



William "Bert" Wilson

September 23, 1933 - April 25, 2016

William Albert (Bert) Wilson of Provo passed away peacefully on Monday, April 25, 2016. He was 82 years old.

Bert was born in Tremonton, Utah on September 23, 1933 to loving parents, Bill and Lucile Wilson. Bill worked for many decades as section foreman for the Union Pacific Railroad. The family spent time in Utah and Montana before settling in Downey, Idaho. They were part of a large extended family centered in Marsh Valley, Idaho.

Bert grew up in the "railroad house," situated between the tracks and the state highway in Downey. He spent many hours of his youth roaming and hunting the marshes and surrounding hills. He also spent mornings and evenings milking cows, tending livestock, and changing the irrigation of the 80-acre family farm near town. As a boy he was a gifted musician and accomplished student who had a particular love of words and literature. After graduating from Downey High School, Bert was the first of his family to attend college when he enrolled in Brigham Young University in 1951, majoring in English.

After attending college for two years, Bert served an LDS mission in Finland. Through that experience he gained a love for the Finnish people, culture and language. In Finland, Bert met the love of his life, the dark-eyed sister missionary Hannele Blomqvist. After their missions, Hannele enrolled at BYU, and the couple were soon married on May 31, 1957 in the Salt Lake LDS temple. During the next decade, Bert and Hannele lived in Utah, Indiana, and Finland. Bert taught English for a year at Bountiful High School before earning a Master of Arts in English from BYU and a PhD in Folklore from Indiana University.

After spending many years on the faculty at BYU, Bert became Director of the Folklore program and archives at USU from 1978-1985. He then returned to BYU as the chair of the English Department from 1985-1991. He would then work for many years as the Director of the Redd Center for Western Studies at BYU. In 1990 he was named Humanities Professor of Folklore and Literature. He also taught for short periods at UCLA

and the University of Oregon.

Bert developed a distinguished national and international reputation as a folklorist. He has published dozens of articles and books in the areas of Finnish folklore and Mormon folklore, and he was Editor of the journal *Western Folklore*. He was elected a Fellow of the American Folklore Society and the Utah State Historical Society, and he served for many years as a member of the Utah Arts Council. He received the Utah Governor's Award in the Arts in 1998, the Leonard J. Arrington Award by the Mormon History Association in 2002, and high honors from the Finnish government, the Finnish Literature Society and the Kalevala Society. In 1981 he gave the University Faculty Honor Lecture at USU, and in 1990 he was the Karl G. Maeser Distinguished Scholar at BYU, the highest faculty award given by the university. He also gave the distinguished Arrington Lecture in 2007 at USU.

These honors and many more were evidence of the renown he earned in his field of study. But Bert never stopped being the Downey kid who cleared weeds and repaired track with the section gang and who remembered huddling against the warmth of a milk cow to fight off the icy Marsh Valley dawn. He was as comfortable on horseback or in the back of a pickup truck as he was standing in the lecture hall or leaning over his writing pad in his scholarly study.

In much of his work, Bert celebrated the hopes and dreams of common people, and he believed that the artistic expression of the simplest of men and women—people like his parents and extended family who he loved—were worthy of the same dignity and respect as were the fine arts. Always strong in his faith and his community, he sought to understand the stories of his people and why they told them. He and his students collected thousands of stories of the Three Nephites, of missionaries facing adversity in the field, and of temple workers aided by miraculous means. He saw those stories as a window to the soul of the teller. And those who read his work and listened to his lectures had a window to the glow of his loving heart.

In addition to his scholarly activities, Bert was a kind and gifted teacher and a devoted mentor to young scholars. He took great joy in seeing his students gain success in their chosen fields. He was a man of letters, but his greatest professional legacy are the countless students who have been touched by him. His students value his professional guidance but cherish, most of all, his kindness and loyal friendship. All who knew him remember the twinkle in his eye and his ready wit.

Bert was a loving husband and father and faithful member of his church. He has served in a variety of leadership positions in the church including High Priests Group Leader, Stake

High Councilor, and Bishop. He was a faithful home teacher. He had a strong testimony of Christ and His gospel throughout his life. Bert and Hannele served an LDS mission together in 2001- 2002 in Finland.

Bert was preceded in death by his parents, William L. Wilson and Lucile Green Wilson, by his brother Don (Irene) Wilson and sisters Althea (Lee) Orme, Marjorie (Rees) Baty, June (Ray) Walker, Vonda Wilson and Gloria (Merlin) Phillips.

He is survived by his wife, Hannele, his four children, Laila (Brian) Anderson, Denise (Ralph) Jamsa, Sven Eric (Nancy) Wilson and Karl (Amy) Wilson, by his sister Margo (Pat) Murphey, and by sixteen grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and three step-great-grandchildren.

Funeral Services for Bert will be held Saturday, April 30th, at 11:00 am, at Rock Canyon Ward, 3050 Mojave Lane, Provo, Utah, where Visitations will be held Friday, April 29th, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, and prior to services on Saturday from 9:30 to 10:30 am. Interment in Provo City Cemetery, 610 South State Street, Provo, Utah.

Cemetery

Provo City Cemetery

610 South State Street

Provo, UT, 84606

Events

APR 29 **Visitation** 06:00PM - 08:00PM

Rock Canyon Ward

3050 Mojave Lane, Provo, UT, US

APR 30 **Visitation** 09:30AM - 10:30AM

Rock Canyon Ward

3050 Mojave Lane, Provo, UT, US

APR 30 **Funeral Service** 11:00AM - 12:00PM

Rock Canyon Ward

3050 Mojave Lane, Provo, UT, US

Comments



“ I am Jill Terry Rudy's mother. I am sure your family is aware of the tremendous influence "Bert" was in Jill's life. He took her under his wing as an undergraduate student and mentored her throughout her schooling and career. She feels so very close to you, Hannele, and to your family as well. We, as her parents, could not understand her love for folklore and her 'need' to go to Bloomington for further schooling, but Bert could see her potential and encouraged her to the point that she had to go there because he did. Little did we know that she would not only get her PhD, but also her wonderful husband Bill and her career at BYU. Can't imagine what her life would have been like without Bert's direction and encouragement. Thanks to him and to your family for your support of her. Helene & Ray Terry

Helene Terry - May 06, 2016 at 07:35 PM



“ Dr. Wilson was one of the best teachers I have ever had. His folklore class changed my life. A great, good, dear man - brilliant and funny. I have been out of school for many years, but I think of him often.

Laura Wadley - May 06, 2016 at 10:17 AM



“ The world is a better place for having known Bert Wilson. I was a great teacher, and an even greater friend. He deeply influenced me and my husband, both us taking one of his early folklore classes at BYU. It was a random choice, made because it sounded great and he personally urged us to register for it. We have never been sorry. We have since used folklore in our own historical and ethnological research, using it as a means to access how people think, and where their values lie. The world--we--will miss you, Dr. Wilson.

Sondra Jones - May 02, 2016 at 11:23 AM



“ Bert Wilson is someone for whom I have complete and total admiration. He was a scholar whose work taught me to bring my whole self to my studies, my heart as well as my mind. Bert was the chair of the BYU English Department when I was hired, and it was because of his vision and character that I and other LDS feminists found employment there. He was the fairest leader I ever worked with; he defended his faculty from misrepresentation and misunderstandings, in some pretty difficult situations. He was kind. He taught me how important our stories are and how they shape our lives. I will always think of Bert and his beloved Hannele with love and respect. --Susan Howe



Susan Elizabeth Howe - April 29, 2016 at 03:41 PM



“ Hannele, I loved and admired Bert, a man of such integrity and intelligence and compassion. I will miss him. He was a teacher, a mentor, department chair, and most of all my friend. I am so glad that I was able to see him several times this past year when he was ill. I wanted him to know of my love and esteem for him. Susan and I wish we could be there for the funeral. We send a warm Hawaiian aloha to you and your family.

John and Susan Tanner

John S. Tanner - April 28, 2016 at 09:53 PM



“ I have so many fond memories of Bert and Hannele. (I can't think of one without the other!) Two memories come to mind:
In 1987-88, while I was living in Finland, Bert stayed with us for a few days. (I speak NO Finnish other than a few memorized sentences.) The phone rang one day, I answered, then I asked the caller (in Finnish) if he wanted Timo E.... Not know what the caller was saying, I just kept repeating "Do you want Timo E...?" Noticing Bert was having a hard time keeping a straight face, I turned the phone over to him. Only after Bert hung up did he tell me I had been saying, "I want Timo E....!" He has teased me about that every time I've seen him since!!
I remember with fondness driving to California with Bert and Hannele for a Folklore Conference. One evening at dinner, I asked how Bert and Hannele had met, and I saw the two of them transform into two love birds as they relived their meeting, courtship and marriage. Their love for each other was so genuine!!
Our love and blessings to all of the Wilsons--and a tender hug to dear Hannele!!
Janet & Larry Peer

Janet Peer - April 28, 2016 at 07:49 PM



“ Even those of us who weren't his students, were his students. And not just as students of folklore but as students of how to live a good life. May his memory be a blessing.

Steve Siporin

Steve Siporin - April 28, 2016 at 06:20 PM



“ It was great to get acquainted with Bert on our American Folklife Center project in Paradise Valley, Nevada, in the late 1970s. His deep knowledge of ranching and life in the Great Basin was a great help to the study, and his warmthand sociability suffused the folklife team environment. I've attached a picture that fieldworker Rusty Marshall took, depicting Bert at the organ at the little church in the valley. Carl Fleischhauer, Port Republic, Maryland.

BTW: original scan here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncr001517/>



Carl Fleischhauer - April 28, 2016 at 03:33 PM



“ Back in about 1980, I audited a Utah Folklore class at USU. Bert was the teacher. He had passion for his subject, and I found a home. I ended up getting a Masters Degree under his tutelage, and he has been the measure against which I have evaluated all my work in the field ever since. He was a meticulous scholar, an outstanding writer, a great storyteller, and a wonderful friend and mentor. I had the great joy and honor of interviewing him about his life and career a couple of years ago. That oral history is now part of the American Folklore Society collection at Utah State University's Special Collections. Bert took a lifelong interest in his students who had continued in the field of folklore. One year, he gathered us for lunch at the annual American Folklore Society meeting. We came from all the various institutions at which he had taught, and all of us (about ten, I think) had gone on to fulfillment and success in folklore studies, some as public folklorists like me, and others as academics. Bert continued to mentor me and the others, and as I said above, I always looked at my work and measured it by how he would react to it. He was funny, a serious thinker about life, and kind. I will really miss you, Bert. My love to Hannele, who was always at his side and also became a friend, and to the rest of the family.

Elaine Thatcher



Elaine Thatcher - April 28, 2016 at 12:26 PM



“ Our beloved friend, Bert Wilson. A man of complete integrity, filled with faith and courage and truth and Coca Cola. Exuding humor (irony) and his own wry kind of joy. Dear and profound and loyal, laconic, and true I can't stand this. But there we are. Passionately devoted father, teacher, mentor, and above all husband. The last time I saw him he said he knew it was cowardly and probably unkind, but he just had to pray that he would go first, because he just couldn't imagine living without Hannele, his love, his dearest friend, his choicest companion in conversation. He wanted to take care of her always, but there it was in those final months. Her attending devotedly to him. Bert, whose profession was stories. Really really good stories. Not necessarily factual, but all of them true. Ah Bert! How we miss you! (They're peeling off, said Doug, trying for courage. Last time Doug drove his truck, drove anywhere: to see Bert and Hannele.) Farewell, Bert! Say hi to Gene for us. (Surely you're hovering until you're laid to "rest".) Hold the fort! We'll see you soon enough. [Still looking for that photo of you and Doug Gene and a bunch of dead fish, on the ice.]

Donlu Thayer - April 28, 2016 at 12:10 PM



“ During my seven part-time and thirty full-time years of teaching in the English Department at BYU, there was never a better department chair than Bert Wilson. He believed in his faculty. He came into my office, when he became chair, and asked me what I most wanted to teach; I told him, and I began my career in teaching Native American Literature as well as Third World Literatures. If I had lectures to present on campus, I would look in the audience, and Bert would be there. He used me as a resource for some of his research. That means he trusted me as a scholar. He and Gene England knew how to value female colleagues in ways that set them apart from most male faculty and administrators. Whenever I spoke with Bert, I knew the conversation was sincere. What a lovely human being Bert was/is.

Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist

Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist - April 28, 2016 at 10:28 AM



“ We have lost one of the best FINNS ever to walk on earth. Bert loved our mutual country, he knew more about our history, our culture, our beliefs than anybody I know...We are truly blessed to have him in our lives... Last time I was in Utah I blessed to see him... Sadly we reside presently in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and I cannot come there to be with you. Hannele and family you are in our thoughts and prayers. Kiitos Bertistä ja ystävydestä, erityisesti kiitos rakkaudestanne ja työstänne Uskomme ja maamme puolesta. Rakkaudella ja haleilla täytetyin osanotoin. Jussi ja Pini ja lapset perheineen

Jussi Kemppainen
Jeddah Saudi Arabia
kemppainen.jussi@gmail.com

Jussi Kemppainen - April 28, 2016 at 07:24 AM



“ It was 1967, and I had just returned from the West Spanish American Mission, and had applied to start a Masters Program in Folklore. Prof. Wilson was my first teacher in that area of focus, and almost instantly I knew I had found the perfect focus for future studies. Soon after I was married, and an at-home mom for 15 years until I went back to teaching. A few years later, myself along with Bob McPherson, and LaVerne Tate started Blue Mountain Shadows, a regional historical magazine about San Juan County the the Four Corners, It was from Prof. Wilson's instruction and motivation both at BYU and USU that I was able to encourage my students to do oral interviews, and research dozens and dozens of folklore and historical topics. The magazine has been going strong since 1986, and is now on its 55 issues. Thank you for planting such vibrant and motivational seeds in my heard.



Janet Wilcox - April 27, 2016 at 12:43 PM



“ Startup team for the beginnings of Blue Mountain Shadows taken 1990. A regional magazine for the collection and publication of history and folklore of San Juan County.

Janet - April 27, 2016 at 12:47 PM



“ I often wonder where the dodge coronet of berts mom ended up?

ken wright - April 23, 2018 at 04:54 PM



“ Bert Wilson was lifelong best friend and then colleague to my dad (Eugene England, 1933-2001). The England family loved Bert and his beloved Hannale. He could tell us wonderful stories of growing up in the little town of Downey, Idaho. We loved his wry sense of humor. As a folklorist, he was extraordinary. He made his academic research accessible to many, and influenced generations of students to become folklorists. My husband, Jordan Kimball, and I will always remember Bert with great fondness and respect. I imagine Bert and Eugene have given one another bear hugs and are having a great conversation right now. My mother, Charlotte, is beyond words of grief right now. All our love and sympathies to Bert's family. From Rebecca England (and Jordan Kimball) and my siblings Katherine, Jody, Mark, Jennifer, and Jane.



Rebecca England - April 27, 2016 at 08:00 AM



“ Above is a photo of my dad about the time Bert Wilson would have been chair of the BYU English department, where Bert and Eugene worked together (also, where Bert tried to keep my dad out of trouble with the administration). My family will try to add some photos of Bert here.

Rebecca - April 27, 2016 at 08:13 AM



“ I was close to the England who introduced me to Bert--a wonderful scholar and a fine friend--Mary Bradford

Mary L. Bradford - April 27, 2016 at 10:47 AM



“ I took a folklore class from Dr. Wilson at Utah State University. He was a wonderful teacher and had a real passion for the subject.

Blake Walbeck
Richfield, Utah

Blake Walbeck - April 27, 2016 at 07:49 AM



“ If any of you have photos of Grandpa Bert, would you please email them to me at jnish@churchillschool.com? I'm trying to compile anything I can get. Also include a caption if possible. I'm trying to update his family search profile name.

We love you Grandpa!!!

Jessica Nish - April 26, 2016 at 08:25 PM



“ My mom was very proud of Bert. She saved many newspaper articles about his accomplishments. I will always be known as the niece who tried to chop off Bert's head with the ax while he was sleeping on the porch at the Downey home. I enjoyed his stories and quick wit. Our Memorial Day lunches were special occasions. I am blessed to have known such a fine man. He always looked for the good in all of us. My sincere sympathy goes out to all of you. Sharon Baty Brailsford

Sharon - April 26, 2016 at 07:38 PM



“ I am grateful that friendships endure through eternity. Maybe Marv and I, Bert and Hannele will - on the other side - renew the pinochle games we played long years ago in Bloomington Indiana, when Bert and Marv were Ph. D. students there. Laila and Denise were toddlers at the time. Though time and distance separated us, we have always remained friends. Our sincerest sympathy and deepest love to Hannele and the children. Such a joy to have known Bert.

JoJean Hansen Loflin - April 26, 2016 at 06:37 PM



“ 9 files added to the album Bert Wilson



Utah Valley Mortuary - April 26, 2016 at 03:41 PM