

Memories of Bill Chandler

By Joseph Clark, Springfield High School class of 1965

Gregarious: affable, companionable, social, fun, outgoing, to be like Bill Chandler

Bill Chandler was the living definition of gregarious. He was outgoing, fun and a true friend. I met him when we were students in Springfield High School and we became good friends. There was always something very special about Bill. He was self confident, slightly mischievous, could be impulsive at times, and was always ready for an adventure.

We lived on opposite sides of Springfield but one winter evening it had been snowing and accumulated several inches. Around 8:00 that night there was a knock at our door and it was Bill. He had walked several miles to my house in the snow and said that he was just walking around. It had become a cold, crisp evening with few cars on the road and so we walked together part way back to his house just enjoying being out on our own in the snow, carefree and full of life.

In the late 60s, many families discovered the fun and utility of owning a Volkswagen Beetle. One day a group of us were gathered in front of school (before or after our school day) and we saw a VW beetle parked illegally in front of the school entrance on Leamy Avenue. Bill suggested that we could probably lift the beetle off the road and onto the sidewalk. Led by Bill, about six of us lifted and dragged that little car up onto the sidewalk in front of the school. I'm not sure why we moved it, it may have been to surprise the owner but we seemed to have fun just being able to pick it up and move it.

Around the time we were getting our drivers licenses, Bill's mom bought a 1963 bright red Ford Galaxie convertible. It had all the best features, leather bucket seats, center shift, fully automatic and a powerful V8 engine. This car was a perfect match for Bill's gregarious nature. He wasn't shy and found it easy to call or drop by a girls house and ask if they wanted to go out for a ride. How could they refuse to go out in a car like that with easy going Bill. One day he dropped by my house with Martha and said lets go for a ride. We ended up at Jody's house and he knocked on her door and in a minute, Jody and I were in the back seat (I think she was as shy as I was) and Bill just drove around Springfield with the top down under the sky with the four of us in awe of the moment and the adventure of being out in that car.

In the spring of our senior year the Springfield Country Club was building an outdoor swimming pool. Bill once again led a group of us to believe that we could get our lifeguard certification and become lifeguards at the new pool. The Chester YMCA was offering this certification so we all enrolled and started this evening program at the pool in the Chester YMCA. Bill was an incredibly strong swimmer and could easily perform all the tasks required by this program. I was usually exhausted by most of the swimming endurance tests but survived most of the classes. One cool evening after the class Bill was driving us home from Chester in his mom's convertible. He decided to put the top down and I still had a wet head with no hat and a light jacket. This was fun but I got pneumonia the next week and almost ended up in the hospital. I didn't finish the certificate, but Bill did and I think he got a job that summer at the new pool. It still amazes me that I was part of that group from Springfield seeking the glamor of life guarding at the new pool.

After graduation I went on to college and I didn't see much of Bill after that but I do recall one day when I was home from college on a break. Bill came to visit with his first car, a 1957 Ford station wagon with a V8 engine. We went for a ride in that old car and ended up on the Media by-pass. Suddenly Bill accelerated that old car up to 100 mph. I had never gone that fast and I remember how incredibly frightened I was on that ride with Bill. Since then I have become a very cautious driver. Thank you Bill.

One day after I had graduated from college, once again Bill knocked on our door at home to show me his new car. He had a new VW super beetle. I think he was married then and living for a while at home on leave from the Army. We took a drive around Springfield and caught up on what we were doing, it was almost like we were back in high school again. That was the last time I saw Bill. I was drafted into the Army myself and served for two years, 1970 to 1972. When I was discharged and home again I heard that Bill was killed in action in Vietnam. I was devastated. It's still so hard and sad to comprehend this tragic loss of someone who loved life as much as he did. Later as an elementary school principal, I would help chaperone our annual grade 5 class trip to Washington DC. Each time I went I found myself visiting the Vietnam Memorial and locating the name of William Chandler. Every time I saw his name on that wall I silently wept and had a rush of great memories about him and all that he meant to me during our time together in Springfield.

In 1975 I fell in love with a beautiful girl and got married. We have four sons and a daughter and now have five grand children, 3 boys and 2 girls. I am so grateful that my children have never had to serve in the armed forces. The tragedy of Vietnam was an awful time in our history and the loss of Bill Chandler makes it so personal to me. I will always have his memory etched in my soul and shed a tear when I think about him and all he meant to me.