



## William Harrison "Bill" Knieff

July 24, 1952 - February 15, 2025

What a long, strange, trip it's been.

William Harrison "Bill" Knieff stepped through the door on February 15, 2025. He was born July 24, 1952 in Hampton, Virginia, to the union of Virginia Dene Anthony and Claude Alexander Knieff, Jr. Bill's father, a WWII veteran, left to serve in the Korean War just two weeks after Bill's birth. Bill's first year was spent living with his mother, brother, and grandparents in Brownwood, TX. The family, which eventually grew to include Bill's little sisters, moved according to his father's assignments within the U.S. Air Force, living in Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, and Alaska, before settling in Colorado. Bill recalled that he "never felt more alive" than while living on base at Eielson AFB in Fairbanks, during the height of the Cold War. Eielson was a SAC Base, meaning that, "if the Soviet's decided to invade, we'd get it first." This knowledge brought excitement and a sense of danger to young Bill, and emboldened him and his friends to live on the edge.

Bill came of age in Aurora, Colorado and spent his early adulthood in Denver. The most pivotal moment of his life took place on the evening of February 9, 1964, when The Beatles first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. By the time the last chords of "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" played, Bill's life had been transformed. Music remained a lifelong focal point for Bill. He played bass guitar, and his collection of albums numbered well into the thousands. He was

an avid participant in Denver's fledgling music scene of the 1960s and 70s, attending shows by Bob Dylan, The Band (then known as The Hawks), The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, and The Grateful Dead. The back-to-back combination of Jimi Hendrix at The Family Dog and Cream at the Denver Auditorium in February 1968 left Bill with permanent hearing damage. Although Bill attended the George Harrison and Ravi Shankar concert at the Denver Coliseum, among the greatest regrets of his life was not seeing The Beatles when they played Red Rocks in 1964. He never forgave his parents for them not wanting to shell out \$6.60 for a ticket.

Bill was a voracious reader. J.R.R. Tolkien was among his favorite authors, and he read *The Lord of Rings* at least quarterly from the time he was about 15. He was also a prolific storyteller, relaying humorous and suspenseful stories of adventures and near-misses, including childhood memories of visiting Indian mounds in Mississippi, seeing the northern lights in Fairbanks, and of hitchhiking to California and up the coast to Portland in the early 1970s.

In 1973, Bill began working at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. He spent his entire career at the health department, most within the water quality control division, sampling rivers and streams, and later water treatment plants, throughout the state. Bill loved that his job took him to all the beautiful corners of Colorado, and especially loved working in the San Luis Valley. After 1979, Bill was based in the CDPHE field office in Pueblo, and was known from that point on for completing inspections with his one-eyed German Shepherd, Kid. Kid found Bill in 1974, and Bill was rarely without a dog after that.

Shortly after his retirement in 2004, Bill married his soulmate, Olivia, and settled in northern Colorado. Their connection was one that transcended time and space. Bill was Olivia's biggest champion, and she his. Their love for, and devotion to, each other knew no bounds.

Bill is survived by his loving wife, Olivia, and their sassy Shiloh Shepherd, Juniper; sisters, Claudia (Cliff) Anderson and Leah (Scott) Richardson, and their children; sister-in-law, Jude Roehm; brother-in-law James R. (Jillian Emmons) Kellner and their children, Avery and Bromley; sisters-in-law, Leah (Darian) Watkins and Rachel (Nestor) Machado, and their children; and his best friend of 50+ years, Ben Brown. A highlight in recent months was Bill making a trip to the shooting range with Avery and Bromley. Although he wasn't able to shoot, Bill, a longtime gun collector, was so proud to watch A+B as they shot all manner of firearms. Another event of paramount importance to Bill was the birth of his grandnephew, Eli, to nephew, Tyler, and his wife, Tae. It meant a great deal to Bill that he was able to bond with "Bubba" during his last days.

Bill was preceded in death by his father, Maj. Claude A. Knieff, Jr., USAF, Ret.; mother Virginia A. Knieff; brother Terry Knieff; best friend and father-in-law, Robert A. Kellner; mother-in-law, Nancy J. Kellner; and a pack of good boys, including Remy, Dexter, Django, Weeun, Doc, Sam, and Kid.

Bill was a radiant, loving, soul and would love nothing more than for his passing to be marked by donations made in his memory to Emma Loves Dogs (<https://www.emmalovesdogs.org/>), the American Belgian Malinois Rescue (<https://www.malinoisrescue.org/>), the ASPCA (<https://www.asPCA.org/>), or to the animal-related charity of your choice. At Bill's request, there will be no service.

"Never was there a time when you did not exist, and there never will be a time when you cease to exist." George Harrison, paraphrasing Bhagavad Gita 2.12.

# Tribute Wall

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“ I worked with Bill for many years and I found him to be so kind and patient. Once when my youngest son was in high school, Bill took him on an inspection for one of his classes. When they stopped for lunch in a small town Brandon reached for his glass of water and Bill put his hand on Brandon’s arm and shook his head and said, “I wouldn’t do that buddy. “ Brandon reached for his Coke instead. Then during the inspection Brandon told Bill that there were a lot of regulations and Bill said, “It’s because of the Man Brandon. It’s because of the Man!” Brandon had a blast and talked about Bill for a long time.

*Carol Keever*

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**Carol Keever** - February 28, 2025 at 08:15 PM