



William "Bill" McDonald

December 31, 1940 - December 06, 2023

William "Bill" E McDonald passed away on December 6, 2023 at the age of 82 in Medford, Oregon of causes related to Alzheimer's Disease. To most, his presence was synonymous with his laughter. Bill loved to engage in banter and gentle teasing, but was always ready to poke fun at himself. He loved connecting with others about anything—pets, common interests, tattoos, traveling, where to find good coffee. To him, every person was a living storybook, and every event a plot point. Though his story here is concluded, it is woven into the stories of all who knew him, and ours are richer for his contributions.

Bill was born in Mansfield, Ohio on December 31, 1940 to Gaylord "Mickey" and Vera McDonald. Most of his childhood stories are dominated by memories from the family's seasonal cottage at nearby Walton Lake. He enjoyed a great deal of independence, spent countless hours swimming, many nights in a hammock, and fostered his earliest relationship with the outdoors. He also loved to recount stories of his part in pestering the community's teens who graciously included the younger members like Bill—this in spite of the many pranks Bill and others helped execute: hiding under the docks, emitting screams, or launching water balloons from shrubs in the dark.

His love of swimming landed him a job as lifeguard at a church camp. While attending a youth leadership conference on behalf of his Evangelical United Brethren Church, he met the conference director of camping when he was asked to help at the waterfront. Before the week was out, the conference camping director offered him a job at Camp Wanake in Beach City, Ohio. These were first steps in his path to ministry. He kept working at Wanake throughout his time at Mansfield High School as a lifeguard, and through his BA at Otterbein College as a staff counselor. Through those experiences, he developed meaningful relationships with people in seminary and serving churches. These helped shape his own interest in theology and ministry, so he got his Master of Divinity from United Seminary and served churches in Lexington, Ontario, and Berea, Ohio while continuing to serve camps in a variety of volunteer camp leadership roles, eventually pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry degree with a focus on Christian Camping.

Shortly after completion of his doctorate, Bill moved to Michigan to lead camping ministries in the Detroit Conference of what by then was the United Methodist Church. While there, he also held leadership roles on regional and national committees and boards before being asked to come to the Oregon-Idaho Conference in 1981. As Council Director, he oversaw a vibrant camping program encompassing 9 properties. In that capacity, he'll be remembered by many in the region as a colleague and mentor. His belief that camp experiences were an equalizer made him an advocate for diversity in camp and retreat ministries that touched a wide demographic—from residential retreats to small group "In the Woods" at-risk youth camps; from trail and adventure camps to family camps; from local church retreats to horse camp. He always believed that the neutral territory of a camp setting helped people be more open to experiencing community, empathy, and the stewardship of our relationships with each other and creation.

As the tenure for Council Director was coming to a close, Bill returned to the parish with an appointment at Christ United Methodist Church in Beaverton, OR. After eight years there, he took an appointment to Medford First United Methodist Church in Medford, OR where he retired in 2008. But not really. Having earned much admiration for his manner with families facing medical challenges and death, Bill served as a volunteer chaplain for nearly 12 years at what is now Asante Regional. His presence with listening, humor, or prayer was so appreciated by the people whose lives he touched.

Bill often observed that he appreciated the casualness of the Pacific NW. He didn't much care for dressing up in suits and ties, opting instead to go as casually as would be acceptable. This unpretentious preference exemplified his theology and ministry. In accordance with his tendency to see stories all around him, Bill's campfire reflections and Children's Time often featured stories of animal friends who would find a new insight in a shared experience, and his sermons were peppered with stories gleaned from clippings, history, literature, and experience—all used to illustrate the selected text. For church holidays, he often included dramatic elements to the service like sets, illustrations, acting, music. On heritage Sundays, he would even dress as a circuit rider and ride into an outdoor gathering on his horse, Mickey. Special services like weddings and memorials were personalized by his gift of storytelling. He saw the profound in the most ordinary circumstances and translated those into stories that listeners understood to be at once personal and universal.

As a family man, Bill brought the same down-to-earth sensibilities. He enjoyed storytelling, and enacted the occasional scavenger hunt or mystery with a story theme for a party. He attended concerts, games, and special events more enthusiastically than dutifully, even when it came to transporting. Time outdoors remained a constant in his familial, social, and professional calendars with more time at Walton Lake, canoe trips into Algonquin with friends' families, rides on his various horses, and family trips to the mountains, Oregon coast, or Redwoods in the little Burro trailer.

Bill was preceded in death by parents, Mickey and Vera (Shoemaker) McDonald and by brother, Tim. He is survived by his wife Cindy and their daughter, Kate Vaden and son-in-law Michael Vaden; by his sons and their families- Mike McDonald and Kristy Clough, and children Logan*, Kylee*, Kamryn, and Tyler; Tim McDonald, and his children Sarah and Collin; Nancy McDonald; and Sharon Collier McDonald*.

In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made in his name to Camp and Retreat Ministries of OR-ID at www.gocamping.org

A celebration of Bill's life will be held at First United Methodist Church in Medford, OR on February 3, 2024 at 1:30 PM. In alignment with Bill's casual tastes, comfortable attire is appropriate, and excessive decorum will be discouraged. If you are unable to attend the service, he would love for you to think of his part in one of your stories, to go to a lake, hike a trail, or share a laugh with loved ones or a stranger.

Tribute Wall
