



Bill Morgan's Fair and Glorious Gift

In Bill Morgan's house, a quote from Martin Luther sits on the bookshelf: *Music is a fair and glorious gift from God.*

Bill Morgan was destined to be musician, if not by God, then at least by family tradition. His grandmother was a pianist. His father was a professional musician. Bill started piano lessons when he was four. He was raised in a family trio of alto and tenor saxophones and cornet. Bill carried on that tradition by forming a family quintet with Nyla and their three children, all of whom attended TCU on band scholarships.

In Houston, where Bill started school, band didn't begin until seventh grade. His father let Bill start band with his alto sax, but Bill later migrated to clarinet with

his first new instrument, a metal clarinet which he still has (see photo where he holds both his oldest and newest horns). He eventually migrated to saxophone. At Houston's Lamar High School, he began to hone his leadership skills and his journey toward becoming a music educator.

Bill learned to play jazz at Lamar, leading the Dixieland Serenaders, the house band for a Saturday morning program on the Houston CBS radio affiliate.

His junior year, Bill received a scholarship to TCU. The family moved to Dallas, and Bill was made Drum Major at Sunset High.

Like Bill's Houston band, the Dallas high school band was a military ROTC band. His Houston ROTC Commandant said of Bill's move to Dallas Sunset, "You're going to be playing in the Number One ROTC band in the nation!"

In college band, Bill sat first-chair tenor sax. Next to him sat Nyla, the last-chair alto sax. "I thought she was pretty cute," he said, and before long, he asked her out to the drive-in movie. Bill said, "It was Spencer Tracey in *Bad Day at Black Rock*."

"No, it wasn't," said Nyla, "It was a movie about pilots flying airplanes." Typical Village conversation.

In 2018, they will celebrate sixty years of marriage.

When Bill graduated with a degree in music education, his professor asked him to stay on to work on a master's degree as a graduate assistant. His job was assistant director of the university's chorus.

As his schooling and draft deferment were ending, Bill decided to accept a Navy commission. The commissioning was two weeks away when his professor told him that the 531st Air Force Band, Texas Air National Guard needed a saxophone player, so he played for the Guard for six years.

His National Guard service allowed Bill to begin his band directing career right away. He worked with inner-city youth, and in three years, brought his band from a contest rating of 5 to 1 across-the-board.

Frederick Fennell, from The Eastman School, judged Bill's first contest. Bill and his students were so nervous that when Bill raised his hands to begin conducting, his cymbal player dropped the cymbals. Fennel penalized the band, and that contributed to their dismal score.

Two years later, the venerable Harold B. Bachman judged the contest. Bill's wife, Nyla, who has perfect pitch, was sitting in the first row of the audience. Bill said, "After I warmed up the band and



Bill Morgan (right) with the venerable Dr. Craig Hamilton, Conductor HSCB.

was ready to start the performance, I felt someone tugging my pant leg. I looked down, and there stood Nyla at my feet. She said, ‘Your French horns are out of tune.’”

“I didn’t say that,” said Nyla during our interview. “It was your trombones that were out of tune.”

Another typical Village conversation for two musicians, still very much in love.

Bill's next career move was as band director at a new senior high school in Dallas where not only did he have the responsibility of starting the band program, but also composing the school fight song and alma mater. During his 6 years there, the band not only received superior contest ratings but also represented all Dallas schools in the Cotton Bowl Parade and at the World's Fair in San Antonio.

A few years later, Bill moved into school administration where his favorite job was acting as the “unlicensed lawyer” for the district. He remained in administration until his retirement.

In addition to Bill Morgan’s leadership roles in Hot Springs Concert Band and The Village Big Band, he also has sung in several church and community choirs.

God has gloriously gifted Bill Morgan: a musical family life, a musical community life, and a musical career. Bill is a man richly blessed, because as Martin Luther said, *Music is a fair and glorious gift from God.*