



Billy Joe Bledsoe

May 13, 2024

Billy Joe Bledsoe passed away peacefully on May 13th in Fort Collins at Poudre Valley Hospital. Bill was 98 years old and true to his nature, approached the end of his life with humor, humility, positivity, and an abiding life-long commitment to lifting other people's spirits. He will be so deeply missed by so many. The love that this man expressed for others was profound and contagious. He was surrounded by his family, and preceded in death by the love of his life, his wife Mary Stella, after 61 years of marriage.

Billy Joe was born to Willis Alfred Bledsoe and Ella Elizabeth Johnson-Bledsoe on a small dairy farm east of Weatherford, Texas on February 2nd, 1926. He was the youngest of six children, all of whom are now long since gone. When the Great Depression came in 1929, the family lost their farm and moved in with Bill's paternal grandmother Carrie Jane Bledsoe in Weatherford.

After Bill graduated from Weatherford High School, he joined the Army Air Corps Reserve and was subsequently employed by the American Manufacturing Company operating a lathe making artillery shells for the Navy. On February 18th, 1944, he was inducted into the Army Air Corps 111th Squadron at Camp Wolters, Texas. After completing basic training at Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls, he went to Scott Field, Illinois to train as a radio operator for both ground-to-ground and ground-to-air communications.

Upon graduating from radio school, he was off to Africa in 1945.

Bill's tour of duty in Africa was geographically substantial. In addition to Casablanca, he was stationed at: Accra, British West Africa (Ghana); Aden, Arabia (Yemen); and Atar, French West Africa (Mauritania); and then back to Casablanca where he was assigned to Group Headquarters as the Supply Sergeant of radio equipment. He completed his service, returned to the United States, and was honorably discharged May 13th, 1946.

Bill's experience in radio communications would serve him well. After a year of moving whole houses and following wheat harvests in his grain truck, in October of 1947 he became employed by the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) which would soon become the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). As an air traffic controller, he took assignments at Wink, Texas, Acoma (where he met the love of his life) and Zuni, New Mexico. He spent two years on assignment in Panama, then to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, and finally, to Albuquerque. In 1957, he transferred into the new Albuquerque Air Traffic Control Center and was promoted to Assistant Chief in 1970.

After retiring in 1979, he and Mary began travelling. They went on cruises, took two trips to Spain to research Mary's Hispanic roots, and toured the United States in their RV. Their hobbies kept them busy. Both Mary and Bill were avid birdwatchers, genealogists, and students of Southwest History. Both were members of the New Mexico Historical Society. They moved to Fort Collins, Colorado in 1985 to be closer to their children, but spent winters in Arizona.

Mary Stella passed away on January 18th, 2010, and is interred at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. Billy Joe will now join her, back together again at last and forever.

Billy Joe Bledsoe is survived by his eldest son Kenneth and his wife Phyllis Bledsoe, his daughter Mary Cyril Bledsoe, his youngest son, Dr. Will Bledsoe, grand-daughters Erin Bledsoe Vigil and Tayler Bledsoe, and great-grandchildren, Noah, Mikaela, Shiloh, and Tinsley.

Bill's family wish to express their profound gratitude for the remarkable staff and residents of Rigden Farms Senior Living community where Bill loved living for the past six years. Additionally, we would like to thank Legacy Healthcare Services, Almost Family Caregiving, and the nurses and physicians at Poudre Valley Hospital.

In lieu of flowers, Bill asks that donations can be made to Colorado Horse Rescue.