

Good morning everyone, I'm Bill's son Ben.  
I want to thank you for coming today, to pay tribute to our Dad.

My father was a kind man. A gentle man.

Growing up with him as a father, I took a lot of things for granted. As a child and teenager, I assumed everyone had parents like mine.

Parents who offered unconditional love. Parents who would always have their kids back, no matter what.

But over time, I realized that everyone did not have parents like mine.  
That not every man is kind and gentle.

How lucky our family was to have him.

There's so much I want to share, so much loveliness to try and encapsulate, but I am going to try to be succinct. Though those of you who knew Bill well will know, that being succinct isn't necessarily in our DNA ;).

I feel overwhelmed by two things.

The first is loss. The void that his passing leaves. How he has been the constant.  
How it feels to know that he is not here anymore, as he was.

The second and more powerful of the two feelings is gratitude.

For his love, his support, his encouragement, for the steadfast consistency of his unconditional love for myself, for Dan, for his beloved grandkids Lily and Gabe and their Mum Rachael.

Our childhood was pretty idyllic. Whilst we didn't have much money (Mum stayed at home to look after Dan and I, whilst Dad went off to teach) there was an abundance of love.

With summer weekends being spent at Perfume point beach in Napier, the always present Sunday afternoon drive and the much treasured yearly holiday in Taupo.

So many treasured memories of those holiday trips. Swimming out with Dad to the pontoon in Acaia bay, the excitement of night visits to the AC baths, going down the hydro-slide with Dad and hot pools under the stars.

Dad was a big guy. (You've all seen the last sheet of that program!) I have a vivid memory of being around 6. It was a hot summers day and Dad was mowing the lawns. Pushing the mower dressed only in gumboots, speedos and cowboy hat. Feeling such pride that this giant man was my Dad. Impossibly strong. Undefeatable. A great protector.

He was a patient man. The turbulent teenage years of Dan and I must have pushed him to the limit. In amongst that period, he shared some wisdom that took me decades to understand. He said, "You can't control what anybody else says, does or is, you can only control how you react or respond". If you ever needed a fast track on how to maintain and achieve a peaceful mind. That's it. But it took me 25 years for it to finally start sinking in.

He loved music. The Beatles being a firm favorite. I have a wonderful recollection of putting Dire Straits "Sultans of Swing" on the stereo when I was about 12 and him standing there, gleefully air guitaring along with Mark Knopfler.

Seeing his joy resonate with my own, at the sound of that guitar left an impact.

He was the first guitarist I ever heard play. The first guitarist I ever knew. Me in the portacot, in the backgarden of our house under the apple tree as a toddler. Dad sitting there, playing guitar to me. What a genuinely magical thing.

And whilst he never had the desire to pursue the instrument hard, I know he took great pleasure in seeing Dan and I focus more and more on our playing. This was in evidence by the colossal number of gigs that he and Mum attended – both Dan and I, and in recent times, Lily's band. So devoted.

My father loved being a Grandad. He loved his Grandkids so much. The delight he took in the birth of Lily and then three years later Gabriel, was palpable. There was not a birthday, Christmas, Easter or any other major date that did not see both Dad and Mum driving from Hawkes Bay or inviting us up to Hawkes Bay to celebrate. Year on year on year. Devoted.

Then, as the children got a little older, they spent summer holidays staying with my folks. A week each.

Lovingly named "Falcor", the nick name embodied his kind, gentle and patient way with the kids. He loved you both so much.

Both my parents were remarkable in their support of my little family.

I could speak to you for hours about all the things they did for us. But I promised that I'd try to be succinct. It's easiest just to say, if there was something, anything at all that they could do to help with the kids, they did it.

Their love and attention was constant and steady. There was never any doubt that they were always there for all of us – anytime, anywhere. How precious that is.

They embraced Rachael as a daughter. Even when Rachael and I broke up, their position was "She's the mother of our grandkids, therefore she is our daughter".

Their support of her did not waver.

Then, over the last few years, as their health failed and Mum's dementia appeared, it was Rachael who maintained that contact. Reciprocated that love. Something that I know Dad treasured enormously. He loved you very much.

The house at 38 Tokomaru Drive was an oasis for thirty years. The best port in any storm.

I still dream of that house. Of the feeling of waking up in the spare room, the morning light glowing behind the curtains. The sound of Mum and Dad bustling around. The feeling of calm, of safety and of love.

That placed personified the difference between a home and a house. It all came down to the people, and Dad and Mum were the reason it felt that way.

My father loved our Mum very much. He was a devoted, kind, caring and loving husband.

He shared the story of meeting Mum for the first time at the Top Hat Club in Napier one night and asking her to dance. Whilst dancing he asked her what she did, Mum responded that she was training to be a school teacher. "School Teacher! Why on earth would you want to do that?" It was only later that Mum discovered this dapper young man was actually a very dedicated school teacher himself.

Married for almost 53 years, they had their ups and their downs, like everyone. But their commitment to each other, to their marriage and to their family saw them through. Their love persevered.

Mum was definitely the one who made more of the executive decisions. Something which Dad accepted happily. I know he felt great pride in Mum's cleverness. Conversations with him in recent times revealed how very impressed he was of Mum's mind (though apparently she looked pretty good in a bikini too).

Dad's health issues in his late 40's with his heart lead Mum to suggest to Dad to go part time teaching. She was very worried about him. She wanted him around for a long time. So Dad went part time teaching whilst Mum continued full time.

And this was how it was for many years.

Living their lives doing their things. Supporting us in any way they could. Cherishing their family and friends.

Then in 2017 they moved to Hastings. And it became apparent that Mum was not well. Dad had called it long before any official diagnosis. He knew it was dementia. He believed it was his job to find a cure for her. An impossible task, but one he attempted to undertake nevertheless. That it was his responsibility to find a cure for her, no matter what anyone else said. No matter what doctors and specialists said. These were trying times, as his resolute belief that Mum would come back to how she had been, was a hard thing to try and gently navigate.

When I reflect on this time my lasting impression is that of love personified. He just wanted his wife back the way she had been for the last 45 years. He wanted them to be able to enjoy their retirement together, enjoying those golden years.

His devotion to my mother over those years – from when she became unwell to the last day of his life, was simply incredible. He loved you so much.

His lifelong optimism and unbreakable spirit was utterly remarkable. The two foundation stones of that spirit were his love for Mum and his deep faith in God. His Christian faith was a rock for him. His steadfast faith gave him the strength to carry on under overwhelming pressure. Many is the time that he would share that he was praying to God for strength and wisdom. His connection to his church family at New Hope was a great source of comfort to him. The love from Bob, Christine, Steve, Sally and everyone there was something he truly valued.

Victor Frankl, the Austrian psychotherapist and holocaust survivor said in his book "Man's Search for Meaning":

"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."

Looking in from the outside, it would be easy to think that the circumstances Dad found himself in in recent years would have been unbearable. But he had meaning and he had purpose. He believed it was all in God's hands. He believed it was his purpose to be there for Mum, even as his body failed. His love of Mum and his deep faith kept that spirit fighting.

The last 9 months have been very hard. I want to pay tribute to my brother, Daniel. This year Daniel has done a remarkable job being the man on the scene for Dad. Which at times was far from easy. Sacrificing huge amounts of his time and energy. I know Dad took found great joy in seeing the two of us on the same page. Both doing all we could to look after him. He expressed his great appreciation frequently.

Dad left us last Wednesday. He was surrounded by Dan, Myself, Lily, Gabe, Rachael and our Mum. I know he knew how much we loved him. And I know he knew we knew how much he loved us. If that's not the mark of a life well lived, I don't know what is.

I love you Dad. I already miss you terribly. But I'm so grateful for who you were and how you were, for me and for all of us.

I love you Dad.