

From Hedley Times
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Bill Day: A Force in Adult Education



Bill Day & Nellie, his 1930 Model A

It isn't likely you will hear Bill Day talk about his MA in Adult Education, his years as President of Douglas College, the Order of Canada Award he received, or his service as a Citizenship Judge. After visiting with him and his partner Lynn Wells for an hour, I came away with the distinct impression that at age 80, he's just too busy and goal oriented to focus on past accomplishments.

From the beginning, he received very little without effort on his part. "We were depression babies," he says. "Things were ok until my alcoholic father was fired from his position as a prof at UBC. The next 5 years were terrible. We were hungry a lot. I remember card boarding my shoes. Work was scarce in those days so we considered it a stroke of good fortune when my mother was hired by Finning Tractor. Her pay wasn't great but at least the family had a steady income and stability."

Necessity made it essential for him to be proactive and creative. "To pay my camp fees at YMCA's Camp Elphinstone," he remembers, "I cleaned out-houses. It was something no one else wanted to do. I was my own boss. I liked it. I learned that if you do work others don't want to do, you get respect."

He developed the habit of doing whatever it takes. To pay for his UBC tuition, he worked at the paper mill at Ocean Falls. "I learned on the job and became a millwright," he says. "I loved the work and I loved Ocean Falls. It was there that I started teaching English to immigrant men in the evening in the bunkhouse." Helping those men put him onto a path he was to walk on the rest of his working life.

One day his foreman came to him and said “Bill, I’ve been authorized to offer you a job in administration. However, I don’t think you should accept it. In a few years you would be bored. My advice is go back to school and train for a career in teaching. You have a gift for it.”



Bill Day & Lynn Wells at Hedley Farmers Market

Bill had the good sense to accept the advice of his mill foreman and returned to university. After completing his training, he began his teaching career in Quesnel. Here he taught during the day and tutored Italian railroad workers in English four evenings a week. Subsequently he taught in Maple Ridge, continuing to teach English at night, and then accepted a role in Surrey as one of the first full-time Adult Education administrators in B.C.

His growing experience and expertise in Adult Education brought an invitation to go to India for a year, to advise the Rajasthan State government in this field. “They didn’t really need me,” he says, “I learned from them and it was a wonderful experience. I loved India.”

Upon returning to Canada, he was asked to plan the development of Douglas College. He subsequently became Dean of Continuing Education and then served as President for 15 years. He also wrote feasibility studies for two other Community Colleges.

Bill considers himself very fortunate. “Until I retired,” he says, “I was always in the right place at the right time. I served under people for whom I had great admiration.”

Observing him participate in the community organizations of Hedley, it quickly becomes evident that Bill’s good fortune had less to do with luck than with preparation and the willingness to do what is needed. Undoubtedly, a positive outlook and a touch of charm helped too. His partner Lynn Wells describes him as “a hard worker, very bright, personable and proactive.”

Understanding that everyone appreciates recognition, he gives it quickly and enthusiastically. He is convinced that by working collaboratively, a community can accomplish what seems impossible. This positive, proactive thinking has many times attracted the attention of people in authority and power. For his work in Adult and International Education, Bill was awarded the Order of Canada. Then, after official retirement, to his great amazement, he received a call from Ottawa offering him a position as Citizenship Judge.

“I was certain at first they had the wrong Bill Day,” he recalls. “When they assured me they didn’t, I was thunderstruck.” Pausing as though reliving that moment he says, “it was very affirming. It told me I had actually done a good job.” “I loved the work and carried on for ten more years until I reached mandatory retirement at 76.”

Bill is still doing a good job, even if he doesn’t get paid for it now. At the Hedley Museum he said to the Directors, “tell me what you need done and I’ll do it.” Last year he spoke at Hedley’s Canada Day celebration and also at the Remembrance Day ceremony. He is currently spearheading the development of Unity Park in Hedley. He and Lynn are “devoted” volunteers at the Princeton Traditional Music Festival. This morning, before our visit, he painted woodwork and washed windows at the Seniors’ Centre.

After sitting across the table with Bill and Lynn for over an hour, I realized that his mind hadn’t lost its focus even for a moment. He is optimistic, bright, high octane, apparently healthy, and community minded. I wasn’t surprised when he said at the end of our time together, “it’s being a great life.”