

BILL WIECK / by Priscilla Wieck

Date:

Damian Macey: Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, July 2017

D: The original tape with Bill Wieck and I did not tape onto the disc so it is unavailable. Mr. Wieck passed away before we could re-interview him. So, his wife, Priscilla has agreed to tell us some probable highlights from that interview. So Priscilla, I will turn it over to you.

P: Let's start with him teaching. You know they have the online condolences that you get from the funeral home and we just had so much fun reading all the things that his former students had to say about him. And most of them were humorous but what came out of it was that most of them said that he had taught them as if they were college students. He assumed that we would take whatever he had to say and they could use it then and in the future. And the first thing he always said to his students is that the first thing we learn from history is that we never learn. And he wrote that on the board. He was entertaining as well as informative. He always outlined everything on the board so that the students could write that down. But he never monitored their notebooks or anything but they were to write down what was on the board. And they appreciated that and that helped them in college. There were just lots of funny things in the comments and he kind of became a legend. And I would hear from people at various places and they would tell me to tell him that he was the best teacher they ever had. And that was nice.

He was a diabetic since the time he was released from the service. So it was difficult for him at times in the classroom because his type of diabetes was different every day and you never knew exactly what the day would bring. He kept candy bars in his desk drawer...never told the kids why but they would take a candy bar and go out in the hall and eat it. And when he retired, the Welliver boys at his retirement party...by this time Bill had a small motor bike and they rode that into the study hall and they had candy bars.

D: What year did he start teaching?

P: I think it was 1962.

D: And he retired when?

P: He taught 30 years. He could of taught longer than that but he just couldn't stay on his feet that long. He certainly enjoyed teaching, enjoyed his students, and had a good relationship with them. Jeff Pearce just told me a story yesterday that the students would give him detention...one day he accidentally flipped part of a pen out the window and the class gave him detention.. he gave Jeff a bunch of papers and told him to take them down to his mother, who worked in the office. I will say that Bill had a world view and not a local view and I think possibly because of where he was raised. He was raised in Horace, near Chicago. He taught Humanities for a long time before World History. And

he taught music, art and literature, the way it fits into World History. But they only had that for three or four years and they we got more parochial they cut that out. He always felt bad about that because he likes to teach how things fell together and how things never really change.

D: He was always in the social studies area, wasn't he?

P: Yes, and he taught Civics so he had every senior. Another thing that the students appreciated about him was that he was always willing to help a student who was having trouble understanding. He stayed a lot after school to help kids. Someone told me just recently that he knew of one student who could not pass a civics test so one of his buddies taped the answers to the questions to the front of Bill's desk. But Bill said, well, that was alright, at least he could pass the test. I think he cared about his students because he was not a good student himself. He was bullied in school, he was an overweight child and there was mental illness in his family, his mother spent a good portion of his growing up in mental institutions, he had a very nice father but Bill had a hard time in school. Bill met one of his teachers when we went back to his town, and she asked what he was doing and when he told her that he was a teacher she said "Oh my."

He was introduced into the fine arts by a wonderful teacher that he had in high school that organized trips and took the kids into Chicago to see various places and musicals.

D: Someone like that really leaves an indelible mark on kids.

P: Yes, it really does. And that is why when I taught speech and English, we took a yearly trip to Indianapolis. Harold Ellshoff always drove us. I remember someone said "Have you ever seen a bus driver in a \$100 suit?" Oh, one thing the students always said about Bill was that he was always fair...they knew his political beliefs but he always accepted others political beliefs. One girl said "I gave me an A on my paper even though I'm a Republican."

Politics was very dear to him. He remembered FDR stopping in his town of Horace, or he went to Chicago to hear him. He also went to Terre Haute to hear Kennedy. Bill believed in....he could speak so much better than I can... justice for all. He was always fighting some cause.

A lot of his former students would come to him for advice or recommendations or loans. I think he loaned money to half the "down and outs" in town. And didn't get most of it back !!

I admired him because he has never been well yet he never talked about it or let it bother him. It was just something we all lived with.

D: I remember one time he had a very beautiful old Oldsmobile. Did he have a particular love for old cars?

P: I don't know why he bought that. And that belonged to Edith...she was a home-ec teacher. And we could remember her driving it because when she was driving it, all you could see was her head. He drove that and enjoyed it for a while and then he gave it to Turpin when he couldn't get around so good. She said he should clean it up and drive it in the parade and I should sit in the front seat. I don't think

he had any particular love for old cars, though.

D: And in the later years, he always had a motor scooter.

P: Yes, first he had a small motorcycle and then he had a motorbike type thing and then he got the last one he could ride with the big boys on that but he never went out on the Interstate with it. And there is a funny story about that... when he had the one he would take Connie to school. Well, we got a new superintendent, don't remember who it was, but the superintendent told him that he shouldn't have those young girls riding with him !! So he told him "I'm sorry to tell you, it's my daughter." He could say things so well, he spoke so well. See, we didn't get into the nuclear dump business. You were from Martinsville, so you probably heard a lot about all that.

D: I was on the committee.

P: Which committee?

D: To evaluate the deep well.

P: No, not the deep well, I remember that, boy it's a good thing we didn't get into that, those people were scammers. Not to mention the damage to the ecology, they were scamming. No, this was the nuclear waste dump that they wanted to put in. That was a seven year battle. And when we finally got to the hearings our organization was awarded half a million dollars or so for attorney fees and so forth. I think what bothered Bill the most about the nuclear dump was the public safety issue, as well as the political finagling and the way the state was buying off everybody.

D: I think even today when you hear the word nuclear it can be used for a lot of good but there is the fact that that stuff lasts forever and there is no way to know what the final outcome will be.

P: And we are in an earthquake zone and the concrete bunkers are supposed to make it all safe. You know, it's kinda like the Velsicol site, we don't know what's happening underneath the ground there either.

D: But yet, my uncle worked there for many years and apparently he or anyone else who worked there had adverse reactions.

P: I don't think it's so much the workers that should concern us as it is the land or maybe the cattle that graze there.

I don't know if that is a good portrait of Bill or not.

D: I think you have told us a lot of things that it's good to get in the oral history. And I think many people, especially his students, will enjoy hearing this history of him by you. Was Bill opposed at all to Connie going to China?

P: Oh no, you know we don't have that kind of family.

D: Well I know you said he always looked at the big picture. So I assumed he was in favor of that.

P: We just raised our kids to be pretty independent. Connie is the one who always has been. Even in high school she was just different. She had to get a special petition to be able to use the weight training equipment at the high school because girls couldn't use that equipment. She needed that equipment because she was a swimmer. It's interesting... Paul is different, he is rather traditional. And she is very not traditional. Bill was always very proud of his children. He was proud of his house, proud of all his accomplishments because he had nothing before. Most of us had nothing.

D: Conversely, Marshall can be very proud of Bill.

P: Thank you.

D: I know my son ended up in detention once and Bill gave him a good chat and asked What was he doing here? I think George and Bill "battered" that around many times in the years later.

P: It's always a pleasure to hear good memories about Bill. It's good that we live on in other people's thoughts. And something like these oral histories preserve a lot of memories for generations ahead to hear.

D: Well, Priscilla, you have added a lot to our oral history file, both about you and Bill. Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to do this for us.

P: Thank you.