William David (Bill) Bell III

March 4, 1942 - September 14, 2023
Compiled by Jay Jorden with assistance from Terry Raines, Bill Elliott and Carl Kunath

[From official obituary] William (Bill) David Bell III passed away on September 14, 2023, at the age of 81 at his home in Fredericksburg, Texas.

He was born on March 4, 1942, in Houston, Texas. Above all, Bill was thankful to his Savior for his salvation by grace and spoke often about it. His fervent prayer was for his family and friends to receive the same grace that he had. He was a deeply loving man with a large family and many friends. Bill had a remarkable ability to connect with people and never met a stranger. He could engage in conversations on various topics, favoring history, geography, politics, and religion, which he could discuss for hours on end.

Bill was not only intellectually inclined but also a gifted craftsman and artisan, renowned as a silversmith. His skills and artistry were widely recognized, and he counted among his clients Hollywood actors, directors, musicians, politicians, and countless others who would hear of his work and seek him out. His passion and skill were evident in every piece he created.

Bill grew up in California but moved to Texas to attend the University of Texas in the early sixties and never looked back. It was there that he discovered his love of spelunking, developing life-long friendships along the way. He married the love of his life, Linn Roe, in 1964, and immediately began the adventure of raising three children together. After a stint with the Merchant Marines, Bill took his young family on a detour to Taos, New Mexico for one year (1974) where he learned the craft of silversmithing. They ultimately chose Fredericksburg over Austin and Houston to put down roots as they believed that the small, sleepy town of Fredericksburg was the best place to nurture a family. Their values of faith, family, and country were passed down to their children.

Bill is survived by his son, Billy Bell, and daughters, Heather (Bell) Brewer and husband Don, and Amber (Bell) Hesskew and husband Justin. Bill was also a loving grandfather to Natasha Brewer, Jordan Brewer and wife Sarah, Brandon Brewer, Ryan Brewer, Patricia Brewer, Lincoln Brewer, Destry Hesskew and wife Blair, Dakota Hesskew, Brazos Hesskew and wife Maddie, and Croix Hesskew. Additionally, he was a proud great-grandfather to Buck, Parx, Endi, Sail, and Bear Hesskew, and Benjamin Brewer. He is also survived by two loving brothers, Parker and Eric Bell, and numerous cousins.

Bill was preceded in death by his father, William D. Bell II, his mother, Elin Parker Bell, and his ex-wife, Linn Bell.
Bill worshiped at Fredericksburg Bible Church, where he found solace and strength in his faith. In his free time, Bill enjoyed tinkering and collecting old things and had a love/hate relationship with farming and ranching.

A memorial service will be held to celebrate Bill's life at Fredericksburg Bible Church located at 107 E. Austin St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624 on Saturday, Oct. 21, 2023, at 3 p.m. [See eulogy on YouTube]

Bill will be dearly missed by his family, friends, and all those whose lives he touched with his love, craftsmanship, and engaging conversations.

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CAVING – text and photos by Terry Raines

It began in Summer 1962, when T.R. Evans took the bus from Orizaba into the mountains to explore. Along the road up to Tequila, he saw pit after pit. Back in Austin, he shared the excitement of all the pits, and on Thanksgiving ‘62, T.R., Bill Russell, James Reddell, and Terry Raines returned to begin exploration in this new area.

For the first couple of years of caving in Mexico, we didn’t have trucks, so we took the great buses of Mexico down to the caving areas.

Mike Roe had a VW bug, but unfortunately it rolled as we were returning from climbing Longs Peak in Colorado.

Fortunately, Mike was so resourceful that he was able to fix it up so we could drive down to the Mexican border in December ’63 and catch the bus to Xilitla.
As we learned, in the Xilitla area there are pits everywhere. On this trip, Mike Roe, Bill Bell, and Terry Raines headed out on the road to the west, and after a couple of kilometers saw the first pit on the right. On the bus and on the road, we had to carry all our gear. The long rope was braided so we could share the load. This pit we named Sótano de San Antonio, and it turned out to be about 300 feet deep.

In 1963, we returned to Sótano de Huitzmolotitla to set a camp and explore the 10,000-foot horizontal section at the base of the two entrance drops. Pictured are Bill Bell, Terry Raines, and Terry Plemons. (Terry Raines photo)
In the spring of 1964, we launched the First ‘Expedition’ into Sótano de Tlamaya, with Bill Bell, Benny Martin, Rune Burnett, and Terry Raines. It was eventually surveyed to a depth of 1,488 feet, making it the deepest in the Americas for a while.

After the 1964 NSS Convention in Texas, Bill Bell and Terry Raines returned to explore in the exciting new area above Orizaba. The road up was slippery, and Bill had to put tire chains on his Jaguar to get up to Tequila.
When we arrived in Tequila, we were immediately asked if we could recover the body of a professor, who had fallen down at 200-foot pit.
Of course we said yes, and I went down and located him. Then Bill went down and put the 6-month-old remains in a bag.
They thanked us greatly and insisted on paying us, but we said no. We just asked them to please show us the caves in the area. (Terry Raines photo)
The classic photograph of the Sótano de San Agustin expedition in April 1967! Bill Bell is in the first row, third from right. (Photo from Terry Raines)

Bill Bell guiding registrants for a caver event (among photos displayed at celebration of life)
Bill Bell (right) and Rune Burnett at Sótano de Tinaja, November 1964 (Orion Knox photo)

Bill Bell at the entrance to Sótano de Tinaja in November 1964 (Orion Knox photo)

SILVERSMITHING
Bill’s concho belts and silver keychains displayed by participants in celebration of life, Oct. 21, 2023
Sporting Bill Bell’s concho belts at TCR 2015 are (from left) Charlie Loving, Ron Ralph, Frank Binney, Terry Plemons, Tom Byrd, and Blake Harrison. (Dorothy Mladenka photo)

Displaying Bill Bell silver keychains and bracelet at 2018 Texas Cavers’ Reunion
Detail of workmanship displayed at 2018 TCR

Bill Bell and Pam Lynn at Orion Knox’s celebration of life, Natural Bridge Caverns
More modeling of Bill Bell’s silversmithing prowess (photo from Carl Kunath)

Among many photos displayed during Bill Bell’s celebration of life

THE RECEPTION
Heather Brewer, one of Bill Bell’s daughters, eulogized her father (see YouTube video) and spoke at a reception. (Jay Jorden photo)
Terry Raines with Billy Bell, Bill’s son (right) at the reception after the celebration. (Jay Jorden photo)

Bridget, Thomas and Mimi Alexander at reception following celebration of life (Jay Jorden photo)
PECAN GROVE STORE
Cavers with Billy Bell (left) at dad’s fave watering hole, Pecan Grove Store, north of Fredericksburg

Departed cavers: Ernie Garza, Don Broussard, and Bill Bell
Bill Bell with Katherine McClure (photo from Carl Kunath)

Bill Bell with Paul Fambro (photo from Carl Kunath)