

## THINGS I AM PROUD OF

Now that I've spilled my guts by telling you about the things that frightened me, I have to balance the account. I've had a lot of success as well as failure and discomfort. I want to give you a balanced picture of my first hundred years.

**MY WIFE DAISY** - One of my favorite sayings is, "Nobody's perfect." It certainly pertains to me. Daisy however is perfect - for me!

When I am weak, Daisy gets strong. When I am too proud, she keeps me grounded. When I doubt myself, she reminds me that I can do it! We have shared pain and fear. I love her to distraction. Stop. Stop it...!!! Damn it Daisy get away from the keyboard!

...she has had her ups and downs. I am in her mix somewhere near the top - on a good day. We



1974 - Daisy and I have lived in quite a number of houses and apartments. Some were bigger than others. In the beginning we moved, foolishly it turned out, to try and avoid David Younes, her jealous ex. Later monetary considerations dictated our digs. The common denominator for every place we dwelled was that Daisy's flair for decorating and make things look Nice. This blurry picture shows the dining room in our first place.

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worked together at Siegal Medical Group for eighteen years. We worked together in our restaurant businesses. We worked together at Nantanala Outdoor Center for over seven years. We worked together at Harrah's Cherokee Casino for three and a half years.

After I left the casino, she really found her groove and did her best work ever. People loved



We loved to entertain when we were young. Armando Garcia, a friend of ours built the bar for us and it was perfect for the house. I don't feel that we drank very much but almost everyone drank and smoked back then.

her, respected her and learned from her. She retired with head high and a tear in her eye. WTG Daisy!!!

**A strong woman with convictions.** Soon after she was transferred to the Executive Offices at Siegal Medical Group in 1969, she came to me with a simple request, "Mr. Serle. We have to close the Downtown Office for Good Friday and it's coming in four weeks and we have to start adjusting our ap-

pointment book soon."

I thought she had either been appointed as spokes person for the eight or so women who worked at that office or was taking the lead as a negotiator for a popular cause.

"The girls who work here and all of the patients are Cuban," she declared. They're Catholic so they can't work on Good Friday. I took her request seriously because of her positive attitude and I knew that she had good leadership abilities.

"I'll investigate," I said, "and get right back to you." She seemed satisfied. I looked at the records from past years and found that on previous Good Fridays, over the past ten years, the office had been open and that it was a very busy day business wise. I checked with Dr. Siegal and he agreed with me - keep the office open.

When I told Daisy, she was outraged. "Mr. Serle. It's a day of Holy Obligation for these girls. You can't make them work."

I told her that I had never heard that before and asked her to confirm the "Holy Obligation" part. I figured that ended it.

Oops. She was back a few days later with a shy looking Cuban priest who had limited English abilities. Daisy prompted him to declare that we should honor Cuban customs and close but he failed to say Holy Obligation. I told Daisy, "No, and, that's final." (I wished.)

The good father left the office and Daisy stormed back. "Mr. Serle. There's going to be an uprising. It's not fair. The Jewish Doctors take off for Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashana, Passover

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and Chanukah. That's four days," she growled, "and the Catholic girls only get Christmas. IT'S NOT FAIR!"

She really had me involved now. So I said, "Look Daisy." I really want to do the right thing. Let me do some more research." She stomped out to go back to work as our Chief New Patient Telephone Appointment Taker. Our telephone was hooked up so that she could talk to anyone who called any clinic for a first appointment, even Fort Lauderdale or Naples. She was an excellent representative for us.

I called the Catholic Diocese in Miami and talked to a kindly monseigneur who said, "Mr. Serle. It's not a day of holy obligation. All the Catholic churches celebrate mass from very early morning until late at night so that workers on any shift can get to mass. It's a Cuban custom, charming and all that, but you don't have to close your business."

Inspired, I consulted with one of our Jewish doctors and a rabbi as well. Both told me that Orthodox Jews may need three days off a year but that Reformed Jews can get by with only two days a year, even if they're religious.

So armed with facts, I called Daisy into my office and laid down the law. "We're working on Good Friday. Sorry."

She frowned at me and said, "Mr. Serle you may think you're right but some of us take our religious obligations seriously. My husband's Lebanese and I am required to take two days off every year but I haven't been doing it. Starting now I'm taking off for Hummus Tahini and Baba Ghanoush."

I told her that I'd respect anyone's days of Religious obligation and that settled the matter.

A few days later I was looking at the menu of the Lebanese restaurant across the street and noticed Hummus Tahini and Baba Ghanoush. They were menu items. I burst out laughing at Daisy's bold joke and couldn't wait to confront her! We had a good laugh.

**MY CHILDREN** - I am very proud of my kids and grandchildren. The kids seem to have remarkable judgment. Some are richer than others but all have persevered to win goals. Our four: Kim. Bill. Jeff. Kris. Yeah team! Way to go!

The kids are scattered and live in Florida, Virginia and New Jersey. My fond dream is to get them all into the same room with their spouses and have a nice visit and make sure they really know how special they are to me and should be to each other. If their children are nearby, that would be a bonus. And my sisters and brothers too. Family. Friends. I am blessed....

Here's a dad's remarks putting them **oldest to youngest**. Now children - no complaining about that order of things now!

**Kim** has married three times: high school-sweetheart Randy Perkins, D.J. Mitchell, father of Jordan, and Ken, the third-time-is-a-charm, Mathews. Ken is an immigrant from England and



Wedding Day October 24, 1999 - Rick, Steve, Ken, Greg, Kim and Jordan.

has three sons, Rick, Steven and Greg, who are now Kim's step sons and counted when I brag about having a dozen grandchildren. Rick grew up living with his dad, Kim and Jordan. He's now a married homeowner living in Northern Virginia. Steve and Greg live in England and are university students.

Kim is a strong beautiful woman who faces every challenge in her life with courage and a will-do attitude. I couldn't be prouder of her. She says that she will be the one to take care of Daisy and me when we get too old!

It's really good news that Jordan takes after her mom. At sixteen she is a shining angle with a glow, a stunning figure and a sense of fun that makes it a pleasure to hang out with her.

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**Bill III** has grown to be a formidable man. He married young to Gail D'Isidoro who bore two boys; Billy IV and Brandon. These two boys are young men now, also formidable, at the time of this writing. Gail, sadly, died June 20, 2008. She was a kidney transplant survivor who had several good years afterwards. Finally a cancer killed her.

While she lived Daisy and I loved Gail madly. She was more than a sister for Daisy and more than a daughter-in law for me. We had a wonderful relationship with Bill and Gail and his boys. When we lived in North Carolina we treasured their vacation visits and we loved to jour-

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Photos commemorate a canoe trip on the headwaters of the French Broad River near Rosman, N. C. Photo of the three Bills taken by Gail.

We switched boats from time to time so that we could all try both the canoe and the kayaks.

I think this was a day that lightning chased us off the river.

Kim and her band made the same trip with me on other occasions.

Above - three Bills. Below - Gail and Brandon



ney to Florida when we could.

Time heals wounds. Today in 2011 Bill is healing and the boys are fine scholar /athletes at Embry Riddle University in Daytona, Florida. Bill is romantically involved with Kelly VanStraete and we await developments.

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**Jeff** is the best natured person I know. He vastly impressed me by obtaining his education as a mechanical engineer on his own while working full-time over an eleven year period. He's persistent as well as smart.

One of the many things that stands out about Jeff's family is their religious ardor. They not



Melissa, Nicholas, Jeff, Carol and Jeffrey Serle. About 2006 since the kids are seven, nine, and eleven in May 2011.

only attend services but participate in the affairs of the church through participation in committee work, Sunday School and finances. I attended Jeff's baptism ceremony in the Presbyterian Church and was moved to tears.

I've been invited to his Christian men's golf retreat for several years and have experienced much more than golf. At the devotional each evening twenty or so men share life stories and we often find ourselves with damp eyes as we recount the emotional events in our lives.

At six-foot-six and 280 pounds Jeff is a big man. His friends call him the Biggest Christian in Ormand Beach, Florida. The three kids are much like their parents and gain in personality every time they turn around.

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**Kris** is our youngest and the little girl in our novel *Stealing Ali* is indeed Kris. As a delightful child in my life, Kris always threw her whole being into the business of living. As a woman she is the same - meaning that she does everything with the intention of being the best she can.

She married Dan Keck about twenty years ago and they started very poor in a Queens, New York apartment. It was poor and gritty but they persevered.

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Garrison, Kris, Maddy, Dan and Mackenzie. For the three years Daisy and I lived in Allamuchy, New Jersey near Kris and Dan, we saw them on a regular basis. Kris and Dan bought a condominium near their home and let us rent it for a nominal amount. "Whatever you are comfortable with," they said. They came to dinner almost every Monday night and this was an important family and social contact for Daisy and me. Sometimes they would bring a visiting business associate. On Thursday nights we'd sometimes join them at Panther Valley Country Club's family night. I don't know why Daisy is not in this photo, but I remember shooting this so-typical event. Mackenzie and Maddy are mad about horses and champion riders. Garrison is a weapons enthusiast.

Dan became a big earner in the construction supervision business and they prospered mightily. Their home in Allamuchy, New Jersey is the biggest in the family and they own other sizable residences and business properties.

The kids go to good schools. Mackenzie is now a freshman at American University in Washington, D.C. Maddy is a champion in equestrian competitions. Garrison is interested in weapons and their history. Gar and I just finished a remodeling project in our home in Rockledge. He helped me remodel the master bathroom, doing everything from demolition to sheet-rock. Our three years in New Jersey were heavenly because of the opportunity to be with the grandchildren there.

Sadly Kris and Dan seem to be heading for a divorce, and we cannot see how things will stand in the years and months ahead except to say that Kris is a beautiful, strong woman, like her mother and sister. She will go on to wonderful life experiences and accomplishments.

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**My Children.** I love you all madly.

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**THE COAST GUARD** - My Coast Guard career was always worth while. I had good “ship-mates” who I miss now that we’ve all retired and drifted apart. Many have passed on. I let too much time go by without being in touch. My nature I guess. Now it’s forever too late. Note well reader - If you have a certain someone you’d like to chat with, don’t wait. Do it now. Not everyone lives to enjoy advanced age and if you procrastinate, you may lose the opportunity.

**LEADERSHIP AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM RALPH GARDENER** - When I became an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and acquired the opportunity and obligation to lead, I had good men to serve as my examples. Ralph Gardener was a great example. When I showed up at my first reserve meeting on a sunny Saturday, in May 1958, Ralph was a first class yeoman and was responsible for checking me in and taking care of the paperwork.

Not over five foot two inches, he was a serious, barrel chested man who seemed to be running everything. He was obviously the go-to guy because, in the large and busy open office area of the North Miami Beach Armory. U.S.C.G. ORTUPS 207 used for drills (Organized Reserve Training Unit, Port Security) People kept interrupting my processing to ask Ralph questions. He’d answer in clipped, direct language, sometimes referring to a little note book he kept in his back pocket to cite rule numbers and sub paragraph titles.

Even the commanding officer, LCDR Herb Lutz asked Ralph questions. He always had the precise answer. Before computers, cordless phones, photo copiers and the other little miracles we have today, he sat tall at his typewriter and banged things out with ten fingers, the mark of an expert. He made few mistakes because when you made a mistake in those days, with four pieces of carbon paper in the machine, they



I remember being a little annoyed that I had to share the title of Honor Man with an officer. I had higher grades but school authorities didn’t want to miss an opportunity to promote the career of a fellow officer. Winning an award at the four-week school helped me stand out as an up-and-commer when I applied for a direct comission. By this time I was a second-class damage controlman. The white, bell-bottomed uniform was hard to keep clean.

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were difficult to correct.

There were very few officers above the rank of Lieutenant Commander, LCDR, in the Coast Guard Reserve at that time. It was a relatively small organization that had to shadow the promotion patterns of the active duty Coast Guard, so officers had very rare opportunities for advancement and many highly successful officers retired as LCDRs.

CDR Munoz was assigned to our unit even though he outranked our Commanding Officer, tough, red faced, LCDR Herb Lutz. He did some kind of office work for the unit and Ralph ordered the full commander around as if he were just another seaman. CDR Munoz was a photographer by profession and rather polite and mild mannered. (Mild mannered is not always a good thing for an officer.)

I often wondered about Ralph as the years passed. We worked together for twenty years. How the hell did he get away with ordering senior officers around as if they were his assistants? He took the exam and was promoted to Chief Petty Officer which got him out of white bell bottomed trousers and into khaki. Sometime later he further proved his mettle and passed the exams for Chief Warrant Officer and assumed his place with the commissioned officers in the wardroom and as gentlemen.

I too prospered in my Coast Guard Reserve career. I finally made Seaman and then Damage Controlman 3rd class. I was a Damage Controlman 2nd class by the time I wrapped up my college degree in 1965. Because I was a college graduate I had the opportunity to compete for a position as a commissioned officer with no need for additional active duty. Just a two week Officer Training Course to start followed by 2 weeks active duty for training every year.

As an Ensign (O-1) I out ranked Ralph (W2) and was named Administrative Officer. Ralph was my assistant. Hah! "Bill," he used my first name now that we were both officers, "See this little green book that I always keep in my back pocket? Get one like it and every time you look something up in the regs or learn something, jot it down and you'll soon know your job and how to be an officer." **To boil it down I learned from Ralph that you can take as much authority in life as you care to exert. Lead and others will follow.**

I did buy a little pocket notebook and made notes but I became a successful Administrative Officer by asking Ralph whenever anything came up that I didn't know off the top of my head. He was better at such work and loved to both serve and to order people around.

**DRESS WELL** - As a junior officer, I happened to take a two-week summer course in leadership for officers at the USCG Reserve Training Center in Yorktown, Virginia and was named top student. "Honor Man!" I did well on the tests but believe that I got the top, "Honor Man" award because of Toastmasters.

Our instructor was needling the class to name the qualities that we desired in our leaders and

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pretty soon had a lot of things on the board like, "Courage," "Honesty," "Reliability," and such.

I raised my hand and said, "We want our leaders to dress well." The idea was put down, as trivial, by both the instructors and my fellow students. I was chagrined by the rejection of my idea so after a few minutes raised my hand again and rose to re-present the idea citing the plumage, healthy size and coats of alpha animals, the fancy silk suits of CEO's in industry, the gold leaf on senior officer's caps, the elegant robes of religious leaders and a great deal more. I made a good argument and I believe that it was this little oration that earned me the top spot in this class and suitable recognition for my coup when I returned to my reserve unit. The Seventh Coast Guard District Commander Admiral Thayer even sent me a congratulatory letter.

I was promoted and re-promoted. Ensign, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Lieutenant Commander, and Commander. I assumed more responsible jobs as time went by.

Eventually I was appointed as a Training Officer of the unit to which I was originally assigned. Later, when I was a full lieutenant I became Commanding Officer of a reserve unit.

I felt that I performed well in my first command and was very proud that none of the men or women in my reserve unit ever left the service while under my command even though similar units had a terrible time with retention. I always tried to lead as I learned from Ralph. Let the experts do their jobs and share the credit with them.

After a time I was assigned to command a second, larger reserve unit to command and was blessed to have Robert Grant, now retired Captain Grant, the best executive officer to assist me that had ever been born. I did my bit but let him shine and shared the credit with him. I had a great run. I was promoted to full Commander and retired at that grade.

I was elected to be president of the Miami Coast Guard Reserve Officers Association. I got to work with wonderful people. The Coast Guard was an important part of my life. I am proud to have persevered.

**SERVING OTHERS** - I learned from Carolyn's dad Chester Klepfer. He was a smiling man with a mission.

He liked to serve others and he demonstrated this bent in everyday life. He managed a retail shoe chain with several stores in Miami until his retirement in 1972.

Carolyn's mom, Maxine, never worked outside of the home during the years since Carolyn was born. When I first dated Carolyn the Klepfers invited me to dinner many times. On my first visit, Maxine finished making and serving a delicious meal and I was stuffed. I sat back in my chair and was surprised when Chet jumped up and said, "C'mon Bill. Let's go."

He began to clear the dishes and I, of course, had no choice except to help. Not only did he clear the table, he washed the pots and pans and all of the dishes. His question to me was, "Would you rather wash or dry?"

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Then Chet made a little speech. "Bill. My wife's efforts are so important to me. This is my way of saying thank you for all you do." He was a great guy and to this day I feel that if I am invited to sit at the table, I can thank the cook and preparers by cleaning up.

When it came to pass that I worked as an owner, manager, cook or waiter in a restaurant, I felt happy at the opportunity to serve. I think I was a very good server and I'm proud to have had the opportunities to serve others for those few years. It was fun and exercise combined.

**MORE STORIES? SURE.** When I was a waiter at the Nantahala Outdoor Center we served very good food. Our customers were locals, the staff at NOC, groups there for the kayaking restaurant instruction, and seasonal tourists. Sometimes there would be sizable parties.

I particularly liked large tables of a ten, twenty or more. When they were seated and had menus I'd tell them about specials and go around the table and take drink orders, moving carefully from person to person but not making notes. We were in a dry county and served no beer, wine or liquor. So I'd hear the same thing over and over. Coke. Diet Coke. Coffee. Decaffeinated coffee. Coffee with sugar. Coffee with cream. Water. Etc. People would wonder, I know, and sometimes they asked, "How are you going to remember twenty drink orders?"

"No problem." I'd say, and go off to fill their orders and I always got it right. I would bring twenty glasses loaded with ice. Twenty coffee cups, pitchers of coke, diet coke, carafes of coffee and decaf hot water, tea bags, cream and sweeteners, water, etc. and distribute them artfully on the table. They'd get it then. I came loaded. But when they ordered food I had to write it down.

It was hard physical work and I got plenty of exercise hiking, boating and working at other jobs. I felt young. It was fun.

A memorable moment was a joke birthday cake for a man with a party of twenty-two. He was forty so he had forty candles. The joke was that the cake was made out of styrofoam with icing on it and that the candles were the kind that relit themselves over and over again.

After dinner I got the signal to bring the cake. I lit the candles and returned to the dining room just as the birthday boy disappeared into the bathroom. The joke was on everyone else. Me especially. After a few moments the cake was smoking hot and we couldn't blow it out! I wound up throwing the flaming cake out a back door, thankfully before the fire sprinkler system went off.

We served him a real cake with regular candles when he came back to the dining room.

**I AM PROUD OF BEING HAPPY.** Like Ocsar Hammerstein in the introduction to this memoir. I try to be a happy man. I am proud to be among my fellow humans because of the good things we do despite our base nature.

**I AM PROUD OF BEING A HUMBLE MAN.** I guess this is reverse snobbishness. Despite limited means Daisy and I have traveled much of the world by being willing to stay at interesting hotels, eating at local establishments and by judicious shopping for transportation bargains. We had a lot of fun and said, "Gee," a lot.

**I HAD A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF COURAGE TOO -** I was willing to take chances to start a number of businesses. I got the most praise from the work I did on *Fun Things To Do In The Mountains* but that success was built on some painful failures, notably Terrace Café. *Fun Things*, under new ownership, is still chugging along twenty years after I first had the idea.

**PERSISTENCE HAS SERVED ME WELL.** I'm sure that there have been other occasions but the following examples come to mind at this moment:

- First National Bank of Miami 1958 - 1967 -. I was broke and unemployed. The Personnel Department told me "No." I kept on coming back until they said yes.
- Graduating from the University of Miami in 1965 - I got my degree ten years after graduation from high school in 1985. My son Jeff took longer to get his Mechanical Engineering degree. He did it on his own without ever complaining.
- Recovering Kris when she was kidnapped.
- Staying solidly married to Daisy despite intimidating road blocks.
- Nurturing relationships with my four children Kim, Bill, Jeff and Kris.
- The Sunset Center Sandwich Shop - We started on a shoe string and went down from there.
- Terrace Café - 1985 - 1987 - this was a mini marathon.
- Selling Frank Wandiese and a dozen others on the idea of investing in Terrace Café.
- Staying active and advancing in the Coast Guard Reserve. Best part time job ever.
- Siegal Medical Group - 1967 - 1985. Left with my head up and my eyes open.
- *Fun Things To Do In The Mountains*.
- Buying our first house in Waynesville, North Carolina.
- Trips to Thailand, Spain, Venezuela, and thirty other countries.
- Retiring in comfort.

**Life is good.**