

What do you say when one of the most popular and colorful bowlers in town over the last 40 years moves across country? Obviously, “good-bye” comes to mind, but to some, a “thank you” is also in order. To a rare few, it’s almost mandatory. So, at the risk of sounding like an obituary...Thanks, Bill, for all the memories!

To those who know you best, we know that your bowling ball is like a painted face to a clown, transforming an otherwise quiet, serious family man into the jovial life of the party. Your at-home predictability gives way to reckless abandon when pins are waiting to be knocked down, and people are watching to see what you’ll do next. For you, stepping onto the approach is like a performer coming on stage to entertain—except you never charge for the show.

No one remembers your early years better than my dad. “He was a pistol when he was a kid! He just lived a couple of blocks away, and he was here *every* day. We finally started paying him \$5.00 a week to sharpen pencils and clean the lanes just to keep him out of trouble.”

As a teenager, your peers remember the time you were introduced by the late Tommy Graves, owner of the former Tower Lanes, now Munsee Lanes, as “a 16-year-old with a million dollar arm and a \$2.00 brain.”

Remember coming back from the service and firing a 197 at Jim Hamm—when a game over 190 was something to brag about—as though you had never missed a day? The same fire that made you one of the best bowlers in town also drove you to throw your ball out the side door on one of your occasional “off” days, only to be recovered by a kid on the playground. Was it a little embarrassing to have to ask the principal for your ball back? Didn’t you also heave it into the parking lot a time or two?

Your pranks have been many, topped only by your colorful impersonations. Or is it vice versa? You’re proof that imitating someone really *is* the sincerest form of flattery. Who will ever forget the fact that you did Salem, a man we all admired, almost as well as Salem did himself—his chuckle, his bowling form, his mannerisms behind the counter, both sides of his “conversations” with his wife Marcia, including the famous honeymoon skit. And how about everyone’s friend and long-time co-worker Perry Garner, and his “shim the sham, adjust the cam, and replace the wee-waw shaft”? How about just one more Dick the Bruiser for the road?

Who among the New Castle Lanes bowlers will forget your King Kendall’s Klowns team made up of you, Rod Grim, Joe Shelley, Bill Baker and Dick Williams, with your black shirts and the “KKK” on the back. Or the Varsity Sports team with Shelley, Baker, Williams, and John Harp. Each week you arrived in basketball referee shirts, along with your snafu toilet bowl plunger. Low man got the “honor” of taking the plunger home each week. (No sandbaggers on those teams, that’s for sure.) How many know that the “Real Men Wear Pink” shirts actually started years ago with your Mary Kay Cosmetics team?

Remember your story about the frustrated cashier years ago at Kenny Eaton’s market who was trying to figure out how to ring up a canned good that was priced 2 for 79 cents? He finally said “Lady! Either go get another can or put the ‘darn’ thing back on the shelf!” It was funnier watching *you* do it than if we’d been there in person.

You’ve always been known for your stylish temper tantrums, but we all know it’s really as much about showmanship as it is anger...even though I *did* walk to the back end one hectic

night and caught you red-handed “threatening” a machine with a ball peen hammer...and even though you *did* put your fist through a wall at a tournament in Dayton, not knowing it was paper thin. We still know your antics are mostly for fun, and waving a white flag through the pinsetters at some angry bowlers was one of the ways you proved it.

Who among us will *ever* forget “The Unknown Bowler”? For the unfortunate who missed it, coming out of the restroom with a paper sack over your head, complete with eye holes and the infamous title, *and* with a plunger in hand as your unofficial scepter, was a moment in bowling history that we will never forget. I’ve heard that you also patented a variation of the same theme when you came out of the restroom with a trash can over your head, beating it with that same plunger. (Speaking of trash cans, is it true you used to turn them upside down and pretend they were drums?)

One of your best lines was the time you and Clif Fellers had gone with a group of guys to Vegas to the Nationals. For those of you who’ve been to Las Vegas, you know you can do a *lot* of walking and still not get very far. When Clif commented that the two of you had walked so much you’d probably lost at least five pounds, remember your comment? “Yeh, but we’ve walked from one restaurant to another!” Was “pinch an inch, yank a yard” really *your* line or some famous philosopher’s? Your classmates remember the kind of eater you were in school, figuring out a way that you could eat two out of three lunch periods!

Speaking of the ABC, back when burning draft cards was a popular protest against the war, we remember when you, a Viet Nam vet, began burning bits of your ABC sanction card in protest of bad bowling nights. Little by little, it became so small that by the time you arrived at the Nationals one spring there wasn’t much left of the card—and they laughed so hard at your story they let you slide, anyway.

Since bowling today is more about strikes than spares, how incredible is the fact that you and John Harp were not only runners-up in the State Doubles Tournament in the mid-seventies—you did it with three *clean* games each!

If this isn’t just a bad dream and you really are leaving us, who’ll have the nerve to be the first one to throw his bowling shoe at the pins the way you so eloquently have over the years? Does anyone remember the night you forgot you had on a pair of lace-up shoes instead of your usual slip-ons, and nearly fell down trying to get it off your foot? Just the other day you threw your shoe to Gene Neal so he could throw it at the pins. Were you passing the torch?

Most bowlers think the purpose of a ball return is to return your ball. Good bowlers know that the *real* reason they’re there is to have something to hit and kick when we’re bowling bad. Remember the good old days of the Classic League...the night someone said they pitied the ball return if you missed that solid 10 pin...and you did? Knowing that if you hit it just right, a good punch could be heard from one end of the building to the other, so I grabbed the hood and ran so you couldn’t beat it to death.

On a more personal note, remember the night you were standing behind the counter, holding my precious little bundle of joy—only a few months old—and said “Just think, Amanda. Someday this will all be yours!” and she burst into a full-fledged wail? (Tell me the truth. Was that for real, or did you stick her with a pin?)

Lots of people are missed until someone or something else better comes along, but the truth is, there will never be another Billy K. So on behalf of four decades of bowlers who’ve enjoyed bowling either with you or against you, or just enjoyed being in the audience, I’ll end the way I started. Thanks for all the memories! And don’t forget to send a postcard!