

Chapter 19. A Test

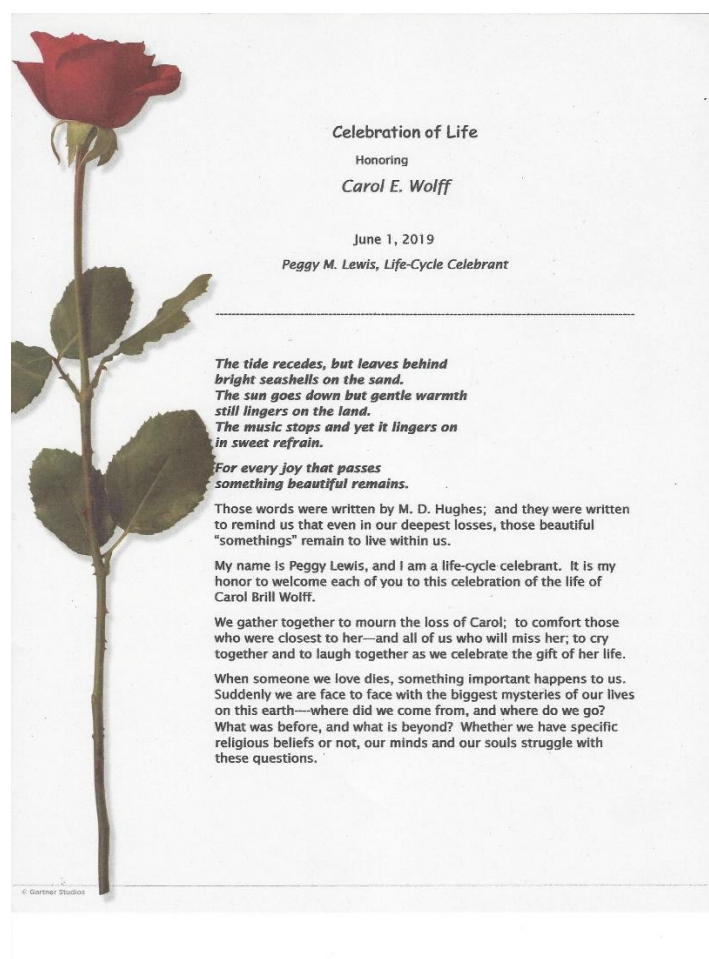
Thomas Paine wrote in December 1776 in “American Crisis”: “These are times that try men’s souls.” I’ve been through a life crisis from 2019 through 2023. During those years we lost the physical companionship of two of our children and I lost the partner who had been at the center of my universe for 68 years. What kept us going during those heart-breaking times were our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. JoAnn’s physical and mental well-being seemed to deteriorate on an ever-accelerating downward scale. I look back on this time and wish that I had done a better job of finding things that would have made her last days happier since all my efforts to improve her condition and quality of life were going to fail.

On January 12, 2019, we flew to Kauai. We intended to stay there for 4 weeks and stop off in Las Vegas for the Graybar “OMEGA” Retirees’ reunion. We had to cancel the Las Vegas stop when JoAnn’s condition got worse. We flew home on February 8.



On May 23, 2019, we lost our daughter, Carol Edith Wolff, to arteriosclerotic, cardiovascular disease. Carol's health had been declining radically since her fall at work, in 2015, when she broke her shoulder. This year was her worst and she had not worked for several months and had not been able to drive for weeks. I drove her to doctor appointments and to shop for groceries. When she did not answer her cell phone on that day, JoAnn and I drove to Winter Garden that morning and had to call 911 for assistance when she did not answer our knocks and calls. When the police officer who gained entrance to her house told us what he found, I was glad that I had never asked Carol for a key to the house. Her boys came at once and spent the next week preparing things. They decided on cremation and set up plans for a Celebration of Life.

Our home-owners association provided a place for the celebration and catered to our every need in this regard. The program was led by Peggy Lewis who officiates at ceremonies and celebrations in the Central Florida area. The program follows.



And these are the questions that have engaged and perplexed the human race from the very beginning; and the questions whose answers cannot be satisfactorily found within our own human reasoning powers.

So most of the time we don't dwell on those mysteries; we get very busy with our own lives on this earth. We go about things as if we actually knew how much time we had, what our end would be like, or what will happen after. Or perhaps as if we just gave up asking.

But the questions are insistent, and they reappear. Carol's unexpected passing brings us sharply back to all those questions.

Colonel Robert Ingersoll, a writer in the 1800's, was asked by a friend to give a eulogy for his small daughter, who had died. This is part of what he said:

"Before the sublime mystery of life and spirit, the mystery of infinite space and endless time, we stand in reverent awe..... This much we know: we are at least one phase of the immortality of life.

The mighty stream of life flows on, and, in this mighty stream, we too flow on.....not lost.....but each eternally significant.

For this I feel: the spirit never betrays the person who trusts it. Physical life may be defeated but life goes on; character survives, goodness lives and love is immortal."

Most certainly, Carol exemplified goodness, and character, and love. Each of you shared many moments of her love, her generosity, and her good nature and support; and those moments are now a part of you forever.

But for those who are left, an immense pain is felt. And especially for close friends and family members, an important piece of your universe is gone.

There is a quote from the movie "It's a Wonderful Life", a line said by Clarence, who said, "***Strange, isn't it? Each person's life touches so many other lives. When one isn't around it leaves an awful hole, doesn't it?***"

And that is why we are gathered here this afternoon. The passing of Carol has left some kind of a hole in the fabric of each of your lives.

We come together now to comfort each other, to remember Carol, and to truly honor her by celebrating all that she gave you and to the world.

As you share warm words, and tears, and hugs, and laughter with each other, you will strengthen that legacy of love that she has given to you.

Her Story:

Carol was born in 1957 in Youngstown, Ohio. Her parents are Jon and Joann Brill, who are here with us today.

The family moved a good many times---kind of like a military family. But her father Jon was not in the military through those years---he was a corporate man, working for Graybar. The early moves were not so difficult---but later moves, when Carol was entering middle school, and in the middle of her high school years, were more difficult for her.

But unlike many other children in those circumstances, she did not "act out" or cause trouble. She always kept her balance, and continued to have a pretty smooth progress through her growing up years. In her last year of high school, however, when another move was planned, she persuaded her parents to let her live in the home of one of her friends.

I am told that she married her high school sweetheart at the age of 19; which might have been one of the reasons she balked at that latest move!

During her high school years her Mom and Dad, Joanne and Jon, headed up the youth group in their church. And her Dad told me that Carol loved performing---especially the duets with her brother Jon! And he said they had an especially good time one Christmas performing "Jesus Christ Superstar".

Carol was also industrious. She sold cosmetics---Avon, I believe, while still in high school.

And she kept that industrious quality for her whole life. She liked working; and baking most of all. Her cakes were her best creations. (I sort of wish we could have one of her cakes here today!). Carol worked for many years at Target, and became a baker for them until an injury to her shoulder prevented her from continuing.

Carol loved collecting---especially shells and starfish; but also many other things. Sometimes that went beyond collecting, and into a bit of hoarding. One of her sons whispered to me that one of the things they found in her house were several boxes filled with toilet paper cylinders---not rolls of toilet paper, stored for an emergency---but the paper cylinders inside the rolls. She just really did like to hang on to things!

All three of her sons speak about what a good mother she was; always being supportive of them (except, perhaps, when one of them broke one of those starfish!). They have fond memories of Carol helping them finish up school projects---often at the last minute. She seems to have passed on that tendency to put things off to her sons, which led all those evenings of rushing to finish those projects!

Everyone I spoke to told me how thoughtful and generous Carol was throughout her life. Her sons all told me how kind she was and how she was always giving to others. Ben said that even when she did not have a lot herself, she always managed to give cards and flowers and gifts to family members and people who were important to her.

And now some of her family members will give us their reflections on life with Carol, and share some of their experiences with us.

(Family members speak)

Thank you so much, those of you who have spoken; clearly, you are all deeply affected by this loss. But your sharing is comforting to your other family members, who feel this loss just as deeply as you do.

It seems to us all that Carol was taken too soon. These days we expect our loved ones to live well beyond their early sixties.

We are often puzzled---even angry--- by the vicissitudes of life which seem unfair and which defy our hopes and our common sense.

And we are brought back to one of the basics of life: Everything is temporary. Everything changes. We may wish to control more; and we may go about our business as if we knew how much time we had left--- but we fool ourselves when we do that.

Everything is temporary. And therefore everything, every little thing, is precious.

We can renew our own commitments to live our lives as fully as we can; to participate in all that we can; to love as much as we can and to savor every morsel of it all. We do not know our own future. Let's live with gusto---and with love and appreciation for each other.

As we prepare to bring this service to a close, I offer you these words of wisdom taken from a Navajo prayer:

*Grieve for me, for I would grieve for you.
Then brush away the sorrow and the tears.
Life is not over, but begins anew,
with courage you must greet the coming years.
To live forever in the past is wrong;
can only cause you misery and pain.
Dwell not on memories overlong,
with others you must share and care again.
Reach out and comfort those who comfort you;
recall the years, but only for a while.*

Grieving for someone we loved takes a while. We don't get what some in our culture call "closure" quickly; and sometimes we do not get it at all. What we get instead is a measure of peace in our memories; and a sense of what is precious in this life. And that peace; and that gratitude for the precious parts of this life---is what brings comfort as we move on with our own lives.

A very wise woman named Margaret Mead wrote these words: This is called "Remember me".

To the living I am gone. To the sorrowful, I will never return.

To the angry, I was cheated, but to the happy, I am at peace.

And to the faithful, I have never left.

I cannot be seen, but I can be heard.

*As you look in awe at a mighty forest and its grand majesty---
remember me.*

As you look upon a flower and admire its simplicity---remember me.

*Remember me in your heart, your thoughts, your memories of the
times we loved, the times we cried, the times we fought, the times we
laughed.*

For if you always think of me, I will never be gone.

Thank you so much for being a part of this today, for sharing your grief and your memories with the rest of Carol's family. Please linger on, and snack, and chat, and hug, and love.

Go in peace.

On June 10, I posted my thoughts on Facebook:



“For almost 60 years this picture of Carol Edith Brill, born 4/2/1957 hung in our homes as we moved from Youngstown, Ohio, where she was born, to Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and back to Pittsburgh where she left our home to make one of her own as Mrs. David Wolff. The picture went with us to West Chester, PA, where she and her growing family joined us for a while. She didn’t follow us to St. Louis, but, in 1985, she did bring David Matthew Wolff at the age of 6 to go with her mother, JoAnn, her brother, Charles and me on what was our last of many family camping trips. This one was the biggest of all – about 3000 miles through the western states including the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Mount Rushmore and all the sights in between. After 20 years in St. Louis, JoAnn and I moved to Winter Garden, FL – mostly to be nearer to Carol and her family. We’ve had fifteen wonderful years in which Carol was no more than a half hour away. A short time ago, we gave this picture of herself to Carol to hang in her home. We now have the picture back in our home; hanging where we will see it many times a day. Our daughter, Carol Edith Wolff, died May 23 at home after several years of physical and health problems and two months of disability.”

“Her Life was celebrated June 1 with a program presented by her sons David Matthew, Jonathan Paul, and Benjamin Andrew and their spouses Mary, Emily, and fiancée Tabitha Carey; and the three grandchildren she doted on, Rosie Nicole, Rowan Elliot, and Everett Linc Wolff. Also, in attendance were Carol’s three brothers Jon, Kenneth and Charles; her sister-in-law Christina Brill; her nieces and nephews from Ocala - Hope Brill-Vary and Riley Vary; Becca McKinney, Donald McKinney and their sons Nikita and Lennox; Emma and Andrew Bedford; and Ryan, Holly, Grace and Spencer Brill; and her nieces from Missouri – Hannah, Kaitlin, Victoria and Chloe Brill. Her sister-in-law, Wendy McKisic made the trip from Flower Mound Texas; the Carey family came from St. Augustine. Friends of Carol’s 3 sons showed their support. A large number of friends and associates were there representing her employer, Target. Others, including her mother-in-law, Ginger Wolff; her Aunts Mary Bess Rains and Janet Exline; her sisters-in-law, Shannon Brill, Karen Brill and Becky Orr; her nieces Lauren Burke, Allyson Brill; her cousins Susan Webster, David Stubbs, JoAnn White and Diane Arocho; and her ex-husband David J. Wolff expressed their condolences and regrets that due to illness or commitments they were not able to attend. Friends and family sent flowers, condolences, food and loving conversations. Our home-owners association catered to our every need. Everyone did their best to soothe the heartache.”

JoAnn and I have our memories, pictures and mementos but it will be a while before those are enough.

We spent the next few months preparing Carol's house to be sold once probate had been cleared. In September 2019, we flew to Dulles Airport in Virginia and drove to Berkeley Springs. Jon and Shannon; and David, Mary and Rosie came there for the weekend. We had a great time with them. We took Jon and Shannon to Hooks Mills, WV to see the house that my dad was raised in. Later, we went to Capon Springs, WV to visit a resort that had been started in the 1940's and where there has been Brill family members involved since the beginning. We met the Operations Manager who is a distant cousin and lives "just up the road" from my first cousin Clyde Brill who owns what is left of my grandfather's and uncle's farms.

While we were in Berkeley Springs, we purchased a memorial stone for our grave in Greenway Cemetery. We will be buried together, with the first to go being cremated.



The memorial stone was placed in June 2020.

Benjamin Andrew Wolff and Tabitha Ann Carey were married January 10, 2020, in St. Augustine, FL. We drove up to attend the ceremony and reception. Since there was no parking at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, it was suggested that we come to the hotel where the wedding party was staying and go on the public transportation that was being provided. I did not think that it was likely that JoAnn would have an easy time hopping on the public buses so I decided to see if we could park in a restaurant parking lot close to the Basilica. I made reservations at one that was within 2 blocks. When we got there, we found that the restaurant did not have a parking lot.

Fortunately, there was a hotel with a restaurant that was a little closer. We had previously decided that we could not wait to eat until the reception since it was quite late. While we were eating, I talked to the restaurant manager, and he agreed that we could pay a small charge and leave our car in the hotel parking lot since it was valet parking. The ceremony was beautiful, and the bride and groom enjoyed the reception where a special recognition of Ben's mother Carol was made. Several months later, just a short time after they moved into their new home, Ben left for a Marine Corps Reserve deployment to California and Japan which lasted the rest of the year and into 2021.



Ben and Tabby with his Grandparents

We traveled to Las Vegas for the annual Graybar “Omega” retiree’s reunion in February 2020. From there, we flew to Kauai for a six-weeks’ vacation. JoAnn was not able to golf, but I was able to play 17 days in the 33 that we were there, and JoAnn rode in the cart. There was more than the usual amount of rain while we were there, but we only had one round that completely soaked us. A friend from Cheney, Washington that we have golfed with for 20 years celebrated his 90th birthday at a party that drew about 40 friends and locals.

Without much fanfare, the health commission in Wuhan, China had reported the outbreak of a respiratory virus on December 31, 2019. For much of the next 2+ years nothing would be the same because of Covid-19. The coronavirus pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on March 11. The stock market had already had a record set on Black Monday, March 9 by falling almost 8 percent; the Dow set new points record on Black Thursday, March 12, when it fell over 2300 points, and this was followed by Black Monday II, March 16 when Wall Street fell 12%, this was its worst decline in more than 30 years.

The pandemic caused us to decide that we would rather be sick in Florida than on Kauai mostly because there was only a small hospital on the island, so we left a week early. The flight on which we were originally set to leave was cancelled a week later. In fact, our friends from Washington had their flight cancelled in March and had to remain there until July when the next flights out occurred.

This was not the best decision that I ever made because the spread of Covid-19 was much worse in Florida than it was on Kauai, and we probably could have stayed on since travel to Hawaii was strictly curtailed. I suppose that part of the decision to leave early included the fact that it had rained every day of the last week we were there. The lagoon that was yards away from our condo overflowed and a pump was installed that directed the water down the street in front of our condo. I had to move my car so that I could put our luggage in the trunk.

While we quarantined ourselves at home for 3 months, we waited for the birth of Hope and Riley's baby. Right on time, Otto Yeager Vary was born Sunday, June 28, 2020, at 11:16AM. He weighed in at 7 lbs. 9 oz and 21". We had a visit from Hope and Riley in August and our first meeting with Otto.



Otto Vary

In September, we drove to Berkeley Springs to spend some time with my niece and nephew Susan and Pete. Jon and Shannon and David, Mary, and Rosie Wolff came to Berkeley for the weekend. We stopped on our drive to see my sister Mary Bess Rains in Wilmington. She lives with her daughter and son-in law, Joanne, and Steve White. We spent a day with them and some of their family.

The rest of 2020 we mostly spent by ourselves. We had a few visits from grandchildren. We picked up groceries that we ordered online. The only outside contact that we had was at the doctors' offices. Near the end of the year, we got the bad news that Charles would have to be treated for cancer that was diagnosed in his lymphatic system.

Early in 2021, I had an episode while working at my computer that was very worrisome. I saw flashes in my peripheral vision that seemed to coordinate with my heartbeat. This lasted at least 5 minutes. I asked the ophthalmologist about it at my next examination, and she said that there was nothing wrong with my eyes. She did suggest seeing a cardiologist. I had a couple more episodes very similar to the first and asked my GP about it at my next appointment. He suggested that I see a neurologist. I finally did this in January 2022. He ordered some tests, including a brain MRI and an echocardiogram. He also sent me to a neurological ophthalmologist. It was this doctor who diagnosed my problem which by then had happened 4 or 5 times. He said he had seen this about 20 times in his practice; it is called "ocular migraine". However, I think that it is more likely that what I experienced is a less troublesome condition called "visual migraine". The last occurrence of this was late in 2021; but it returned a few times in the spring of 2025.

By March 2021, we had finally received both of our Covid-19 vaccinations. For most of the previous year, we had stayed away from close contact with others. We had groceries delivered to our home once and a restaurant meal delivered to our home once. For six months starting in September, we only did take-out restaurant dining and curbside grocery shopping. Unfortunately, we also had little physical activity, so we now had to get our life back to more normal. We still would observe restrictions that had served to keep us safe until the country was back to normal.

Harry Victor Saville died April 27 in Leesburg, VA where he had been living since Emaleen died. We were not able to travel and expressed our regrets to his daughter Judy. On April 30, JoAnn fell in the TV room, and we had to get EMS to come and take her to the emergency room to be checked out. She was vacuuming the room and lost her balance and fell backwards. They did not find any serious injury, but it added to her daily pain quota for a while.

In May, Allyson graduated from West Chester University.



Allyson and family after Graduation

Hannah had her High School graduation ceremony in May after graduating early in December 2020.



Hannah Brill

On July 4, Ryan Connor Brill and Jordyn Cluff had their marriage ceremony in American Falls, Idaho.



Jordyn and Ryan

We had to cancel our annual trip to Berkeley Springs in September because of an operation on JoAnn's arm to remove a squamous cell carcinoma that had been bothering her for several months. We also had the Covid-19 epidemic to consider because, even though we had all the vaccinations, there was still the danger of a breakthrough infection which, even if it was milder due to our vaccinations, might still be dangerous. We stayed home and avoided groups for the next 5 months.

On October 5, Timber Charles McKinney was born to Becca and Donald. He'll fit in great with his two older brothers.



Timber McKinney

On December 15, Aurora Ann Wolff was born to Tabby and Ben. Carol would have been over the moon with her latest grandchild.



Aurora Wolff

We spent Thanksgiving and Christmas at home out of caution and because JoAnn was in a lot of pain due to a fall in the kitchen. I had to get 2 friends to help her get on her feet. She didn't want to have it checked out as she said she did not have any immediate discomfort. She had been trying to mop the kitchen floor even though I had cautioned her that she did not have the strength or balance to do that type of thing.

On Christmas day 2021, the James Webb space telescope was launched into space from French Guiana. This could turn out to be the most important scientific advancement of the 21st century.



One of the first images produced by the Webb Telescope

Emma and Andrew became the parents of Lucy Bedford on January 31, 2022. She had some issues initially but overcame them like the strong little girl she is. We then had 3 beautiful great granddaughters and 6 active great grandsons.



Lucy Anastasia Bedford

At the end of January, JoAnn's pain seemed to be getting worse rather than better; we consulted with our geriatric specialist, and he prescribed Tramadol to replace the Tylenol that she was taking daily and suggested that we consult a pain specialist. Two weeks later the Tramadol didn't seem to be helping, and it was getting close to our date to leave for Kauai on February 17. We made an emergency appointment with a pain specialist who prescribed Hydrocodone and a muscle relaxant. Up until the last moment I felt that the trip was only about 50% sure and I told JoAnn that if things were not OK for her, we would return at the earliest time possible.

I had made plans last year to go to Las Vegas for the annual Graybar retiree reunion and go from there to Kauai on February 19. The meeting was cancelled in January, so I tried at the last moment, unsuccessfully, to book a direct flight. I was able to cut our stay in Las Vegas to 2 nights. Even that was a disaster as our accommodation left a lot to be desired. We completed our trip where we met up with Jon and Shannon in Phoenix and had an uneventful flight to Kauai.

We had a good time showing Jon and Shannon the island that we love so much. They did a few things on their own like a whale watch cruise and a Luau. Jon and I golfed several times with the friends that we hadn't seen in two years. JoAnn and Shannon rode along with us. The weather was great for the whole two weeks that they stayed. I told them it wasn't always that beautiful. A couple of days after our arrival, JoAnn started getting chills and shivers. She became disoriented and couldn't keep track of to whom she was talking. I had seen this behavior with her years before and felt that she was having a reaction to hydrocodone. I stopped using that for pain and went back to using the Tramadol that our GP prescribed at our last check-up. That seemed to work although she still was cold with the temperature in the 70s and there were no heating appliances in the condo. I bought a space heater to provide more warmth.

After Jon and Shannon left, we didn't get out too much. I played golf a few times, but JoAnn didn't feel like riding in the cart. The weather turned around and we did have a lot more rain. Most clear days we walked up to the pool and sat at a table for a half-hour just to get some exercise. I considered cutting our stay short, but the cost would have been double the already expensive airline booking that we had. The trip back to Orlando was long but uneventful and we were glad to be home. JoAnn was not in the best shape but was able to get around with her walker. She hated the fact that she was not able to do the things around the house that she had done all her life until recently. She never minded too much that I did the cooking but leaving the rest of the household chores to me was not something she had ever contemplated. We tried hiring outside help but for one reason or another, this didn't become our solution.

On May 4, Sybil Rose Vary was born to Hope and Riley; she was 8 pounds 3 ounces and 21.5".



Hope and Sybil Rose

On May 16 deaths from Covid-19 in the US reached one million.

Early the morning of June 16, 2022, Christina called to tell us that our son, her husband Charles Edward Brill, had passed away. At the end, he was surrounded with the love of his family at the hospital in Tampa that he had been going to for treatment of his cancer condition for almost two years.

My reflections on his life:

Charles Edward Brill was his mama's baby for almost 54 years. Moreover, he was a loved and loving husband for almost 32 years and an adored and adoring father for almost 31 years. His seven children knew him as a stern, reliable, droll, and often doting father and grandfather. They knew he could be counted on for help in any case from fixing their car to consoling their missteps. He changed diapers and arranged for their employment.

Chuck lived within an hour of his parents all his life except for the semester at Southeast Missouri State University, his army service at Fort Benning Georgia, his 4 years at University of Kansas in Lawrence after his wedding to Christina and the two years that they lived in Ocala before his mother, and I followed him and his sister Carol to Florida. He supported us in many ways from acting as our Health Care Surrogate to helping us to clean out his sister's house when she died in 2019.

Chuck was the first person that I knew well who was born in New York State. Before that, most of our family were West Virginians who were transplanted to Ohio and Pennsylvania. Those are the three states that my father lived in all his life, never more than 250 miles from his birthplace. All the rest of our family except Chuck were born in that circle. His oldest brother and sister were born in the same Ohio hospital that my sister Mary Bess and I were born. We moved 3 times before he was born and by the time he graduated from high school we had moved 3 more times.

He wasn't sure about the school thing; the school bus driver brought him back home on the first two mornings and his mother had to drive him in. But he was the first in his family to complete his undergraduate degree. He was the third member of this branch of the Brill family to serve in the armed forces. His great uncle Walton served in Europe in the First World War; his uncle Bud served in Hawaii in the Second World War.

I have always admired the courage that it took for him to tell his mother and me that we were wasting our money on the first college attempt that he made. He came back from his years in the army much more mature and motivated. My respect grew as I saw him become a family man. I came to envy the nearness that he fostered in his large family. Most of his life he has been separated by distance from his siblings. He left a sister behind when we moved from Pittsburgh and a brother when we moved to St. Louis and another brother when Chuck moved his family to Florida. Maybe this encouraged him to nurture the closeness that his family feels with each other.

Another of his attributes that I appreciated was his no-nonsense approach to taking on whatever was thrown his way. He didn't learn his auto mechanic ability from his father, nor his air conditioning mechanic aptitude, nor his talent as a roofer. Charles in most ways was his own man and didn't try to copy any other.

His faith guided him, his Faith Family sustained him, and his decency was with him his whole life. His strong presence in their lives will sustain his children and their spouses. Her strong family will sustain Christina; their 6 grandchildren will have loving memories of their Gpa. Life for all of us will go on but there is an enormous vacancy that will not go away. We are told in Psalms that the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit and binds up their wounds. Our consolation is that we were privileged to have had him even for too short of a time.

Charles' Obituary:

Charles Edward Brill "Chuck," age 53, loving husband to Christina Petry Brill and father of 7, passed away peacefully Thursday, June 16th, 2022, after a 2-year battle with pancreatic and neuroendocrine cancer. Chuck met Christina in St. Louis, MO in 1987 and immediately fell in love. They married 2 years later on August 18th, 1990. After starting their family with daughter Hope (30) in 1991, they moved to Lawrence, Kansas while Chuck finished his bachelor's in architecture. They had 2 more children, Becca (29) and Emma (27) before moving back to St. Louis in 1996. Once settled down, they added Ryan (25) and Holly (23) to the family. In 2003, they moved to Ocala, Florida and completed the family with Grace (17) and Spencer (14). Chuck worked at Lockheed Martin, Ocala for 18 years. During this time, his profound example of love, servitude and Christlike compassion touched countless lives. Chuck will always be remembered for his humble personality and dedication to his family. Chuck is survived by his wife, Christina, 7 children, Hope, Becca, Emma, Ryan, Holly, Grace, Spencer; grandchildren Nikita, Lennox, Otto, Timber, Lucy, Sybil; his parents Jon and JoAnn and siblings. A service will be held at 4pm on Saturday, June 25, 2022, at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1831 SE 18 Street, Ocala. Online condolences may be left at www.Hiers-Baxley.com.

His two brothers and some of their families were with us at the funeral. Carol's son Benjamin and his family were there. The many tributes that were given to his memory were well earned and spoken from the heart. We enjoyed the dinner that the church gave to family and friends. The drive home afterwards was probably the quietest that JoAnn and I have ever had.

JoAnn's condition had been deteriorating since we came back from Hawaii. She did not have a lot of stamina while we were there, but she could walk using her walker for 100 yards with one stop for rest. Since then that endurance shrunk to less than 100 feet. Early in July we asked the doctor to approve home physical therapy and that was later approved and began July 14. She did well in the first session but on July 21, the therapist while taking her vital signs, noted low blood pressure and high heart rate. This meant she could not do any therapy, but she stayed a while to monitor. I continued to monitor, and the situation didn't change in the next few hours, so I took her to the ER at South Lake Hospital in Clermont. They were able to stabilize her heart rate fairly quickly but wanted her to stay overnight so they could see how the treatment was progressing.

I stayed while they moved her to the Clinical Decision Unit. They said that I could stay all night, but JoAnn insisted that I go home. The next morning when I got there, she was out of sorts, and I wished that I had stayed. I slept in the recliner for the next 2 nights. The care was no more than adequate but I was able to see that she ate and drank, brought her underclothes so that she was comfortable. Unfortunately, they made a decision in her care that influenced everything. She would have been able to come home the first morning but developed a hematoma in her stomach area due to the injection of a blood thinner. They had to keep her two more nights and give her 2 units of plasma. They sent her home with a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation.

On the second morning, to prepare for leaving they had sent a physical therapist to test her ability to walk with a walker. The therapist was satisfied with her ability at that time, but by the time we came home on the fourth day she could barely stand up. The balance of her physical therapy went okay but she was still mostly bedridden. Fortunately, I was able to get help from several granddaughters, and she had an excellent therapist. Several times she was able to walk, using her walker, for 25 to 50 feet.

I noticed two circumstances about our anniversary this November 8, 2022. I wrote a post to Facebook to reveal my feelings about that.

We were married on election day 67 years ago (2/3 of a century - whew). We'll celebrate this year on election day. We're not the same people that we were then. We didn't have any idea then about what love meant; we didn't have any plans for the future; things were so much simpler. How could we know that we would spend over thirty years raising our 4 children, over thirty years greeting our 16 grandchildren, and at least another eight years enjoying our first 10 great-grandchildren.

We don't know when our next trip will take place, but we can look back on our more than half-million miles of travel together all over the world, our visits to about 25 National Parks and Monuments and over 100 weeks of vacations in the destination we love most – Kauai. We really appreciate that at the age of 60 we were able to take up golf and spend hundreds of beautiful days together on courses all over the United States.

We are not at the end of our days together but certainly are in those twilight years when vision is blurred not in what we can see but what we can't and what is unknowable. We do know that we are two of the luckiest people. We know that we are proud of our children and theirs and we've known some wonderful friends and relatives, most of whom are no longer with us.

Our daily routine would bore most people to distraction but being away from the hustle and bustle of twenty-first-century life is what we need on most days. We have the most important person in the world to comfort us on our "bad" days and rejoice with on the "good" days.

While we can no longer remember which of us first suggested marriage, we both agree that twenty sounds like too young for such an undertaking. There are so many things that we would do differently if we could but none of those regrets would we want to steer us in a different direction.

Often, when I'm helping her get out of bed in the morning, I recall a poem that struck me when I first read it a few years ago:

THE BLUE ROBE by Wendell Berry

How joyful to be together, alone
as when we first were joined
in our little house by the river
long ago, except that now we know
each other, as we did not then,
and now instead of two stories fumbling
to meet, we belong to one story
that the two, joining, made. And now

we touch each other with the tenderness
of mortals, who know themselves;
how joyful to feel the heart quake

at the sight of a grandmother,
old friend in the morning light,
beautiful in her blue robe.

Unfortunately, later in November, her blood pressure went up and it took 2 weeks to get it back down to her normal rate. During that time, she was not able to do any walking and spent most of her time in bed. After Thanksgiving, we got a visit from 8 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren which buoyed her spirits while she anticipated a visit a day later by Jon, Jr., Shannon, and Allyson. 2022 ended with not much change.

In January 2023, we decided that we needed to do something to acknowledge the situation that followed from the deaths of Carol and Charles. Both of their spouses, to put it mildly, are no longer active participants in their children's lives. I sent this letter to our grandchildren.

It came to us as we were making out this year's Christmas cards that 10 of our grandchildren effectively do not have a parent that they might normally turn to for help, advice, or just to run something past. Both of my parents were with me until I was 34, my mother died when I was 46, and her mother when JoAnn was 62. So, although they helped in various ways throughout our early and middle life their passing was not completely unexpected. I don't know what this void means to all those children, but I can imagine that it is a life change in the worst possible way. I also realized that of our two surviving children, one is safely retired, and the other is thinking about how he will effectuate his retirement and should be able to expect that to be reasonable. I think that means that Grandma and I are done raising our children and should concentrate our efforts on doing what we can for the grandchildren.

For all of them and not just the ten that brought these thoughts to mind, we want to be there for them in any way that seems to fit their needs. Obviously, finance is the first thing that comes to mind and is an important foundation to build on. Our living trust is set up with the agreement of Jon and Ken so that most of the inheritance will go directly to the grandchildren. We don't want to make them wait for all of that, so we are making plans to distribute what is a reasonable sum each year.

Although our assets and income are more than our current needs, there are important considerations that make the amount available on an annual basis an issue. We don't know how much longer we will need to provide for our own welfare nor what those costs might be. Most of our assets are in IRAs or in company stock that it just doesn't make sense to sell. We are required to take a certain amount each year from our IRA and pay taxes on it. We are close to the next level of taxable income that will raise our Medicare payments by \$3000 a year if we exceed that limit. We would prefer not to reach that level as we now pay about \$10,000 a year in medical expenses including Medicare.

The above is not to say that the amount of cash available is strictly limited. The main issue with discussing our finances is that we have 16 grandchildren and two children to consider. For the last 25 years, we have helped our children financially in various ways. We have always maintained that we would treat all our children as equally as possible and have kept records doing so. That would also apply to each of our grandchildren. What we are proposing is that there is some leeway for advances against any future inheritance, which is what we have done for our children. To make something like this work, it must be understood that there should be a solid, reasonable need for this such as education, medical costs and other emergencies, as well as balanced lifestyle changes. We must be convinced that the need is both important and cogent. We are not suggesting that mortgage and car payments are not important, but some expenses must be in every family's budget. We are making changes to our will and trust that will handle any advances that are made to any of our heirs. This will be done by keeping track of those payouts and reducing the amount of inheritance accordingly. However, it should be acknowledged that only funds that we agree to advance will be counted in these transactions. No gifts that we make will be in this category.

While we are on the subject, I would like to give some advice about budgeting and retirement planning. Most of it I have learned the hard way. I was lucky that my company decided early in my career that retirement benefits were so crucial to the employees that they set up a plan that did two basic things; it set up accounts with both company and employee contributions, and it limited the amount of company contributions that could be withdrawn prior to retirement. I still regret that, in the first 5 years of this, I did withdraw a significant amount partly because I panicked at the decline in value that we had due to a slowing economy. I also made the mistake of not contributing as much of my own funds as I would have been able to. I did purchase company stock at every opportunity and that stock furnished about half of our income in 2022.

So, in addition to retirement savings, what other advice do I have. Again, something that we also did not have was a "rainy day" savings account. Most advisers suggest \$500 to \$5000 as a reasonable amount to take care of emergencies that crop up. Bad situations can occur if there becomes a dependency on "Payday" loans. A law that was passed in December allows employers to set up a separate "rainy day" account for employees to contribute after tax from their paycheck up to \$2500. Like a retirement account this helps employees to budget for future expenses.

It is important that a budget describes exactly where your income is spent so that any necessary adjustments can be made with full knowledge of the consequences. In our early married life, Grandma and I did not have a budget, but we did have a bent toward not spending on anything we thought we couldn't afford at the time. We didn't have a refrigerator in our first unfurnished apartment until Carol was born. I guess what I'm saying is that it is very important to plan, budget and discuss all finances, not only about affordability but also necessity.

With Grandma's condition, it appears that we will not be able to use our timeshares as much as we would like. The selling point for us in deciding to spend a lot of money

to have these is that they are ownership deals that can be passed on to others or sold. Selling is not always an easy situation, so it is financially advantageous to make sure to use each year's allotment of points. We have in the past arranged vacations or honeymoons for several of you and would like to have all of you consider it. I realize that the logistics of this are not as simple as it would seem. For the last 35 years, we have scheduled our vacations around using these timeshares, mostly in Hawaii but also Europe, the Caribbean and at least 20 states on the mainland. It became easier to schedule when we retired but it wasn't a big problem before that. Some advance planning is required if you want something specific but there are many possibilities, particularly in locations like Florida with as little as a week's preparation. To make this more workable for you, we have decided to advance you \$500 with each week's booking. I am happy to take the time to help you plan anything that you want, and I have a lot of experience.

I was heartened by the response and was able to provide about \$200,000 in 2023 and 2024 for various needs.

In January 2023, we decided to start therapy again but after a few sessions, I could see that we weren't getting anywhere and decided to end it in early February. I caught a bad cold which hung on for weeks, so I decided to get outside help. Over the next several weeks, the healthcare service sent a couple of middle-aged women to assist me for 4 hours, three days a week. They were helpful in caring for JoAnn and doing some domestic services, but I could see that they were not any better at handling her needs than I was even in my weakened capacity.

I had talked to Jordyn about replacing Chuck as our Healthcare Surrogate and as I got to know her better, I thought that she might be the perfect choice to help with an increased schedule. I wanted to have someone I could depend on to always be there as I couldn't predict my own condition over a period. I knew that I would have to go outside of healthcare services and hire a suitable person. I just didn't know if Jordyn would be interested in leaving her current job to do what we needed. Everybody I talked to about it felt that Jordyn would be perfect and so, I asked her, and she accepted. It was necessary to cancel our annual trip to Hawaii and Las Vegas.

From March to June, things progressed due to the assistance I was now receiving but JoAnn's condition was not any better and sometimes got worse. During my checkup with our doctor, I brought up the subject and he agreed with me that possibly some further therapy was called for. I also thought that Jordyn and I would benefit from some coaching on our care and transfer processes, and we also need to be prepared for the possibility that it might become more difficult to transfer JoAnn from and to her bed and wheelchair. We talked to the therapist about lift products that we might be able to use.

Jon came down from Pennsylvania in August and helped us celebrate our 88th birthday. We also decided that a mobility van to hold JoAnn's wheelchair was needed. We rented several times for doctor's visits, a trip to Ocala and restaurants. We were pleased with the results and decided to buy a 2019 Dodge Caravan that was converted to provide mobility service.

September would become a month that we would have preferred to skip. On August 30, I went into the hospital with sepsis infection in my blood. It was fought for 5 days in the hospital and 4 days at home with Jordyn processing the IVs of antibiotic. Jordyn cared for her grandma while I was in the hospital and brought her every day to see me. However, while I was in the hospital, JoAnn increased something she had started to do over the last few months. She would make it very difficult to get her to take her medicine and either would not eat all her meals or would refuse to eat at all, including drinking water or any other beverages.

A therapist who was evaluating her stated that she was dehydrated, and we should contact her doctor. The next day, her blood pressure was very high compared to previous days. I called the doctor's office, and the nurse said that we should go to the ER. Jordyn and I took her in on September 7. She was there until September 12 while they dealt with Those problems. The eating, drinking and medication problems continued. Before we left the hospital the doctor discussed the situation with me and I also talked to a social service worker who suggested I talk to some representatives of hospice providers, which I did.

Jon had decided to come down while Jordyn and Ryan were in Utah to reveal the gender of the baby she is carrying to her family and friends. Jon arrived on the 14th and I showed him the problems we were having with his mother. She had been eating and drinking very little for days and still refused to take medicine. I had gone to see our doctor that morning and we discussed the situation from all viewpoints and we both agreed that we should consider some form of Hospice. The next day her dementia was worse, and we picked a provider and called to ask to see a representative. After listening to her presentation at our house, Jon and I decided that we had little choice and that evening they transported her to Cornerstone's Mike Conley Hospice House. Most of her family was able to come and see her in those last few days. She passed away quietly on September 19 with many of her family members at the hospice-

I wish that we could have reached our 68th wedding anniversary because we had been telling everyone we were married that long. But we could have said that we have been together for 68 years since we were engaged on 9/15/1955.

We will eventually be physically together in the same burial space, in Greenway Cemetery, Berkeley Springs where my mother, father, brother, sister, grandfather, and many uncles, aunts, and cousins are buried. We decided many years ago that we wanted to occupy the same casket and made some arrangements for that including borrowing a site from my niece Susan Webster and having a marker erected. This was not my decision, it was our decision.

I have expressed in writing my Ethical Will and Testament several times how I felt that not only was our meeting and getting together a miracle but also how I felt that I needed her to help me complete myself. I truly feel that without her personally being there with me in our partnership, I would have been much less happy and fulfilled. I knew very little about a successful marriage relationship since at that time I had not had the chance to observe one up close.

Even though good fortune landed me with Graybar and a regular paycheck for the next 69+ years, it was not always an easy life for her because of the long hours and frequent moves that

my job involved. Until we moved to St. Louis in 1984, the 5 places we lived after our first move averaged 4 years each.

We moved first with 2 children, then with 3 children, and next with 4 children. Again, we moved with 3 children, and then with 2 children; each move involved uprooting JoAnn from friends that she had made and from schools and churches that she had become familiar with. The moves always separated us for some period and included one that lasted 8 months with my frequent returns for several days at a time. She took these upheavals and the accompanying workload without whimpering or complaining. I could not have asked for better support of “my career”. Unfortunately, I now know that I could have given her more support in her career raising our children.

At the time when all the children were in school and acclimated to the latest move, she felt she was able to add work outside the home to her resume’ and assist with stretched finances, which she did until her retirement after 18 years. She worked her way up to be a supervisor in the food service industry and might have gone higher if we hadn’t made our final move for my work.

Although she excelled as a mother and a wife, I also appreciated that she was a wonderful companion. During our empty nest years, she accompanied me on many business trips as well as our vacations and visiting family and friends. In our late fifties, we decided to take up golf as something we could do together and over the next 30 years golfed all over the U. S. but particularly in Hawaii. She also went along with my (perhaps misguided) idea to accumulate time share properties, particularly those in Hawaii which became our second home.

We met and were friendly with many people from all over the U.S. while golfing in Hawaii. It just happened that we came at the same time of year and played golf at the same course. Some of these friendships spread over 15 or 20 years. At times we even visited them in their hometowns when we were close while traveling. JoAnn made friends very easily and we always got along with our neighbors.

You’ll notice that I have never mentioned how much we were alike because we weren’t. We were very much not alike, and we both had to make many adjustments. Lately, I’ve concluded that what made us compatible was our willingness to make those adjustments. I truly believe that JoAnn made many more adjustments than I did. She did, however, let me know it.

Life does go on and I want to be with my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren for many more years but at the moment I don’t feel the inclination to continue the documentation of my life.