Unwavering Love — Bill

It was April 2002, and the phone rang. My heart raced with concern when my brother Ted said, “Rose, sit down. I’ve got bad news.”

My sister Mary’s husband, and our beloved brother-in-law, Bill Ferguson, died suddenly due to a brain aneurysm. How could that be? Bill was a robust and active sixty-two-year-old who spent considerable time outdoors. He fished, gardened, did yard work, cooked for family and friends, and just hung out. He loved life and welcomed everyone into his life.

Mary and Bill were always there for me, through good times and especially during difficult periods. This was a continuation of our growing-up years, a time when all of our siblings were caring and protective of one another. I know I will miss this guy who was like a brother to me.

My sister, Mary Jane, dated Bill, a neighborhood guy, a couple of years after she left the convent in 1961. Bill was over six feet tall and had a slight southern drawl. His Lebanese ancestry was obvious with his olive complexion, wavy brown hair, and handsome brown eyes. Whenever I accompanied their family to a mid-Eastern store or restaurant, he was typically welcomed with the greeting, “How ya’ doing, cousin?”

Bill and Mary married in 1966 and had three children, Penelope, Emily, and Jonathan. Bill was a man with deep love and concern for his family and related well to all people from the delinquent type to the well-educated-very-sophisticated; he welcomed everyone into their home, especially during holidays.

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It's surprising that this guy with mid-Eastern ancestry who grew up in the South prepared corned beef and cabbage for family and friends every St. Patrick's Day. Bill meticulously selected Wigley's brined corned beef at the Gratiot Central Butcher Shop in downtown Detroit's Farmers' Market. Carrots, potatoes, cabbage — gently scrubbed with peels left intact surrounded the roast. All ingredients slowly simmered in a seasoned broth until the scent permeated the house and beyond. It was a tasty welcoming for family, friends, and friends of friends.

Their son Jonathan described his father Bill as a man who " … loved his family and extended family more than anything. He treated friends like family because they were just that to him. He'd give the shirt off his back if someone needed it."

Daughter Emily related fond memories of her devoted father. "We kids were his whole world. As much as he liked work, he couldn't wait to come home to us. The sun, the moon, and the stars rose and set upon us *until the grandkids came along.* He had the patience of a saint. Between my mom's excessive shopping and our teenage misbehaviors, his love was unwavering. He made our home a sanctuary. No matter how shitty the world was, we always knew that he was there with open arms."

Daughter Penelope shared her wonderful memories of Bill. "We had the best daddy in the world. I will always be a daddy's girl. I still love and miss him terribly, as I am sure most of those who knew him would agree. When I was pregnant with Cass and a nanny to a wonderful family, I remember talking with the father about daddy. The father told me he only hopes he leaves behind the kind of legacy my daddy did for his kids."

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Both Bill and Mary had successful careers in Michigan. Mary was a Detroit Public Schools teacher and Bill was an executive with Ford Motor Company. I recall when Ford promoted Bill to a supervisor of engineers even though he did not have an engineering degree. With his delightful sense of humor and North Carolina dialect, he feigned poor grammar from his southern roots. “Last week I cuddent spill engineer, and now I are one.” Everyone loved Bill. His contagious laugh and sparkling brown eyes lit up his face as he told jokes or shared funny stories, especially tales of growing up in the South.

Bill and Mary retired comfortably in 1999 and relocated to North Carolina, the state where Bill grew up and where his brothers and sisters and their offspring continued to live. It was Bill’s dream to return to his hometown. Both were devout Catholics and devoted to each other. They had enjoyed only a few years of retirement and now, with Bill’s sudden death, Mary would live alone in their large lakeside home. *What would Mary do without Bill in her daily life? What would I do without my dear friend and brother-in-law?*