

INTRODUCTION

I read a lot.

At first there were children's books at my Nana's knee. Then came Oz, Swiss Family Robinson, Robin Hood, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robinson Caruso, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Terhune, Swift, the Leather Stocking Tales, Sea Stories, comedy, sex, murder, adventure, romance, mystery, classics, biographies, history, economics, politics, cereal boxes, and - You got it! - anything and everything.

I've devoured thousands of books, millions of words, and uncountable letters. Lots of E's and S's. The words, images, and concepts, flowed into my mind in torrents but not much has come out. What was going on in my head?

What was the purpose of so much reading? Perhaps, it occurred to me, I too could be a writer some day. But I was always too busy. Working and studying, marrying and raising kids. Keeping my head above water was a full time job.

Then, having lived a lot and done many fine and not so fine things, I had enough and retired. Now could I find time to: read, travel, paint and draw, work on pet projects, and write. Yes!

At this point, as a septuagenarian, I have decided to write for my kids and grandchildren. Perhaps they will want to know how their ancestors lived.

My parents were fine people with interesting lives. They're gone now and it's too late to ask. Much of their story is lost because they didn't tell and didn't write, and, alas, I didn't ask.

I am writing this to let people know how things went in my life. I want to incorporate other writings into this so that if you have an interest you can learn more about my life and times.

Bill's Journey ~ Introduction

Two of these works are available on line at this time. stealingali.com. *Stealing Ali* is a novel based on events that occurred when Daisy and I were first married - a kidnapping!!! If you don't already have a copy go to Amazon or Kindle. billserle.com my journal of building a boat has been incorporated into this book as a chapter.

I am very excited to be working on a second novel I call another novel, *Paul Hunter*, which may see the light of day in 2011. It's inspired by events and people I met at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in the last decade of the 20th century.

I hope to soon begin a project about my mother's life and another on her mother, Annie Conover. After that I want to assemble a series of essays that appeared over a twelve year period in *Fun Things To Do In The Mountains*. They were published as editorials in the traveler's guide I founded and owned. The short list of the folks I am writing for includes: Kim, Ken, Jordan, Rick, Steven, Greg, Bill, Gail, Billy, Brandon, Jeff, Carol, Nick, Melissa, Jeffrey, Kris, Dan, Mackenzie, Garrison, Maddy, Jan, Art, Doug, Chris, Gary, Sammy, Meg, Jane, Sandy, Marisa, Raquel, Brian, Troy, Michelle, Samantha, Larry, Nancy, John, Jennifer, Caitlin, Guy, Tracy, Guy and Peter. Those above are my children, my grandchildren, my sisters and brothers, spouses and their offspring.

I'd like to share with my many, often unnamed, friends and mentors. Some have a big part in the tale that will unfold. Others fill minor roles due to circumstances and geography.

By the way, my sister Jan and I just rediscovered a book produced by my grandmother. She writes her name as Mrs. E. K. Conover, but she'll always be Gammy to me. It's a collection of recipes, household tips, philosophy, humor, art work, newspaper clips, notes, and so much more. About one-hundred-twenty-eight pages long, it is a beautiful window into her life and times. The earliest date in the book is 1917. I guess this sort of thing runs in the family. Notably, my grandmother's book includes Longfellow's poem, *The Arrow and the Song*. It's interesting that I included the same words in the first chapter of this story.



Afternoon on the Grand Canal by Bill Serle Pencil - 1993

Bill's Journey ~ Introduction

So, Dear Reader, this is for you. Let me know if I've missed or forgotten something or if you'd like to see something included or excluded or changed or corrected. I promise to listen but I might prefer my version too. Telephone or e-mail to billserle@aol.com

I hope you will enjoy the time spent with me.

Bill

Note

About money - remember the value of money changes each year. For example, when I was in high school gas cost \$.15 a gallon and many men worked for \$1.00 an hour.

This book is about two-hundred pages and has been in the making since mid-2007, so the word now is a moving target. *Stealing Ali* is about three hundred eighty pages and started on a legal pad in 1975 or 1976. It will be available for sale in May 2011.

B

PS - It is possible that there are typos, errors and other dumb mistakes in this work. I'll do better next time!

PPS - I have been playing golf for many years - usually about once a year, and I'm not very talented in that department. I've played a bit more since I retired. Most enjoyably with my son Jeff Serle who lives in Ormond Beach, Florida. For the three years in a row we have taken a mini golf vacation with his Men's Christian Fellowship group. About twenty men gather and spend three or four days playing golf, being friends, gambling, smoking cigars, and drinking. We pray before meals, before teeing off, and we have a devotional program each evening. The devotional involves sharing family stories, personal spiritual experiences, and such. Usually we cry and become emotional, in many ways. It's a good thing.

In 2010, due to my ultra-high handicap, I won the tournament in 2010. I had fun in 2011 too but they changed some rules and I didn't play very well. The good news is that they retired the trophy so I get to keep it.

During a late afternoon by the pool in 2010, Dwite engaged me in a conversation, in a very nice way, about whether or not I was going to Heaven when I die and about my belief in Jesus. I'm afraid I disappointed him by declaring myself a doubter. Particularly since I think that there are angelic people on earth who have not been brought to Jesus through no fault of their own. Billions of Chinese, Indians, Africans, Muslims, and so forth, who are, I believe, mostly good people. But I didn't acquit myself well in the spiritual debate with Dwite and my beliefs *are* a bit muddled. I like the following essay by Oscar Hammerstein - I wish that I'd read it before my conversation Dwite.

Oscar Hammerstein II (1847-1919) wrote the book and lyrics for many operettas and musical comedies. He wrote *Show Boat* with composer Jerome Kern. Later, with composer Richard Rogers, Hammerstein wrote some great musicals, including *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

He wrote the following beautiful words:

~ THIS I BELIEVE ~

I have an unusual statement to make. I am a man who believes he is happy. What makes it unusual is that a man who is happy seldom tells anyone.

The unhappy man is more communicative. He is eager to re-cite what's wrong with the world, and he seems to have a talent for gathering a large audience. It is a modern tragedy that despair has so many spokesmen, and hope so few.

I believe, therefore, that it is important for a man to announce that he is happy even though such an announcement is less dramatic and less entertaining than the cries of his pessimistic opposite.

Why do I believe I am happy? Death has deprived me of many whom I loved. Dismal failure has followed many of my most earnest "efforts. People have disappointed me. I have disappointed them. I have disappointed myself. Further than this, I am aware that I live under a cloud of international hysteria. The cloud could burst, and a rain of atom bombs could destroy millions of lives, including my own.

From all this evidence, could I not build up a strong case to prove why I am not happy at all? I could, but it would be a false picture, as false as if I were to describe a tree only as it looks in winter.

I would be leaving out a list of people I love, who have not died. I would be leaving out an acknowledgement of the many successes that have sprouted among my many failures. I would be leaving out the blessing of good health, the joy of walking in the sunshine. I would be leaving out my faith that the goodness in man will triumph eventually over the evil that causes war.

All these things are as much a part of my world as the darker worries that shade them. The conflict of good and bad merges in thick entanglement. You cannot isolate virtue and beauty and success and laughter, and keep them from all contact with wickedness and ugliness and failure and weeping.

The man who strives for such isolated joy is riding for a fall. He

will wind up in isolated gloom. I don't believe anyone can enjoy living in this world unless he can accept its imperfection. He must know and admit that he is imperfect, that all other mortals are imperfect, that it is childish to allow these imperfections to destroy all his hope and all his desire to live.

Nature is older than man, and she is still far from perfect. Her summers do not always start promptly on June 21. Her bugs and beetles and other insects often go beyond her obvious intentions, devouring the leaves and buds with which she has adorned her countryside. After the land has remained too dry for too long, she sends relieving rains. But frequently they come in torrents so violent that they do more harm than good.

Over the years, however, nature keeps going on in her imperfect way, and the result - in spite of her many mistakes - is a continuing miracle. It would be folly for an individual to seek to do better - to do better than to go on in his own imperfect way, making his mistakes, riding out the rough and bewildering, exciting and beautiful storm of life until the day he dies.

Hammerstein's essay resonates with me. Glad to share it with you.



Bill in the middle window at Mont St. Michael in Normandy

The drawings and many of the photographs in this book mean a lot to me. I began sketching and doing watercolors in about 1991 when I lived in Bryson City, North Carolina. I befriended artist Elizabeth Ellison. I took lessons in watercolor and fell in love with the process of making pictures.

When I do draw and paint, I remember the moments represented by the work.

Putting these pictures in the book is like a showcase for happy moments.

