

The Life of Charles S. Wilke

My mom and dad were married in 1939 and had 3 boys, my mom really wanted a girl, so they tried again. I was born on September 25, 1948, at Deaconess Hospital, my mom cried because she once again had a boy. In them days they could not tell ahead of time what sex the baby was and so there was no painting or decorating the bedroom blue or pink until after the baby was born. Of course, the mom and baby stayed in the hospital long enough for the dad to decorate, it was different then. Five years later they tried again for a girl but once again had a boy. My mom was raised out of town and so did not have any family or friends here except for one sister, Doris Penrod. My grandfather started his own business Paul Wilke & Son, Inc. in 1920 when my dad was two years old, when dad graduated from eight grade he worked at the family business so did not have many friends. I do not remember ever seeing my Godfather, but my Godmother was in my life until the day she died. Her name was Betty Block, and her husband was Charlie and was a sergeant with the Cincinnati police department. So, I think I was named after him, they had a son and daughter, Charles and Brenda. They called the son Chick and so that was my nickname also. I never really cared for it but most of my family still calls me that. I am OK with it now. Betty was not Catholic, and the Priest did not like the idea but since mom and dad did not know many Catholics, he accepted her as my Godmother. You could not ask for a better one, and I believe she would have raised me catholic if something had happened to mom and dad.

My earliest memory is when I was three years old, my dad was a scout leader and there was a scout Jamboree at Philmont Scout ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. So, what I remember is staying at Motels, I would get to go into the room first and place my "Howdy Do" on one of the beds and that was mine for the night. Howdy Do was a red donkey almost as big as me. Somehow, I thought we were staying at people's houses, not sure why. Another thing was at the ranch, we stayed in barracks, every morning at sunlight a donkey would stand at a fence nearby and wake everyone up, I would go out and feed it apples, I guess that is why it kept coming back every day. Each day my brothers would go around and trade badges or patches with other scouts from around the world, each day they would spread them out on a bed, and we would look at them for a long time. After the Jamboree, we traveled all over the west for a couple of weeks, the only other thing I remember is everyone else in the family was going horseback riding at the Grand Canyon, my next oldest brother was 6 and got to go but I had to go on a bus to some play area, I remember kicking some lady in the legs quite a bit as she took me to the bus. I owe her a huge apology; I had the best time once I got there.

We lived in an old 2 story farmhouse in Fairmount which was on the west side of downtown Cincinnati. It was very drafty, and I can remember sitting on the registers to try to warm up. We had some great times; the house was at the edge of acres and acres of wooded area. We had tree houses, one of which my one brother burnt down with my other brother in it because he would not let him climb up to it. We had lots of trails in the woods and for some reason I seemed to trip and fall a lot. Sometimes my arm would come out of its socket and they would take me to the doctor, and he would put it back in. One day I was running down the trail to the house to watch Howdy Doody, I think, and I tripped and out it came again, well I started running again and tripped again and somehow my arm went right back in the socket. During winter, if we got enough snow, we could sled ride quite a long way. The house had a garage with a concrete slab over it, no railings, but on hot days my mom would fill up a couple of galvanized wash tubs that we would sit in and bring us Coke and Sprite that we would mix together along with some chips and pretzels. We were quite poor but somehow mom would find a way

to get us a special treat occasionally. At Christmas we would each get some clothes and a toy to share. The toy to share was “assigned” to one of us and upon marriage that toy was then ours to keep. I still have two items, a lighted merry go round and a Roy Rogers town which consists of a metal town and plastic horses and cowboys.

I started Kindergarten when I was five, I went to Saint Bonaventure School which was run by Franciscans. It was not too far from where we lived and so we usually walked to school and for lunch we would walk to my grandma’s which was just about the same distance. My Grandparents were awesome, they lived in a three-story home at 2020 Queen City Avenue. Grandma’s sister Aunt Emma lived with them on the second floor. If we stayed overnight, we would stay on the second floor with Aunt Emma, she was good to me. She ended up with cancer, they did exploratory surgery at Saint Francis Hospital not far from the house, she was so full of cancer they just sewed her back up. They never told her, and she died in the hospital. I will never understand why they did not tell her. Grandma always had a bowl of popcorn on the counter to snack on, it may have had salt on it but no butter, maybe that is why I like popcorn so much now. Grandpa would take us to the bakery, his theory was if one peach pie is good, 5 are better. Of course, he would buy plenty of donuts and rolls, so grandma would slice the rolls and donuts so that you would have a top and bottom, she would give us the top with all the icing, and she would eat the bottom. If we stayed overnight on Fridays, Grandpa would buy a couple gallons of peach ice cream and we would sit and watch the Friday night boxing matches on TV and eat the ice cream. One day while at Grandma’s for lunch, our Uncle Walter and Aunt Rose were there, they lived in Fort Myers Florida. Uncle Walter had been on a submarine during WWII, he was fun to be with, but you better not waste any food. For some reason Grandma made me a sandwich with rye bread, which I hated, I ate that sandwich without uttering a peep. I think I was about five years old and did not talk much, on our yearly doctor checkup, my mom told the doctor because she was quite concerned. The doctor said that when I point someone would always give me what I wanted so had no reason to talk, she made sure I had to ask for what I wanted after that, and it worked.

I went to Saint Bonaventure for Kindergarten, first and second grade. My dad owned a strip of property from Margaret Street off Quebec Road to Grand Avenue. The old farmhouse was on Margaret Street, the family business was on Grand. A developer started putting in a subdivision on Patrick Drive in between the shop and farmhouse in the spring of my year of second grade. The surveyors made an error and went too far onto dad’s property and were putting in a cul-de-sac. So, dad decided to build a new house at the end of the street, the street was already prepped, and the gas and water were already run. So, the house was not complete when I started third grade, but I was transferred to Our Lady of Grace School in Price Hill and so dad would drive us to and from school. I made new friends quickly and was invited to a Halloween party at the end of Mickey Avenue which connects Grand Avenue with Patrick Drive. It is also the same day we moved into the new house so after the party I walked home. After a Halloween Party and walking down a new street it was a little scary, I probably ran most of the way. So, I went to Our Lady of Grace for third, fourth and fifth grades. On the second day of my six-grade year, it was my youngest brother John’s second day of first grade, he did not remember where he was supposed to go so one of the nun’s was hitting him with her rosary, we returned to Saint Bonaventure the next day. I quickly picked up where I left off with my old friends. Patrick drive was halfway between the two schools so I stayed friends with guys from both schools and we would hang out at each other’s houses all year long, most weekends during the school year and many day’s during the summer. We would play basketball, football, and baseball either at the park or at the Bible College nearby. Summer evenings I

would play with neighborhood kids, and there were a lot of them, Patrick Drive was awesome. There never was a bully at Our Lady of Grace but was one at Saint Bonaventure. He would pick on me, but a great friend Dave Huwel would stick up for me. One day the bully and I decided to meet out in the alley next to school. We both showed up and he told me to take my glasses off, I told him he would not get close enough to mess up my glasses. That is all it took, no more bullying. We had a 25-year reunion and he apologized to everyone he had bullied, I forgave him.

Some of the story's that I remember from grade school days are Jimmy Funk swallowed the class goldfish. We did not have very many snow days back then even though we got a lot more snow, and we really did have snow up to our knees, but we were short then. One day at school I thought we were supposed to be off for some reason, but we were not, so I was so disappointed that I told mom and dad that I was off even though all my brothers had to go, well they let me stay home and it was the most boring and long days I ever experienced up to that point, I do not remember getting any punishment for it though. We would usually walk home from school, there was a small mom and pop grocery store in the opposite direction of home but not too far so we would walk to it with the hope of collecting a couple pop bottles to trade for candy, after that we would walk home and there was a house with a large hedge, once in a while the guy was trimming them with hedge trimmers, he would call us over and say he wanted to trim our whiskers, scared us to death and sometimes would take the long way around to avoid him. After Sunday Mass at Saint Bonaventure, a guy would be selling soft dough pretzel sticks, they were the best. I have and had a terrific life, young years included. Growing up in the fifties and sixties were so carefree, you could play outside anytime and walk anywhere you wanted anytime.

On the home front, growing up, even though we were five years apart, John and I spent most of our time together. We did so many fun and sometimes crazy things when we moved to Patrick Drive. Dad set up a four-foot deep, twenty-four feet diameter pool, and we would swim a lot. We had big truck inner tubes to float on, they made good snow sleds also. It was set up near a storage barn which gave us a lot of things to explore. We would find wasp nests and of course we had to mess with them, we did not have any wasp spray so we would squirt them with the water hose, you know that did not kill them so they would come after us and sting the heck out of us, we would put some mud on the bites and continue. One time we found a bat sleeping on the side of the barn. We used a butterfly net to catch him, we tried to kill it by slamming it down on the ground, but it was still alive, after some time of using other methods, we put gasoline on it and lit it. That worked but the butterfly net did not survive. We built a two-story camp in the woods, there were a lot of exciting things that happened there. We used to have mud ball fights with the neighborhood kids, we put small rocks in our mudballs and had the advantage of being up in the second story of the camp, we always won. One day brother John accidentally set the camp on fire, we were able to put it out, but we bribed John for years, if we needed anything done that, we did not want to do we would threaten John with telling mom and dad and so he would do it. One day we went too far and wanted him to go back to the barn for something, well it was after dark and the barn was 300 feet or more from the house, he said he was not going, and he told mom himself, she said she already knew. Dad did not golf but somewhere he got a golf club, a putter, we did not know any better and would try to drive a golf ball as far as we could with it. Dad had bought a houseboat cheap because two guys owned it and it was in a boat storage place sitting on concrete blocks during the winter, each one thought the other had put the drain plug back in and so when the river rose the boat filled with water up to the roof and they just wanted rid of it. Dad put a lot of work in it and had the motor rebuilt and added a generator. He docked it at Four Seasons Marina which was in a

cove off the Ohio river. The boat even had a dingy with a small outboard motor. So, if dad just wanted to stay in the harbor, John and I would take out the dingy and cruise around. We were not supposed to go out into the river, but we usually did. Also, at the marina, they had a really nice place to get a hamburger, snacks and drinks. We could go anytime we wanted and charge it onto dad's account. John and I felt like big shots. When we took the boat onto the river, we would sometimes go upriver a short distance to Coney Island, from the river it was free to get in, but you had to pay for each ride. I think dad would give us ten dollars which lasted most of the day. We had many super fun days. Other times we would go down river and stop at a boat dock with a bar. Dad would always get a seven seven [seven up and Seagram's seven], if I asked if I could have one, he would buy me one. Once again feeling like a big shot. Each year dad would have the boat brought up to our yard because we lived at the end of a subdivision and had many acres. Usually in the spring he would work on it, one year it needed painting so he bought some Rustoleum brand paint, unfortunately they forgot to put drier in it, and it would not dry so had to be striped off and repainted. One year as they were transporting the boat to the river along the public landing, a train came by and scraped the railing, fortunately not too bad.

In between playing around we did have chores. We had to cut the grass, which was about two acres, we had a Garden All Tractor with a four-foot-wide cut but every time you used it the belts would break or come off, it was a pain. Of course, we did have fun with it, we would try to level out some of the ground by dragging a wooden skid behind it, well, you needed weight so we would take turns riding on it. Grandma and Grandpa had moved to Patrick Drive two houses down from us, he loved plants so had two huge rose gardens in our yard and we had to keep them weeded, we did not have gloves in those days so our hands would be shredded by the time we were done. There were also wild raspberry bushes way back on the property and they had thorns also but the raspberry's sure tasted good. We also had to clean the basement, mainly dust. Dad was a collector of many things; he and grandpa would go to auctions and buy anything that was cheap. They also had certain people that they traded with. One guy was called trader Bill. He had a house but could not live in it because it was full of antiques and other assorted items. He lived in a small camping trailer that had plenty of items in it also. So, our basement was full but organized. Dad had 365 clocks, one for each day, there were grandfather, mantle, cuckoo clocks, and clocks made from cigar boxes. The cuckoo clocks hung around the perimeter of our dining room with there being at least twenty of them. He had over 400 guns, rifles, pistols and a BAR that we played with outside. It took two of us to carry it. He had all kinds of Knick knacks, a collection of knives, pipes and books. We each had our own collection of items that we would show at the county fair, I had seashells that I won ribbons for. Dad met some famous people like Eddie Arcaro that gave dad one of his winning horse race trophy's, also there was a guy Jeff Davis, and he was the King of the Hobo's and he gave dad a ring of his. Also in the basement were a pinball machine, a horse race spinning wheel, a booth from a restaurant and a bar with barstools. I also had 20 tropical fish tanks, I raised guppy's, angel fish, neon tetra's, Bettas and I had one 100-gallon tank with an Oscar in it. He was about six inches long and I would feed him earth worms from the yard. He would swim around for days with one hanging out of its mouth until he swallowed the whole thing.

We would play outside with neighbor kids, kick the can, hide and seek, ghost in the graveyard and whiffle ball & basketball. Sometimes dad would have some friends over with kids our ages and we would play monopoly after dark. Sometimes we would go to their homes and one family would grill corn on the cob and again play Monopoly until we had to go home. Dad made friends with a Franciscan Priest, Father Aloys Held who oversaw the Franciscan Missionary Union in Cincinnati. At some of the

auction's dad went to he would buy things that they could use, at the time they would send items to the Philippines. When the Sinton Hotel went out of business it was auctioned off. They sold most rooms as a package deal. He bought several rooms to get the desks to send over. He also bought the abandoned luggage room. This room was a treasure trove full of suitcases and various loose items that people left behind. Some things were just forgotten but most was from people that could not pay their bill or had to leave town in a hurry. Father Aloys worked with a mover and he would bring everything to our barn in the back yard of our house. I should explain that the barn was fully sealed with a wood floor, garage door and shingled roof. Dad added on 2 more buildings as more room was needed. So, in these suitcases we found things like puppets, mannequins, vaudeville clothes, magic trick items, and everything you can imagine. The best thing was a Mahjong Set. It is a Chinese game that uses 144 ivory tiles using skill, strategy and luck. Father Aloys introduced us to another Franciscan Priest, Father Adolph, he had been in a Chinese prison for saying Mass in China. He taught our family how to play Mahjong and each Sunday we would spend hours with him playing. We never could get the gist of score keeping so he always did that. Pretty much every Sunday they came to the house and pick out what they wanted to send to the Philippines then stay for supper and play Mahjong. Then during the week, we would put everything in large crates and when full the mover would pick them up and ship out. Father Aloy's also would send us large votive candles and religious items to also pack and ship, a lot of the candle's ended up in our camp. We would use them for heat and light. We would also melt them and pour the wax onto rags and then burn them for more heat. That is how John caught the camp on fire.

I was a pretty picky eater, mom and dad tried to make me eat tapioca and after a couple hours I ate it and threw up, I think that is the last time they made me eat anything I did not want. When mom made chili, I would not eat it so she would make me a hamburger. I did not eat pizza until I was in my fifties. I had made a deal with my niece Sarah, if she ate some pork, we were having for supper I would eat something she liked, well she ate some and picked pizza for me to eat. Pizza is good but I am lactose intolerant so the cheese can be a problem. Typical for the times, my heroes were cowboys and cartoon characters. I liked Hopalong Cassidy and Mighty Mouse, plus Howdy Doody for sure. I still have a Hopalong Cassidy watch. When it came time for new shoes, we would go to Luebbe shoe store where he sold Red Goose shoes, I remember they would give each of us a golden goose egg each time we went. Two things we did away from home was roller skating and going to the movie theatre. The movies at that time were always science fiction with aliens attacking us in one form or another. John and I would walk down to the bottom of Grand Avenue to Queen City Avenue then the theatre was about a block away. We would usually go late afternoon and then have to walk home in the dark. We were always scared to death but somehow being with each other got us through. Dad being in business would get Cincinnati Reds baseball tickets from salesmen. He did not want to go so I would go by myself. They were usually rather good seats. The games at that time were at Crosly field, which was just a couple miles from home, so I would again walk down Grand Avenue to Westwood Avenue then cross under the western Hills Viaduct and the Ball Park was just around the corner. I always took my baseball glove but never got a ball. My mom and dad would always pick me up after the game.

Guys that graduated from Saint Bonaventure would go to Roger Bacon High School, it was in Saint Bernard, and you had to transfer to three different buses to get there. That is where my oldest brother went. The next three of us went to Elder High School because of where we lived, it was much closer, and we could still walk even though it was a longer one. John, the youngest went to Western Hills High. At Elder I took General Courses, it was kind of a given that all the brothers would go into the family

metal working business, and we all did. Although I always wanted to be a fireman. I had a recurring dream about being a fireman and I would be on a ladder truck but somehow it could go down staircases. In the staircase was a beautiful young woman that I was determined to marry. The best part is I did, I do not know how I could have dreamt about her specifically long before I ever saw her, but this is true. On career day, I just hung out because it did not matter what other jobs there were in life. The only language I took was English, but my buddies talked me into joining the German Club that they were in. None of us took it seriously and so I learned no German at all. I seldom studied but always did my homework, I passed most classes with low seventy averages, but math was always in the nineties except Geometry, I was great with numbers, but theorems did not fit my comprehension capabilities. The best thing about High School was pep rally's during football season. For the last class of the day, we would go out to the football stadium and holler and yell with the cheerleaders leading the cheers. "First and ten, do it again", "I rather be dead than Red on the head" if the other team wore red helmets. Elder's colors were purple and white, and a purple panther was our mascot. I could not wait to get home, eat supper and get back to the stadium with my purple and white jacket, it was not made for winter, but we all wore them anyway. When I was in grade school, I took piano lessons then in high school I took organ lessons, dad had bought a Hammond Organ from one of the Sinton Hotels ballrooms. I still have it. My instructor was the organist at Saint Dominic Church, and he would pay me to play for their Lenten services. I was terrible, I made mistakes and played too loud, but I did that for two years.

My three older brothers were not allowed to get their driver's license until they were eighteen, on my seventeenth birthday they picked me up from school and took me for my written driver's test, no warning, no chance to read the rules. I passed with a ninety-two. When I passed my driver's test my dad bought me a 1961 Ford Galaxy with a V8 in it. This was in December of my senior year and had no restrictions or curfew, I never did. I would pick up a few buddies and ride around and of course drive through Frisch's. During basketball season we would go to the away games, and I have no idea how we ever made it home. None of us drank but I used every bit of that V8, mostly from light to light but one time on the eighth street viaduct I was going too fast and scraped the divider, fortunately I kept it under control and the marks were low enough on the door that nobody saw them. I have a great guardian angel. I graduated from Elder High School on June sixth nineteen sixty-six. On August 8, 1966, I bought a brand new 1966 Mustang Convertible 289 engine, 3 speed on the floor. The color was emberglo with a white convertible top. I wanted a Metallic blue one, but it would take a month or two to get it, so they talked me out of that. Emberglo was a metallic copper that was beautiful. I would spend an entire weekend waxing it with Blue Coral wax. It was a three-process ordeal. I added dual exhaust, eight track tape player, which I would travel to the other side of town in order to get the tapes I liked, Cragar mags with bigger tires which meant I had to add spring spacers and lifts to raise it up so the tires did not rub and external hood latches like real race cars had. I spent a lot of time waxing the Mustang in order to see the neighbor's babysitter that was across and down one house from me quite a bit. When I first saw her, I knew she was the one I had dreamt about many times in the stairwell. I was so terribly shy I could not get up the nerve to go over and talk to her. My brother was friends with the guy that owned the house and after a year they set up a date at his house. So, I picked her up and she would try to talk to me about every subject there was, even football but I was only able to answer with yes or no. It was horrible for both of us. I took her home and eventually called her and took her to Edgewater drag strip, but it was not any better, pure silence on my part, I was nervous and literally shaking. I think we may have gone out again but not sure. She would tell me if I would take a different route, it was faster to her house, well I liked being with her so took the longer route, more pain for her. When I was in the Army in

Fort Ord California for my Advanced Individual Training [AIT], Infantry, I decided to write her. It was much easier without having to be with her. Fortunately, she felt sorry for me and wrote back. When I came home on leave before going to Vietnam, I asked her out and she went out with me, but I was still scared. I dropped her off and gave her a very quick kiss and left. It was a milestone for me. So, while I was in Vietnam and Japan, I continued writing as she continued to write back and again, I was able to communicate better and say what I could not in person. By the time I got home we knew each other so well that we had fallen in love and four months later I asked her to marry me, and she said yes.

Going back a little bit, my oldest brother Paul was nine years older than me and would have parties in the basement, of course we were not allowed to go down there at those times, but they would play records and dance. It was fun to listen to anyway. When he got married, he was in the Army reserves and was at Fort Gordon Georgia for his 4 months of training, he then moved into an apartment on Westwood Northern Blvd. Then he purchased a house on Patrick Drive just houses down from ours on the other side of the street. Brother Ed was six years older than me so like Paul we did not have much interaction once they started driving. When he got married, they lived in an apartment in Cheviot. After a few years he bought a house on Patrick drive across the street from Paul, on our side of the street three houses down. Grandma and Grandpa bought the house next to him, two houses from us. My brother Bob was the best, he was three years older than me and liked to have fun. Bob, John and I had a million good times. Growing up and after high school. One evening we decided to go to Coney Island amusement park, it was about 14 miles away. My friend Fred Feucht was with us so Bob, John, Fred and I got into Bob's 1962, two seat Corvette and headed out, we got about a mile or two before the police pulled us over and told us to go back home. We knew all the police in district three because our family business was in the district on Grand Avenue in Price Hill and coffee and donuts were always available. The family business is a custom metal working shop. We do not do any production work, just one of this and one of that. We make a lot of guards for the machine tool industry and elevator companies. We do a lot of metal fabrication, welding and machining. So, back in the 1960's through the 1980's the police would stop by and over the years there were many good and fun things that happened. We had set up a bullet trap inside the shop and one day they decided to find out who was the best shot. By the end of their shift, they had no bullets left and thankfully they did not get any runs that afternoon.

John was still in high school, and someone would pick him up after school each day. One snowy winter day Paul said I should go but to drive his car instead of mine. Paul had a 1965 Black Mustang hardtop; I had a 1966 Emberglo Mustang Convertible and Bob had a 1967 Metallic Blue Mustang Fastback 2 + 2. So, I took Paul's Mustang and, on the way back, as we crested the hill on Grand Avenue at Lehman Road there were a couple of girls, so I pushed in the clutch and gunned the motor, Paul had glass packs on his exhaust, however I released the clutch too soon and it took off down the steep hill and hit a high curb and then a signpost. On the radio the song "slow down you move too fast" was playing. I told John that if it is not too bad let us not say anything to Paul. Well, it was totaled. Several years later when I was in Vietnam, Paul talked dad into selling my Mustang because the tires would rot before I got back. I think he wanted to get even with me. When I got home, I went looking for it to buy it back but the guy had wrecked it, so I went and bought a new 1969 Torino convertible, it was a nice car. Another time I was driving our stake truck with grandpa with me and was on State Avenue ready to pull out onto River Road. I had pulled out a little too far so backed up a little so traffic could get by. The guy behind me starts blowing his horn but I ignored him and turned onto River Road, he followed me still blowing his horn, so I pulled over. He claimed that I had backed into his car, which he just got back from

the body shop from a previous wreck, and the pendle hook on the truck went into his grill. The guy was a competitor of ours and grandpa defended me to the death. We ended up calling the police and after some discussion, had the guy pull his car up to the back of the truck to see if the pendle hook lined up with the hole in his fender. It did not, it was about 6 inches too high so the policeman sent us on our way. I truly do not know if I backed into him or not, the road could have had a curve or hump to it compared to where it supposedly happened. Of course, I also knew the policeman.

Dad always bought normal delivery trucks that he drove back and forth to work. Our house on Patrick Drive was basically behind the shop. Mom always fixed us lunch so we would sit on the tailgate, and someone would drive up Grand to Mickey Avenue to Patrick and to the end of Patrick to the house. We would eat and then reverse our route. On nice days some of us would walk back to work. For some reason dad bought a new Ford F250 with V8 engine, four speed and it had low profile tires. A lot of construction was going on in Clifton, which is a couple of miles from the shop, and I was the delivery guy most days. That truck could burn the tires in three of the four gears, it was great to drive. Dad also had a male dalmatian that had less spots than most which made it a beautiful dog. When it was time to make a delivery, I would call him, Gunny, and say, "let's go" and he would run out of the office or shop and if the door was closed would jump through the window. Then while I was driving, he would sit in the seat right next to me and put his head on my shoulder. Dad took him to work each day because dad liked dogs, but mom liked cats and it was a constant battle between the dog and cats.

Bob got into drag racing, he started with a gas dragster and quickly got into AA Fuel dragster. One of our customers and Bob created a team "Scott-Wilke". Bob was the driver and raced against some of the top racers at the time. I do not think he ever beat any of them, but he gave them a run, they had a lot of respect for him. One weekend he was racing in Columbus Ohio and a hot dog wrapper blew up and covered his goggles and he crashed breaking his back. He spent a lot of time healing but as soon as he could he got back in and continued racing. It seems every time I went to see him, he would lose. I was on my way one time up to Columbus and my car broke down; he won that day. I was in California returning from Vietnam and called home the night before I came home, mom and dad were out but Bob and I talked for an hour, he said he could not be at the airport to meet me because he had a race to go to. I had no issue with that.

I mentioned that I was returning from Vietnam and since I wrote a separate story about that I will not repeat it here, but it was an adventure that changed my life and not a day goes by that I do not think about it. I will add that I was assigned to Fort Knox Kentucky for a couple of months then was released from the Army on a weekend.

On Monday I returned to work as if I were not even gone for a year and a half. Bobbie and I became closer and closer and on December 21, 1969, I asked her to marry me. I was going to wait until Christmas, but I just could not wait. She said yes and so we began planning for the wedding. We agreed on everything, we only had a maid of Honor and Best Man. The maid of honor was Bobbie's best friend that she had met in high school and best man was my middle brother. We picked May 1, 1970, as the day. As the months went by, we had everything arranged and set in place. On April 12th, my dad had a massive heart attack and died before the ambulance could get there. He had a couple of heart attacks previous and saw the heart doctor every Friday evening, he had just seen him 36 hours previous. Bobbie

and I talked to my mom about postponing the wedding, but she said no, and that my dad had told her that we were a match made in Heaven. I worked with my dad every day in the family business, but we were not as close as I was with my mom. Our family was not the kind that ever hugged or said I love you; I regret that now. So, the wedding went on as planned, for Bobbie and I it was wonderful but I also think it was a sort of letting go of dad and moving on for all of us, I think it gave everyone a chance to let it all out. Of course, we all missed him, he ran the business and the brothers had to figure it out on our own. Of course, for mom it was bad, and it took years for her to smile again. I would say nine years, she had a brain tumor the size of an orange, the surgeon removed it and I think she must have had an out of body experience and started living again. She started to travel and take cruises; it was wonderful to see her so happy. Back to the wedding, we had a Mass and ceremony at my Parish, St. Bonaventure Church, it was a beautiful Church. It was Concelebrated by three Franciscan Priests, Father Norman Perry, Bobbies cousin, Fr, Aloys Held and Fr. Adolph. The latter two were Missionary Priests that my dad and of course the whole family would help accumulate items and crate them up to send to the Philippines. We had some nice barns in our back yard and dad would go to auctions and buy items that they could use. One time when the Sinton Hotel in downtown Cincinnati went out of business, he bought an entire room full of left behind luggage, the suitcases were treasure troves. It was amazing what people would leave behind. In one suitcase there was an ivory Mai Jong set. Now Fr. Adolph had been held captive in a Chinese prison for saying Mass, he learned how to play Mai Jong and taught all of us. They would visit us most Sundays and we would play for hours. Great times. Dad also bought many rooms of hotel furniture that he sent to the Missions. After the reception, we went to my mom's house to change clothes. Our best man, my brother Bob, took us, he lived there also, because our car was in the garage to keep my other brothers from messing with it. Bob was the drag racer and had a race to go to in the morning, so as we pulled out of the garage he came out and untied the cans that someone had tied to the car, we thanked him and waved goodbye as we drove off. Well, when he came out, the door locked behind him and he had already emptied his pockets. He needed to get to bed because of getting up early so he broke out a window to get in. When my mom got home, she was not happy with him. So, we drive to the Holiday Inn in Queensgate where we had reservations only to be informed, they had given away our room. I guess there was a lot of not being happy going on, at least they put us up in another hotel a few miles away. The next day we got up and visited our moms and then the next day headed for Daytona Beach Florida. We had a nice place on the beach, we got to drive on the beach also. We had a great time, from the first day and still today we totally feel content to be just the two of us. We were supposed to stay two weeks but after one week I got a call from my brothers begging me to come home and help with the family business because they did not know what to do. Keep in mind that I was the fourth in line and had been in the Army for a year and a half less than a year before this. John, the youngest, 16 years old was still in high school, Paul was 30, Ed was 27, Bob was 24, I was 21. So, we drove straight through and saved the day. Bobbie has always supported me and never complained; however, I still use the shortened honeymoon on my brothers whenever I can. We had rented an apartment close to my work, Bobbie worked downtown, and we only had one car so Bobbie would drop me off at my shop and then drive downtown to hers. We lived off my paycheck and either saved hers or used it to buy things that we needed or wanted like a sewing machine, 8 track tapes and cabinet to hold them, freezer etc. Two years later our oldest son Chuck was born. We had purchased a house in Miami Heights and moved in shortly after. It was a three-bedroom ranch and was perfect for us, a year later our youngest son Ron was born. There were a million good times there, one time we decided to put in a fireplace and was planning on something like a pot belly stove to put in a corner of our basement that I

had paneled and put in a bar and TV and some lounge type chairs. Bobbie had quit working when Chuck was born, and the company had bought me a company truck. Of course, I was working so Bobbie went to Swallens to look for a stove. That night she told me about this awesome fireplace she saw, it was round with glass panels around the perimeter so you could see the wood burning and had an orange cone shaped top. We went and bought it because it was "us". My brothers' father-in-law was an old German bricklayer, so he came over and put in a round hearth. Like every other decision we had made together, we had many years of enjoyment from it.

When our boys were 3 and 4 years old, Bobbie says to me that her sister and a friend of theirs were going camping with their kids and she thought it would be great for us and our boys. We had always agreed about everything that the other wanted but I had enough camping in Vietnam and said no way. After a few weeks she asked again but this time added that we did not have to sleep in a tent, a friend of ours had a small motor home that we could borrow. I still was not thrilled but said OK. Well of course she was right, the kids and us had an awesome time. I borrowed it 2 more times and in the meantime my grandma had died and left us \$4000.00. We then went camper shopping and found a 20' tow behind camper for that amount. It had a small refrigerator, stove and even a little bathtub big enough to bathe the boys. For nine years we camped almost every weekend from May to October and sometimes November if we had a good weekend. We kept it at a campground in Walton Kentucky along with 3 other couples. Once or twice a year we would tow it to Gatlinburg or Cedar Point. Sometimes during the summer, we would stay at the campground for a couple weeks and I would drive into work every day, it was about the same amount of time as if I was driving home from work, but that way all 4 families could be together, and the kids could all play together. The ladies would cook meals for all of us to enjoy together. Life is good.

Even though we loved our house we wanted a new one, so in 1985 we found 5.5 acres just a block away. The kids could walk through the woods to it faster than we could drive there. We built a three-bedroom ranch just a little bigger, but it has a much more open floor plan, and it is in the woods. Kind of strange since I do not like the woods at night. After 15 years we enclosed the deck and made a mostly glass sunroom. The view into the woods is awesome, we have enjoyed much wildlife over the years. I finished the basement into a man cave with 15 video games, 5 pinball machines, a pool table, jukebox and a few other games. I also have a train room and nostalgia room with toys and stuff from my childhood and many collector items we bought on our early married life vacations. I recently built a shooting range in the back yard that I enjoy with my friends. Our house is perfect for party's and gatherings. The house was still under construction when we set up sawhorses with plywood on the top and folding chairs and had Thanksgiving Dinner in 1985 for about 30 family members. It was the first of many. Also, similar parties on Christmas and Easter not to mention showers and birthdays. Since we now had our own woods, we sold the camper. We had trail bikes from our camping days and now we had 100's of acres to ride on, all heavily wooded. Chuck and Ron would spend hours riding with their friends and sometimes I would join them. We had a blast.

As we approached our 25th wedding anniversary, we contemplated going to Hawaii, however we decided we should have a party so everyone could celebrate our unbelievable life. So, we planned a

gathering and had another memorable day. One of the considerations in our decision was my health. Since Vietnam I have had intestinal problems and it happens daily with no consistent cause that anyone has been able to solve. Shortly after getting out of the Army, I went to the VA Hospital for help, at that time their idea of help was to give me a 10 percent disability, about \$32.00 a month. After three years they wanted me to go to a psychiatrist which I was not happy about and told them no thanks, so they quit paying me. I probably should have gone. One of my civilian doctors did discover that I am Lactose Intolerant and eliminating dairy products did help some. Then starting in about 1992 I began to have every symptom of heart disease. I had ambulance rides and given nitroglycerin. For three years I went to many specialists just about every month trying to figure it out. No one could find the cause. So, I decided to pray a Novena to St. Therese of the Little Flower. I printed up 9 slips of paper with a prayer to her and stopped at St. Jude Church on the way to work, prayed the prayer and left the paper in a pew. I did this for nine straight days. On the ninth day I was on the way to work and on Queen City Ave, quite a poor area, I saw this young girl with a bouquet of flowers, exactly what the Novena is all about. Soon after I went to my regular doctor and he said, I am sending you to the Cleveland Clinic. I had never heard of the place but when I got there, I found out that it is where doctors and wealthy people go for help. I had to go back three times. The first time they checked everything about my heart, afterward the doctor guaranteed me that I would not have a heart attack for at least a year. The second trip was to check my nervous system to see if there was something with that, nothing wrong. The third time they checked stomach and bowel. I had to wear a device like a Holter monitor for the heart except it had a tube that went up my nose and into my stomach for 24 hours. Bingo, my stomach produces so much acid along with a flap that is not quite working right was allowing the acid to back up into my esophagus causing the pains. They found other issues that I did not know I had but not serious enough to do anything about. So, with medication the pain is very well controlled. I still have the intestinal issues but have adjusted my life to accommodate the best I can.

As I felt better, I began to get more active, I joined the Knights of Columbus, joined the building and grounds committee at Church, parish council and the choir. I ended up holding many offices including Grand Knight, President of Building and Grounds and President of Parish Council. I also cantered the responses for funerals at Church. I also joined the VFW and almost immediately became the Adjutant and joined the Honor Guard.

For our 50th wedding anniversary we planned another party, it was to be exactly 50 years to the day and on a Friday night, just like the original. We had awesome invitations printed with the new date plus copied the exact original on another page. We also included a wedding picture and a current one. Bobbie found gold silverware and plates along with gold table decorations. We ordered a cake and flowers and a DJ. We rented the civic center near our home. Our daughter in law had a bunch of our pictures made into a slide show and we had a couple of wedding pictures enlarged and framed for displaying. The date was May 1st. Well, a plaque named COVID-19 was released and the whole world was changed and partially shut down. We were not allowed to have our celebration. By September it was better but still very dangerous, but we were allowed to reschedule for September 20 with some restrictions like you had to wear a face mask and not over 100 people, tables had to be at least 6 feet apart and only 8 to a table. Food could not be buffet style, it had to be served. Well, we still had the best of times. Everyone enjoyed it and no one caught the virus.

However, the Sunday before Thanksgiving 2020 I began feeling bad and stayed home from work which was very rare. Bobbie and I stayed home and had our thanksgiving dinner alone. I didn't eat much

but some of everything. The next evening, I took a shower and as I was drying off, I could not catch my breath, Bobbie called 911 and the ambulance came and took me to the closest urgent care and dropped me off. With suspected Covid 19, Bobbie was not allowed to go. So, after some testing, they tested me for Covid 19, and it was positive. They called to transport me to Good Samaritan Hospital but could not get anyone until the next morning. Because of Covid, ambulances and hospitals were overflowing with patients plus everyone had to put on so much protective gear it took a long time to get anything done. I was in a regular room at Good Samaritan for five days then as my condition worsened, they moved me to intensive care, I was right outside of the nurse's station, I was there for 8 days. My oxygen levels were low and sinking so they tried several different oxygen treating machines and said the next step was to put me on a respirator. The third type they tried was Opti Flo, it forced so much oxygen in my face, it was like a blow gun blowing right at me. The last thing they did was a C-Pap at night and the Opti Flo during the day. They also asked if they could give me an experimental drug because they were doing a study to see if it would help. I was already getting steroids. I could not think nor concentrate so just told the doctors to ask Bobbie. Bobbie said yes, so, they tried it but the day after I came home, they said to quit taking it because it did not work as they had hoped. While in intensive care I could not get enough energy to call Bobbie on the phone, I did manage enough one day to call her and tell her that I was going to ask to be put in Hospice because I was done. With Covid you cough until you cannot breathe and become very weak due to lack of oxygen and just lying-in bed. I was miserable and even though I had an awesome life it was unbearable. When the doctors came in, I told them I wanted to go to Hospice, they left the room, I think they called Bobbie, when they came back, they brought three nurses with them. The nurses stood on both sides of my bed and one of the doctors put his hand on my leg and told me that I had no underlying conditions like heart or lung disease and that I can do this. Everyone in the room was nodding their heads in agreement so I said I would try. As soon as I had hung up with Bobbie, she began calling our family and friends and asking for prayers, as I live today, I can tell you that I felt them. I would sleep a lot and when I would wake up, if it was 11: AM I would be thinking and hoping it would be evening then realize the time and think that I would have to eat some lunch soon. Same thing happened when I woke up before supper. I had no appetite and did not want to eat also because I was stuck in bed with tubes and monitors so had to use a bed pan and the nurses were so overloaded plus had to put on so much protective equipment that they would never get there in time and I would just make a mess. The nurses never ever complained they just cleaned me up and then went on to the next patient. Sometimes I would be alone in the bed for hours. After Intensive care I was moved to a one-person room with two people in it. There was room for only one chair, and you could not share it nor anything else. I had to stay in bed, I could sit up in bed for a while but not long, each day two doctors would come in and check on me and each day they said they would send in a physical therapist to work with me, but I only saw them every couple of days. At first, I could barely sit up for 3 minutes, the second time I managed to sit up and brush my teeth, the third time I could sit up and put on some socks. At one point my roommate went home but someone else came in overnight, after he went home one of the nurses had the chair cleaned and said it was mine, after that I began sitting up for a few hours each day which helped a lot. Each day the doctors would ask me if I had any questions and each day I asked when I could go home. They always said we will see. After a week they said maybe today, a few hours later a nurse popped her head in the door and said you are going home in two hours, call someone to pick you up. I called Bobbie and she picked up a bunch of snacks for the nurses and came to get me. They were so short staffed that they sent a guy from emergency to prep me to go home. He

disconnected all my IV's and monitors and hooked up a portable oxygen unit. He found my clothes and helped me get dressed and got me in a wheelchair and gave me instructions.

Top priority was to get an oxygen generator plus some portable units in case I had to go out. I called before I left the hospital but had to leave a message. I also had to pick up some prescriptions from my local pharmacy, well they would be closed by the time we got there but the pharmacist called me and said he filled the prescriptions and put them on my porch and just pay him when I can. Then the oxygen guy called and said he had some other deliveries to make then he would deliver to me, I didn't feel I had enough oxygen from the hospital and told him that, so he came to me first. He hooked up the machine and left three regular tanks of oxygen with a cart in case I had to go out. We discovered that the hospital forgot to give me my experimental medication, so Bobbie called, and her sister Kitty went and picked it up and brought it to me. There are a lot of good and awesome people in this world.

When we got home, I could walk from the garage to just inside the door and had to sit down. Our kitchen chairs are on rollers, so Bobbie pushed me from there to my lazy boy chair and I was able to transfer to that. At that point Bobbie knew I was going to need a wheelchair so called my VFW buddy Mike and he was on his way home from church so went and picked up a chair from storage and brought it right over. The next two months I was on 24/7 oxygen. I left the house one time to go to my regular doctor, because she insisted on seeing me. Our son Ron came over and helped get me in and out of the car and doctors office. It was now mid-December and we had not put up any Christmas decorations. Our son Chuck said we had a Christmas tree every year all my life and this year would not be any different, so Chuck, Ron, Loan and Kimberly came over and put up our tree, I enjoyed it every day, probably more than ever. I had lost thirty pounds so Bobbie started feeding me every couple of hours, I would eat maybe a little soup and half of a sandwich and for breakfast I would have oatmeal and either bacon or sausage. I quickly gained ten pounds back but then thought I had a good thing going, losing the weight and I should lose even more. So, I lost the ten and now four more and hoping to get to under two hundred. If I do that, I promised myself I would eat a banana split, I always wanted one but do not ever remember having one. Medicare provided a physical therapist, an occupational therapist and a nurse that would come to the house a couple of times a week. They were very helpful and asked me what my goals were, first thing was to take a shower, so it took a couple weeks, but they were able to build me up to do that. Then it was to be able to walk to bed so Bobbie would not have to push me in the wheelchair everywhere, it took a couple weeks, but I did it, then it was to be able to stand up while brushing my teeth, it took a while but that happened also. Then it was to be able to get rid of the oxygen, the problem was Covid aftereffects were totally unknown, and no one knew how long that would take so I called my regular doctor and she advised to slowly reduce my oxygen each week while monitoring my oxygen levels and try it. It took a month, but I slowly weaned myself off that also. I went from a wheelchair to a walker, to a cane to nothing, it took two months, but I did it. At this point I am still doing the exercises and walking that they gave me to do. They always said do as much as you can but do not do too much and get fatigued, well I did twice and knew it especially the next day, it wiped me out.

Through all this Bobbie came down with Covid a few days after I did but was able to stay home, however, she was quite fatigued herself but still cared for me getting me everything I needed including washing me until I was able to shower. Our sons went to the grocery and brought us what we needed including medical items that we thought would be helpful. Bobbie needed to go to the doctor and a

friend came over and stayed with me until she returned, a neighbor took our garbage up to the curb, so Bobbie did not have to.

The last few days in the hospital and when I got home, I would wake up around four AM for some reason, at first, I just laid there but soon began using the time to pray for those that took care of me, those that prayed for me and those suffering with Covid.

They have found there are many side effects of the Covid virus including “Covid Fog” which causes loss of memory and concentration, I have that. Many people have loss of taste and smell, I have a weird taste in my mouth along with a smell and the weird part is I experience it when I eat breads, French fries, pasta or anything like those.

Final Thoughts

Today I am 72 years old and have had a fantastic life. My childhood, growing up in the 50’s and 60’s had to be the best. I was so carefree, I didn’t know it, but we were pretty poor until I was in the 6th grade at which time, we moved from an old farmhouse in Fairmont to a brand-new house in Price Hill. The farmhouse was so drafty I remember sitting on the register with a blanket trying to warm up. We had an old coal fired furnace and of course no air conditioning. The new house had a gas furnace but still no air conditioning. At both locations we had lots of woods and the new house was on a dead-end street with a million kids to play with. We built camps and tree houses, we played in the street until the streetlights came on and then it was time to go home. We played many games and never did anything too bad, if we did, when dad got home, we got a whippin’ and never did that again. We ate lunch at whoever’s house we were at when it was time. No abuse, no drugs, no killings. There are many more stories and events that I could add to this paper, I would instead like to ask you to do the same as I have and write your own story, I would like to read it. Start off just writing down little things that come to you and before you know it you will have the story of your life. God is good—all the time.

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