

Autobiography of Bill Powell

The early years

I was born April 15th 1949, on Good Friday. “That is why I’m so good,” I used to tell my mom. I was born at the old Fairview hospital and raised in Cleveland Ohio. We lived on Randall road until I was five. I don’t remember much except the night the tornado hit near our house. The next day we went and saw some of the damage in the neighborhood. I also remember getting a new bike and it was stolen. TV was just beginning to make it into everyone’s homes. I remember the German guy across the street named Helmut Howshut. I won’t tell you what my mother called him. I also remember the rake-a-dake man. At least that is what it sounded like to me. I think he was saying rags and something else. He had a horse-drawn wagon and went around the neighborhood shouting out rak-a-dake. I vaguely remember the ice man also. Our neighborhood was a lot like the one in the movie the Christmas story. We also had a corner store where we would buy the essentials. It was the kind of store where they put your purchase on your tab. I remember putting some donuts on the tab. Yeah, you’re right; that didn’t go too well.

My father had served in World War II and that made me a baby boomer. Like so many soldiers coming home, he worked hard to buy one of those homes in a neighborhood such as Marty’s from the movie, “Back to the Future.”

When I was five, we moved to our house on Carrington Avenue in Cleveland where I lived until I married in 1970. The neighborhood was typical of most back then. The houses and streets were close together and almost every house had children. It was such a different world from today. Everyone knew everyone and no one locked their doors. It was common for our parents to just go over to someone’s house, unlike today where an appointment is required. As kids, we were let out in the morning and we ran the neighborhood until we heard our mothers calling or our sister came to get us. In the summertime, we were told to make sure we were home before the street lights came on. We could usually be found playing hide and go seek, spud or tag. We didn’t worry about pedophiles back then. Moms were at home everywhere so eyes were on us most of the time. When I was young, I only knew one kid whose mother worked outside the home and many moms didn’t even have driver’s licenses. My mother never drove. To go shopping, mom would take us on the bus to the rapid transit then to downtown. We would go to the Five and Dime, Woolworth, S.S. Kresge and the May company.

Let me give you a little insight into our neighborhood. I am sure many my age can relate. We still had businesses that came to you like the milk man, the fuller brush man, and the post man actually walked up to our house to give us the mail. The garbage man went in our back yard and dragged our garbage cans out, dumped them then took the cans back. I must admit those cans got beat up pretty badly so we had to put a brick on the lid to keep it from blowing away. Another member from the other cast of characters gracing our neighborhood was the bread man. He used to come up to our front door with a carrier from his truck filled with goodies like bread and donuts. Man! I loved that guy. Here is one for you. Every year this guy came around. He would go up and down the streets with

a pony and would dress kids up and take their picture sitting on the pony. Most houses had one of these pictures on the TV. We could never afford one. Most of the dads in our neighborhood were blue collar factory workers and struggled to make ends meet. My dad worked at Union Carbide. Chuck across the street worked at Westinghouse and Tony who lived caddy corner from us worked at Ford. Back to the cast of characters that graced our neighborhood. We had the Good Humor man and Uncle Marty's (No, they didn't sell drugs or were not pedophiles). They had the trucks full of ice cream or sometimes they came on one of those bicycles with the bells and the cooler in front. I always had to get the popsicles but really wanted an Italian ice or one of those ice cream cake looking things. The popsicles were only a dime but the others were twenty cents. I remember with twenty-five cents, we could O.D. on candy. For me it was all about the quantity not the quality. The last business guy that came to our home was the insurance man. Yes, he would come every month to collect his premium. I remember one time I was running home from school and I ran into the side of a milk truck. Yes, I ran into the side of the truck. The driver was so upset and scared. A few weeks later the insurance man came to my house and gave my dad a check for \$200.00. I was able to get a new bike. The one I had was older than dirt and one peddle was just the center; the rubber part was gone. The other pedal's rubber part was always disconnecting from the center and I would have to use the bottom of my shoes to push down and then pull it up with the top of my shoes (that had holes in the bottoms). Additionally, there was no chain guard and sometimes my pants would get caught in the chain. All the bottoms of my pants had chain marks. I guess the milk company was happy that I was alright. We would not have sued like they do today, besides it was my fault and they shouldn't have given us anything.

A few interesting things about our neighborhood

At the end of the street there were some factories. In back of the factories were railroad tracks. One of the factories made plastic items. I remember when hula hoops came out they were giving them away. Everyone in the neighborhood went there. On the other side of the tracks there were several hundred acres that were still open fields and at one time was farm land. This land was between the tracks and Tiedemann road. There were many things to explore including a riding stable and trails. We would pick wild strawberries, blackberries and crab apples. Another factory was Swifts and we use to go back there when we wanted to do something we shouldn't do like smoke or drink. A favorite pastime was hopping trains or putting a penny on the tracks to see it flattened. When we walked the tracks, one way took us to Giant Tigers, (A Wal-Mart kind of store and the other direction took us to Uncle Bill's, same kind of store. We spent a lot of time across the tracks.

We also played a lot of sports like baseball, basketball, track, street hockey and ice skating on the pond across the tracks. One time, an Italian kid moved into the neighborhood and showed us a game called soccer. It never caught on. Halloween was a highlight of the year. With so many houses and the ability to run wild, we had to take pillowcases to hold all the candy. We got mostly suckers, gum, pennies and homemade stuff that we weren't afraid to eat. Sometimes in the summer we would each tell our parents we were going to sleep over at a friend's house and then we would walk the track

about five miles to the drive-in and sneak in or watch from the tracks. The neighborhood was a mixture of people. We had Dale Chusinski, Polish; Billy Lyle, Irish; Tony Vitello, Italian and I can't forget Benny the Ball from West Virginia. We went to school with kids from hundreds of different national heritages including many black kids. Many kids were Catholic because of the large amount of Europeans who lived in the neighborhood.

We walked to school by ourselves from Kindergarten, and even in the subzero weather in the winter. We would sometimes walk the creek on the ice and slide on our backs under the streets using our feet above us to propel us along. Once I fell through the ice and got soaked. We laughed till we cried. At recess we usually went out on the gravel school yard and played dodge ball. Hermise Baldrige would always win. He wasn't the fastest; I was, but he could juke better than anyone I ever met. Another black kid was Savern Gainor. Savern was the first and only kid I ever went to school with who had a Mohawk. He was also quite proud of his anatomy. The teachers were strict and the worst behavior was chewing gum or talking. If our Math teacher, Miss Trinka caught us talking she would come by and smack the tops of our hands with a ruler. All my report cards said, "Billy is a very good student but he spends too much time visiting with his neighbor. I'm sure if you know me, that is hard to imagine."

I remember we had banking day and I was the banker. We had a school personal bank account and made a deposit each week, usually a nickel or dime. I was a school crossing guard in elementary school. I was fired because ole red-headed Judy lied and said I hit her; I didn't. No one today would believe it but I had the best handwriting in the class. The schools didn't have P.A. systems so the teacher would write a note or have me write the note and deliver it. The best thing about school was walking home especially if I found a pop bottle or two and could go cash them in and buy some candy at one of the corner stores that had a huge variety of penny candy. If we found a couple of nickel bottles we could get a Pepsi, Coke, RC, or Diet Rite cola. I liked the Diet Rite cola because it was 16 ounces for the same price. Remember, it is all about quantity. The grand daddy bottle was a Lawsons milk bottle that would bring twenty-five cents. I financed much of my childhood through collecting pop bottles or shoveling snow. One time we went Christmas caroling and got so much money, I felt guilty and never did it again.

I had a short stint with the cub scouts and the boy scouts. I remember making second class but I quit. My parents didn't get involved in my life so scouts just didn't work. The two areas where I excelled were running and ice skating. I made the track team in Junior High but pulled a muscle in practice so I never went back. I learned to ice skate on the pond, borrowing Billy Lyle's skates. He got me involved in competitive speed skating. I won several trophies including third in the Press Silver Skates, which was a state event. I would have finished first in our skating club for the year but I missed one week due to an accident. Once I hopped a train with Bud Rockwell. As the train began to gain speed this side of the bridge on our way to Uncle Bills, I said, "Bud, we better jump," and he said, "Wait 'till we get over the bridge." By the time we got over the bridge, the train was booking. Not wanting to end up in Toledo, I jumped backwards and tumbled on the rocks over and over. I was fortunate I didn't kill myself but I was skinned from head to foot. I

am sorry that I quit skating but once again my parents were not involved in my life and the next step for me would have been state competitions. That would have required more money than I could have ever acquired. I really thought I had the ability to make the Olympics. I knew one kid who made the Olympic trials and I always smoked him.

About the paper boy

I had two paper routes in my career. The first one was a neighborhood paper, the West Parker. I had to deliver what seemed like a million papers for a measly sum of two cents a paper - not too lucrative. I later got a Plain Dealer route on the other side of Kurton Ave. I would get up at 5:00 a.m., walk to get the papers and deliver them before school. Throwing them was not allowed. We had to walk up to the house and put them in the screen door. Once a week, we had to go from house to house and collect. I used to make about seven bucks a week. I wasted it on candy, movies, and banana splits for me and my friends. I also had a long career of helping other kids deliver their papers. I remember while delivering to one guy, my friend asked him, "Where's my tip?" The guy jokingly said "Stay out of the draft and you won't get cold. Buy low sell high." I still use these lines today. I had a teen age brother Barry. He belonged to a car club called the Norns. He was very artistic and did pin striping and painted monsters on the back of hot rods. I developed a love for hot rods that I have even to this day. He took me cruising a few times through Manor's Big Boy with his 50 dodge. It had no door handles, custom homemade tail lights, louvers, and triples, (three two barrel carburetors). I could tell you every car on the road and would sit at the corner of the street watching the cars go by, hoping to see one of the new models. This was big for me in the fifties and early sixties, especially the years of the fins. I always knew when the paper would come out with pictures of the new cars.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention my love for radio. I bought my first radio with some money a kid gave me. He had stolen it from his parents. I was a dumb kid I didn't have sense enough to know that I shouldn't have taken it. Anyway, it was a crystal radio with an ear piece for a speaker. It had an alligator clip that I would clip to something metal, usually my bed at night. My brother also had a great 45 record collection that he let me play with. Well, maybe he didn't *let* me. One day, I was jumping on his bed and he had a dart. Yes, it was one of those steel darts, and he told me to move but I didn't. The dart stuck me right between the eyes. It stuck like a dart is supposed to stick. It took a real hard pull to get it out. Obviously, I lived.

I was a pretty good kid. Looking back, I guess I had quite a bit more energy than most. Now don't get me wrong; I did a lot of things I am not proud of. Looking back, I did like so many do as I got into Junior High School. I shut off my brain and it didn't come back on until I turned 21. Today, however, the brain turning on age is more like 30. Music was always important to me. I always had a transistor radio with me. I also loved to go to concerts once I was old enough to drive. I pretty much know every song from the 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's. I can see where I am going to have to trim what was to be a brief biography. Sixty years at my pace could fill volumes. My first car was a 1957 Chevy. I have remained a Chevy man to this day. Not knowing what to do with my future and being raised in a blue collar mentality home I decided to go to trade school for high

