



William Gotcher

June 12, 1930 - November 28, 2018

Bill was the only child of Senator Riley Gotcher and Martha Isabel Thomason. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, June 12, 1930, during the Great Depression. Due to the economy and joblessness, Bill's parents moved around a lot to find work. They ended up getting a divorce when Bill was about four years old. Isabel was re-married to Wilbur "Blackie" Landes and moved to Oklahoma City when Bill was six years old. Bill's step-dad was a police officer in Oklahoma City, and head of the Juvenile Division. Bill entered school as William Eugene Landes, and went by Bill Landes all the way through high school. When he joined the United States Marine Corps Reserves, he was stunned to find out that he had never been formally adopted. He was very upset with his "dad" over this, and began using his legal name of Gotcher from that time forward. Bill was very athletic and participated in football, tennis, boxing, baseball, and golf throughout his school years. He was a cheerleader in college, too. He was a pre-med student at Central State University in Edmond, Oklahoma, when he was introduced by a friend to a pretty high school girl named Claretha Maxey. Bill and Claretha were inseparable from their first date. They married July 27, 1950, one week before Bill was to check in at Camp Pendleton, California, for active duty in the Marine Corps. She was 16 years old, and he was 20. Two weeks after the wedding, Bill shipped out to Japan, and then on to the Korean War, leaving Claretha alone to complete her senior year of high school. They would have celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary this past July! Bill and Claretha had three children: Gregory Lee, Gina Gayle, and Susanne Elaine. They made their home first in Oklahoma City, followed by Midwest City, Ada, and finally Tulsa in 1963, following Bill's work as music and education director for the Methodist church. Bill participated in the landing at Inchon, Korea, on September 15, 1950. He served through the battle of Seoul, Korea, made the landing at Wonsan, North Korea, served at Majon-Ni, North Korea (Ambush Alley) and participated in the defense of the air strip at Hagaru-Ri, North Korea, where he was severely injured but managed to walk out of that famous encirclement. The injury, diagnosed as a dislocated right shoulder, turned out to be a broken neck and collarbone. In spite of his injuries, he walked 60 plus miles in the snow, carrying approximately 100 pounds of gear, in 30-40 below zero weather, along with the other survivors of the Chosin Reservoirs Battle. These men are known as the "Chosin Few".

Because of “lost records”, no Purple Heart was ever issued. Bill did receive the Bronze Star Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal, and three battle stars: Inchon, Seoul, and Chosin. After being released from active duty, Bill returned to college, where he changed his major to vocal music. Bill worked as a paid soloist for the First Christian Church in Oklahoma City. He was a Governor’s Mansion Guard for Governor Raymond Gary while attending college. He also worked as an Oklahoma City Firefighter for a few months, but found he could not continue doing the heavy lifting required due to his war injuries. His injuries also handicapped him when he worked on a surveying crew. Bill applied for VA disability in 1951, but was rejected. Years later, his private physician took X-rays to check for arthritis, finding that he had actually broken his neck and collarbone 49 years earlier. He did not receive VA benefits for his injuries until 2008, at the age of 78. Bill worked as music, youth, and education director at numerous churches in Midwest City, Durant, and Ada. He was the Director of Religious Education at the Wesley Foundation, and Campus Minister at Southeastern Oklahoma State College in Durant. When Bill and the family moved to Tulsa in 1963, he became the Minister of Music and Education, and Youth Director at St. Paul’s Methodist Church, where he worked until 1973. Bill, Claretha, and the family joined New Haven United Methodist Church after buying a home nearby. Bill first served as Volunteer Education Director, but in 1974, he became the Minister of Music and Education, also teaching Junior High Sunday School. He served on numerous committees and councils, and served as President of the Day School Board twice. In 1974, Bill became a real estate broker and was certified to teach basic real estate law and continuing education classes. He joined Charles E. Welsh Realtors as Sales Manager and Training Director in 1976. He was named top sales associate numerous times. Bill was elected President of the Oklahoma Real Estate Educators Association in 1989. In 2001, Bill joined Coldwell Banker Rader Group Realtors and began teaching for them. He retired in 2005 after working and teaching real estate for 30 years. Bill enjoyed gardening, painting, writing poetry, reading historical and non-fiction books, along with books on all religions. He loved genealogy and worked tirelessly for years digging up ancestry details on his and Claretha’s families. He was able to go back to the 1400s on Claretha’s side, and the 1600s on his side. Both of their families were in America for the American Revolution. Bill was elected President of the Northeast Oklahoma Chapter of the Chosin Few in 2004, and in 2009, was elected Assistant Commandant of the H/3/1 Marine Reunion Group, which was his unit in Korea. Bill loved all these men; they had experienced exactly what he had, and they had all survived! Semper Fi! Bill was preceded in death by his parents, and his wife Claretha in June, 2018. He is survived by his son, Greg, and wife Lana; daughter Gina, of the home; daughter Susie and husband Kevin. He is also survived by grandchildren, Brian Holland and wife, Kristen; Rachael Gotcher; Blake Holland and wife Erin; Lindsey Holland Haney and husband Jon. His great-grandchildren are Kayla Arnold and Gunner Holland. A memorial service will be held in his honor on Friday, January 5 at

10 am on New Haven United Methodist.

Comments



“ Thank you for your service. As I sit here watching a story on the Korean War, you are an amazing Marine! Semper Fi. God Bless.

Harry mccuei - May 04, 2019 at 03:22 PM



“ What a fabulous beautiful life. So great to read all of it. Blessings on all of you as you remember and rejoice in a wonderful life.

Holly and Chuck Holland - December 04, 2018 at 10:36 PM