



Bill from an article in the Dodge magazine.

Bill authored numerous articles, spoke at countless seminars, was an embalming specialist in the research and product development department at Dodge, and pioneered a process for restoring dehydrated, desiccated hands and fingers for fingerprint identification. The process is still in use by the FBI and many state and local police departments throughout the country. For anyone interested, I have copies of his articles on Waterless Embalming; High Pressure, Low Flow and Pulsation; his preferred Embalming Report; and his Process for Fingerprint Identification. Most importantly, Bill is a friend to funeral service and funeral directors.

Janice Root, a descendant of Daniel Boone and Danville, California's pioneer Root family, was attending elementary school when she met the new kid in town, G. William Martin. Little did she know that she and Bill would start dating their junior year of high school and eventually marry. Bill was of Yugoslavian and Portuguese descent. He was attracted to the funeral business at a young age because of the chance to dress up and go to parties (visitations and wakes). He and Jan both worked at Danville's San Ramon Valley Chapel. Bill graduated in 1961 from the California College of Mortuary Science in San Francisco and served his apprenticeship with the Lough-Ouimet Funeral Home in Concord, CA. Bill became good friends with John Ouimet, and it must have been tough when he earned his license, and they couldn't afford to keep him on the payroll. John was instrumental in helping Bill find his next job with Spangler Mortuary. In July 1963, with his new job and his new license, Bill married his high school sweetheart, Jan. Four years later, Bill went to work for C.P. Bannon Funeral Home. This stately funeral home was three stories tall and took up an entire city block in Oakland, CA. C.P. Bannon served 700 to 800 families each year. It was a traditional Catholic firm with the directors all wearing pin-striped suits with tails for funeral masses, which were held each morning. It was here, under the tutelage of Don Sawyer, that Bill perfected his embalming techniques. Don, the inventor of the Sawyer embalming machine, and the first advocate for high pressure embalming, also worked at C.P. Bannon and became a close friend and father figure to Bill. It was Don who would eventually convince Bill to apply for the Dodge Salesman position in the Pacific Northwest.

Bill joined the Dodge family (and it was like joining a family) in 1977. Arnold Dodge loaned Bill a car that was “suitable” for a salesman with the understanding that Bill would pay him for the car when he could. A few years later, the title for the car arrived in the mail. Arnold Dodge told Bill it was his because he had increased the sales and the territory so much.

Bill’s territory of Washington, Northern Idaho, Western Montana, and Alaska was Dodge Country. When I graduated mortuary school in 1990, only one other chemical company even attempted to compete with Dodge. And they only hired a part-time salesman because everyone liked Bill and wanted to buy from him. On more than one occasion, when visiting at national conventions, competing companies would tell me it was no use to even try as long as Bill was working. Bill visited with the owners if they were in when he stopped by, but he always made a point to get to know everyone working at the funeral home and preferred to visit with the embalmers and directors working directly with families.

I think much of Bill’s success was due to his personality. He was a professional when needed. He didn’t hesitate to gown-up, put on gloves, and help embalm. He was available 24 hours a day to give advice on difficult cases. He wouldn’t sugar-coat things that needed to be said. His answering machine said, “Please leave a short message, or a long Dodge order.” And, he was fun to be around. The “Dodge Room” was the place to be during conventions. By the time Kelley attended her first convention with me, the era of the legendary Dodge Room was winding down. It wasn’t open as long as it used to be, and they said it quieted down relatively early. Our room was directly next door and by 3:00 or 3:30 am, it was quiet enough for us to sleep. We were thankful for the “early” night!

After 40 years with Dodge, Bill retired in 2016 and the Washington State Funeral Director’s Association named their scholarship award in his honor. The Bill Martin Funeral Service Education Scholarship is awarded annually to students enrolled, or enrolling in, mortuary school. The scholarship pays up to \$1,000 toward school and includes registration, lodging, and meals at the state annual convention. I encourage all our interns to apply for this scholarship. More information is available at <https://www.wsfda.org/bill-martin-scholarship-1>.

Currently, Bill and Jan are living in a golf course community in Florence, AZ. Unfortunately, Bill is struggling with dementia. They have some long-time friends that continue to call. I know that means a lot to Jan. Kerry, Kelley and I are learning more than we would like about dementia as we work through the process with their mom, Jane. Like Kelley, I too am thankful for the way you’ve treated Jane as she travels with Kelley and for their friends that continue to stop by for a quick visit. I appreciate each of you and I am thankful for the friends, like Bill, I’ve made through funeral service.



Bill enjoying retirement at their home in Florence, AZ