Bill Weatherwax

Bill Weatherwax was hopeless with plumbing and couldn't hang a picture, but put him in a machine shop and he could work wonders.   
  
He spent years building a quarter-scale working model of a 270-cubic inch Offenhauser four-cylinder racing engine, then a quarter-scale replica of race track owner J.C. Agajanian's champ car number 98 in which driver Troy Ruttman won the Indy 500 in 1952.   
  
And he built an 18-foot Fiberglas boat the family used for water skiing on the Colorado River.   
  
Bill died of cancer Dec. 1, just two days shy of his 77th birthday.   
  
A lifetime Orange County resident, he was born in Orange and was 11 when his parents moved to Costa Mesa.   
  
At Newport Harbor High School he played four years of varsity baseball as a catcher and three years of varsity football. He was named Newport Harbor's Tar of the Year in 1948.   
  
After high school, he played baseball for a St. Louis Cardinals farm team and met his future wife, Kathleen Speirs, while at a game in Victoria, B.C. They were married in 1950.   
  
Bill gave up baseball and became a Costa Mesa police officer. Ten years later he joined the Costa Mesa Fire Department, where he was an engineer for 20 years.   
  
After retiring at age 55, he lived his dream of tinkering, as he called it, in his well-equipped and organized machine shop.   
  
He thrived on a mechanical challenge and seemed to do some of his best problem-solving in the middle of the night.   
  
"I'll be back," he'd say to Kathleen as he bolted out of bed. "I think I've figured out a way to ..." and he was off to the shop.   
  
Bill didn't bar the kids from his shop, but they knew better than to mess around in there. He was fussy about his stuff, demanded respect for his possessions and made his children take care of their things and of things in the home.   
  
He also taught them integrity, to do the things they said they'd do, be honest and live by the Golden Rule.   
  
A staunch Republican, he said Democrats were idiots. "Are you a Republican?" he'd ask anyone he met. If they said no, he tried to set them straight.   
  
Bill lived life on his own terms. His wife didn't work because he felt a woman's place was in the home.   
  
He was stubborn and liked things his way.   
  
Even the week before he died, he noticed that his daughter had brought him cereal with the wrong spoon in it, excused himself from the table and came back with the more rounded spoon he preferred.   
  
Careful with his money, he drove a green Ford Maverick for years, then traded it for a used Ford Ranger pickup truck. When his son offered to buy him a Mercedes, Bill turned it down.   
  
"I can afford to drive anything I want," he said. "I choose to drive a Ford Ranger."   
  
His idea of a culinary treat was breakfast at Norm's – hash browns, bacon, eggs and toast with a side of tomato. When he'd eaten the potatoes and eggs, he made a bacon and tomato sandwich with the toast.  
  
He lived for trips to Kinder's Camp on the Colorado River outside Parker, Ariz., where the family camped annually. He drove the ski boat for the kids, talked to other campers about their boats and trucks or sat by the river eating sunflower seeds with a wad of gum that he'd previously chewed tucked behind his ear.   
  
Although he adored his family, Bill wasn't demonstrative with them until later in his life, when he told them all how much he loved them.   
  
On Thanksgiving, all the children and grandchildren were at his house, playing an uproarious game of Yahtzee after dinner.   
  
Ill and in pain, Bill said how great it was to hear the kids all together, laughing and having fun.   
  
He was also still planning one last trip to the river.   
  
William "Bill" Weatherwax   
  
Born: Dec. 3, 1929, Orange   
  
Died: Dec. 1, 2006, Costa Mesa   
  
Survivors: Wife, Kathleen; son, John; daughters, Linda Bullard, Terry Hollister; grandchildren, Tommy Bullard, Jonathan and Matthew Hollister, Kaylee Weatherwax   
  
Services: Private. Arrangements by Eternity Cremation & Burial Service, Orange.   
  
Donations: American Cancer Society, 1940 E. Deere Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92705, or Companion Hospice, 2041 W. Orangewood Ave., Orange, CA 92868.   
  
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