

WILD BILL
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I don't even know his last name and I have known him for many years. "Wild Bill" is the only name I have ever called him. Well, sometimes I call him "William." Every festival or gathering has many ingredients, many people, and many talents. All I can say is that Wild Bill is an essential ingredient and like those Swiss Army or Leatherman knives, he can pretty much do everything and anything. The stories of Wild Bill are legendary.

I understand that Bill has a home somewhere in Alabama, near the Florida border but I wonder if he is ever there. I know at the Bliss Festival here in Michigan he always closes the show with some kind of Zen-like words to us and always plays his flute. And I am told he appears at other festivals. But most of all I know Wild Bill from the Harvest Gathering near Lake City, Michigan that I attend each year. And every year that I have been there, Bill has been there too. In fact, the first person who ever befriended me at the Harvest Gathering was Wild Bill, spotting me sitting way up on the hay bales in the Barn Stage, he skipped up to the top where I was sitting and sat down with me, just to be friendly.

I have been told that in real life Bill is a rescue diver, jumping out of helicopters into the sea to help in this or that emergency, but I have never seen that. What I do know is that in the big truck that he drives he has about every kind of useful tool and device known to man. When something needs fixin', Bill dives into that truck and comes up with some tool that will do the job. And the same is true for nasty jobs. The nastier or more dangerous the job, the more likelihood that Wild Bill will be doing it, right in the middle of it, or at least directing it.

For example, this year I found Bill high in a huge tree, his legs wrapped around a branch, and a chainsaw held in one hand reaching half a body length in front of him sawing off limbs the size of your leg. Just watching him gave me the chills. Totally dangerous. And then before I knew it he was on the ground sawing up the limbs and directing a crew to stack them in a front loader and haul them away.

And Bill is always up early, way before most, and looking for that first cup of morning java. He even brings his own beans and grinds them up. After that first coffee Wild Bill is gone from the kitchen and out there somewhere on the 181 acres of the farm taking care of business. But the "wild" part of Bill is not all there is.

Every year at the gathering they have what we call the Waltz Hour, a time where a dozen or more musicians gather to play waltzes in the barn stage and the dance floor is filled with couples. When Bill turns up for the waltz hour he is wearing his Sunday best, including a fancy shirt with ruffles, and tight-fitting vest, and so on. And he is so polite to the ladies, bowing to them, and whirling them around the dance floor. Even that is not all.

Each Harvest Gathering Bill makes a huge batch of home-made ice cream, in many flavors, and serves it to the crew. People line up to get a taste of that. And I saved the most interesting part to last.

Wild Bill is also an expert herbalist, familiar with the natural medicine or massage to cure about anything that ails one. When my lovely daughter May came down with a very bad flu this year,

scores of people gave May little vials and pills until she had her floor covered with them. When I asked her about this she said that Wild Bill really knew his stuff and Bill was on the spot taking care of her.

So there you have a brief introduction to someone who is already a local legend, and not only in Michigan. In this modern day and age where so much of everything is reduced to mediocrity, Wild Bill appears like the legend he is to save the day and to show that romantic figures and heroes still exist.

Thanks William!

Photo: I borrowed this from Bills Facebook page, and have no idea who to credit. Thanks!

Bill's Facebook page is here:

<http://www.facebook.com/wildbillrescue>

— with [Wild Bill](#).