby and Richard became good mechanics working on the farm. Richard went to college and became a petroleum engineer, and Brenda went to college and became a social worker. Bobby became his father's right-hand man in running the Bonham farms. Bill and Bobby partnered with Virgil and Bruce Haley to purchase the Mountain States pecan orchard. Bobby, Bruce, and Bobby's sons currently work the shared orchard and their respective private orchards.

Bill and Betty enjoyed playing bridge with friends Pete and Margaret Kling (now Margaret Kinkaid), and they often hosted parties for their bridge club. Other players were frequently intimidated by Bill's aggressive bidding style, especially his "3 No-Trump." The Bonhams and the Klings bought a rustic cabin together in Alto, where their families enjoyed the cool mountain air on weekends.

Bill was also a spelunker, and he took his daughter Brenda and grandson Justin on many underground adventures.

Bill was courageous and quick-witted whenever he saw someone having a medical emergency. When his son Richard fell into the irrigation ditch with his head in the culvert, Bill bounded out of the house with huge strides, grabbed Richard, and pulled him out of the ditch.

One day, Bill and Betty were eating at a restaurant when a woman at another table started choking and turning blue. Bill tried the Heimlich maneuver, then grabbed a fork, skewered the meat, and pulled it from her throat, saving her life.

Bill was generous, and in the days before cell phones, he always stopped to help drivers stranded on the roadside. He changed flat tires, pulled out cars stuck in the mud, and once fixed a lady's carburetor with a spring from a ballpoint pen. He was known for his ability to avoid a head-on collision by driving at high speed between the two oncoming cars, forcing them to part so he could pass.

Bill enjoyed daily visits with friends at McDonald's over coffee. At 95, he exercised daily, taking two brisk 2-mile walks each day. On Sundays, after church, Bill visited friends living in retirement homes, taking them a church bulletin and a page of jokes and cartoons. His comforting presence and dry sense of humor will be missed by all.

Bill was preceded in death by his parents, Earl and Lillie Bonham, his twin brother Bobby Bonham, his wife Betty Jean Bonham, his sister-in-law Lavonne Bonham, and his son-in-law Keith Roberts. He is survived by brothers Jimmy Bonham (Bette) of Oregon and Tommy Bonham of Albuquerque and their children, and by his children: Brenda Bonham, Bobby Bonham (Louetta), Richard Bonham (Dana), and Betty Ann Roberts. His grandchildren: Matthew Bonham (Agnes), Hoby Bonham (Amanda), Monica Bonham Sweeney (Scott), Storrie Morris, Shauna Miller, Paul Bonham (Sarah), Christopher Bonham, Daniel Bonham, Jonathan Bonham, Justin Rogers (Melanie), Ryan Rogers, and Teresa Roberts. His Great grandchildren: Georgia Bonham, Christopher Bonham, Phoebe Bonham, Chance Bonham, Lyla Bonham, Jeremiah Sweeney, Willow Sweeney, Sage Morris, Seth Morris, Sadie Morris, Payton McCarty, and Riley McCarty. Great great grandchildren: Stryker Bonham and Ava Bonham.

William's (Bill) tribute was written in his honor by his family.

Please take a moment and share a fond memory or thought with Bill's family at www.andersonbethany.com.

Comments



“ Bill Bonham was a great man and a wonderful neighbor!!! One Easter long ago when we had sheep, Bill came over to borrow some lambs for Sunday School at his church. He put those three little lambs in Betty's nice car and drove off to church. Later when we got home from church too, he pulled in to the driveway and let them out of the car. Everyone was happy and he had such a big smile on his face. It was a wonderful Easter for everyone!

We had a light breakfast at McDonald's next to the table Bill and his friends were sitting just a day before he passed away. He was talking with all his friends and looked like he was as usual having a good time! He will be dearly missed by those who knew him.

Tim and Rhoda Coakley

Rhoda Coakley - July 10, 2020 at 01:58 PM



“ Sincerest Condolences for the loss of your dear loved one. Rest In Peace Mr. Bonham



Jesse and Bobby Chesser - July 09, 2020 at 11:12 AM



“ What a great man! The last time I saw him, he and Brenda attended my Daddy's funeral in 1987. Bill and Betty were always gracious and generous friends. Good times were had with Brenda, Bobby and Richard when we were kids. Rest in peace, Bill. You will be missed. With love, Danny Daniel

Dan Daniel - July 08, 2020 at 05:20 PM



“ Palomino Family lit a candle in memory of William Earl Bonham



Palomino Family - July 07, 2020 at 11:26 PM



“ Loved all your jokes and all your stories. And Two old goats will always be part of our household rub. You were an amazing man and just full of life. May you fly with the angels and you are home with your wife

Palomino Family - July 07, 2020 at 11:28 PM



“ So sad to hear this news. Bill was a very special person and friend to my parents Tommy and Marguerite Fowler. Prayers to the family. Jeannette Fowler Herndon

Jeannette Herndon - July 07, 2020 at 02:56 PM



“ Sacred Duty Spray was purchased for the family of William Earl Bonham.



July 07, 2020 at 12:21 PM



“ William "Bill" Earl Bonham ... reached out and toughed the face of God on the 1st of July, 2020.

He was a Christian First & Foremost, a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force, a Family Man ... Father, Grandfather & Great Grandfather & Successful Businessman as a Pecan Grower.

I - LOVED - drinking coffee with Bill in the Hospitality Area at First United Methodist Church on Sundays. We'd talk about God & Religion, Politics. Bill's eyes would twinkle as he handed me the Funny Papers ... challenging me to find the '6 Things are Different.' Bill, I'll continue to "Challenge" others on Sunday, when we can finally worship in the Sanctuary, again.

Bill, Candy & I miss You !!! We know God has a New Mission for You ... in Heaven !!!



Mark Rowland - July 04, 2020 at 02:55 PM



“ Brenda, I am so sorry for the loss of your father. My thoughts are with you and your family.

Nadine - July 06, 2020 at 11:12 PM



“ Brenda...so sorry for the loss of your dearest Father...our HOPE...PRAYERS ...and a continued..."LOVE CAMPAIGN" in his memory by you is already accomplished by you daily in the life he raised in you to live...laugh...and prosper...'age don't matter'..."LOVE" was all he needed ...and you & family & friends fulfilled his life abundantly...and so it goes...Amen & R.I.P Bill...Best to Brenda and her family...Fred & Helen Walters...

Fred Walters - July 08, 2020 at 01:48 PM



“ Brenda, may you treasure all the good memories and the close relationship you had with your father. What a great man!

Diane & Frank Brennan

Diane Brennan - July 09, 2020 at 11:16 AM



“ I didn't know Mr. Bonham personally, but for the past few years I would see him every weekday in the early morning walking briskly along the walking path at Cielo Grande. He was always polite and greeted my friend and I. We would try to keep up with him. (and usually could not) Condolences to his family

Melinda - July 09, 2020 at 04:03 PM



“ I was saddened to learn of your loss. My husband, Lloyd Stone, would want me to tell you how much he admired Bill and enjoyed their visits. Both were Air Force veterans so that was a big part of their discussions. Having lost Lloyd a little over 2 years ago, I know this a

difficult time. May God bless and comfort you!

Jerry Stone

Jerry Stone - July 10, 2020 at 11:17 AM



“ Sending prayers for comfort in God's loving arms. I will miss Bill's smiling face at church. He was always there ready to Greet any who came through the doors. He was always so proud of his family. Blessing to you all..

Sandy correia

Sandra Correia - July 12, 2020 at 02:42 PM



“ Sending prayers and love to the family from the Whitney family I'm EGP. The Bonhams mean a lot to us. Would like to share the numerous tributes on the Remembering Roswell Facebook page:

[https://l.facebook.com/l.php?](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rdrnews.com%2F2020%2F07%2F06%2Fwilliam-e-bill-bonham%2F&h=AT16SeTFmxhYGkkbXfp5tFlo11MGC56rV62pEuc0h4Gb8IJ0JQ-emTTrA-7AoJXugz2aaKYws8w4rxS0ibCFfJUC_qBcUG7xIcBz6n-8wse4wJkb-bxxYeZSXJOj&s=1)

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Debra Whitney Reecer - July 14, 2020 at 06:42 PM



“ Dear Brenda and All of you in Bill and Betty's family,

I send you each my sympathy and loving prayers as you adjust to the "Going Home" of your your dear dad Bill. He has left us in his physical presence, but he will always be in our hearts as one who showed us how to live. I know he is rejoicing being in the presence of our Lord and savoring the reunion with Betty and so many other family members and friends, which include my dear parents Jane and Bernard Johnston. I know he heard those fabulous words of welcome, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

I loved Bill and Betty my whole life, and they were such dear friends to my parents and me. When I learned of Bill's passing, I had to shed some tears -- as we are quickly losing the last of our beloved parents' "Greatest Generation." As always, may we continue to live in their example until we join them up above. For now, we REJOICE that he, and they, have arrived safely Home!

Love and prayers, Mary Ellen Johnston

Mary Ellen Johnston - July 15, 2020 at 12:51 PM



“ Dear Bonham family, I don't personally know any of you but I did know Billy and Bobby when I was very young out at East Grand Plains. My brother George was friends with them and my parents, Tom and Mary Didlake were friends with their parents. My parents and my brother (who married Ollie Mae Grizzle) have all gone on as well. Thank you for such an excellent write-up. It brought back many happy memories. Isn't our Heavenly Father so wonderful that we have those memories and the hope of seeing them again!

Tommie Jean Didlake Cooper

Tommie Cooper - July 29, 2020 at 11:08 AM