



## William C. Field

October 4, 1939 - June 28, 2020

\*\* Bill's service will be on Saturday, July 18 @ 2 PM and will be broadcast on the internet. Details to follow.

Bill Field, co-founder and proprietor of Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo, died on Sunday, June 28, 2020 of natural causes in his Los Angeles home at the age of 80.

William C. Field (Bill) was born on October 4, 1939 in Los Angeles to William Thomas Field and Gertrude Sara Hopkins, both employees of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

As an infant, Bill's love of music was apparent as he would often cry until his mother played music on the radio. Bill found his love and future avocation when he wandered through the Barker Bros. department store in downtown L.A. with his grandmother and was captivated by the sound of a pipe organ that serenaded browsing shoppers. Bill begged his parents to learn the pipe organ, which he began studying at the tender age of 8. Seeing his talent, potential and passion for the organ, Bill's mother bought him a Hammond Organ and encouraged his growth as an artist.

By the time he was 12, Bill was hired as the organist at the Los Angeles Theatre on South Broadway playing organ preludes and has never wandered far from the instrument.

Throughout his career, Bill played at many churches and venues throughout Southern California, including the Iceland ice skating rink, in Paramount. He also played the organ for J.B. Nethercutt, founder and owner of Merle Norman Cosmetics. In addition, Bill owned and operated a restaurant in El Segundo, Ca.

Bill and his business partner and friend Bill Coffman (the "two Bills") found their prized possession - a 1925 Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Pipe Organ - for sale at the long closed and derelict Fox West Coast Theater in Long Beach.

In 1958, the two Bills borrowed \$2,000 from a credit union to buy the instrument and installed it themselves within 2 years at Bill's home in South Los Angeles. Here, the men performed live concerts to adoring audiences on a weekly basis.

Needing a larger venue to house the organ and accommodate the growing crowds, the two Bills searched all over Los Angeles for a permanent home for their Wurlitzer. Finally, they located a worthy location in El Segundo in a boxy neighborhood building formerly known as the "State Theater" which originally opened in 1925 as a silent picture movie house. After its heyday, the building also served as a Baptist Church among other ventures.

The empty shell of the State Theater served as their blank canvas to create a place where audiences could experience the full spectacle of watching a movie during Hollywood's heyday in a grand movie palace that also featured live music. Here, the two Bills opened Old Town Music Hall in 1968, a one of a kind venue in sleepy El Segundo, a time warp and hidden gem waiting to be discovered by all who appreciate classic movies, music, and the powerful yet ephemeral sound of the theater pipe organ.

In addition to the installation of their prized Wurlitzer which now has over 2,000 pipes and 244 keys on 4 keyboards and various sounds, the two Bill's installed plush theater seats, ruby red carpets, majestic curtains, huge chandeliers, and framed the stage and movie screen in grand proscenium. Thousands of concerts and movies have entertained audiences ever since.

After Coffmans' death in 2001, Bill continued to improve the ambiance of the Old Town Music Hall with projects large and small; including painting and adorning the proscenium with golden floral ornaments, adding contrasting theatrical curtains that shimmered in the spotlight, hanging 4 huge evocative oil paintings along the theater walls, and fully covering the ceiling in antique tin tiles. The magic that is felt when first entering Old Town Music – often heard through 'wows' or audible gasps – is a testament to Bill's creative genius, bold vision, tenacity and moxie to 'make it happen' despite many challenges.

With Coffman gone, Bill carried on alone, presiding as host as well as house organist.

At the beginning of each show, Bill would make his way up to the organ and introduces the upcoming program. Then, turning his attention to the console of the Mighty Wurlitzer, the theater is darkened as the spotlight intensifies its focus on Bill. The curtains slowly open, almost teasingly, to reveal a glowing and eerily beautiful organ that springs to life under the orchestration of Bill, the Wizard of the Wurlitzer! The audience is treated to a musical

explosion and sing-along before intermission and the feature movie.

Bill played for every crowd as though it was his last performance, whether 2 or 200 were in the audience.

Bill had the rare ability to manifest his beautiful soul in his music. It was as though his music spoke to you personally and offered a soothing massage and escape from your worries, all you had to do was sit back and allow the music take you. Many described listening to Bill perform as a “religious experience” or as being hypnotized by the sound of the organ that engulfed them, touched their soul, and transported them to a different time and place; only roused to reality upon the end of the last note. It was not uncommon for some in the audience to be moved to tears by the purity and emotive power of Bill’s music or by long forgotten memories Bill’s music often aroused.

Bill was, and is, a legendary figure here in Southern California and a Master Showman, indeed!

Bill was the living embodiment of the starving artist, sometimes sacrificing his modest stipend in order to pay the theater bills and keep it going. However, if love given and love received was a currency, Bill would be a millionaire many times over! He generously gave gifts, bought meals, and threw parties for his many friends as though money was no object. Despite periodic financial challenges, Bill was always happy because he lived his passion for music, resulting in a meaningful and fulfilling life that anyone would envy, while simultaneously touching the hearts of so many. He loved people and people loved him more!

As his health declined, Bill navigated his way to the organ on a scooter but never failed to pull the audience under the spell of the Wurlitzer. In fact, Bill’s love affair with old movie theaters, silent film and the soaring power of the Mighty Wurlitzer was so infectious that he always had a group of die-hard fans and a stable of followers willing to do anything for him and the theater.

Bill ensured the survival of the Old Town Music Hall by taking under his wing and mentoring one of these followers, Edward Torres, who was a young 14 year-old aspiring theater organist when he first came to the theater.

Over the last two years, as Bill’s skills deteriorated, he increasingly relied on Edward (now 24) to play the shows at the Old Town Music Hall; effectively handing over the reins to Edward, a trusted and dedicated disciple of Bill’s passion and vision. With hard work and

dedication, Edward has become a great talent in his own right and has committed to continuing Bill's tradition by literally taking Bill's seat at the Mighty Wurlitzer and now serves as CEO of Old Town Music Hall.

In 2018, the Old Town Music Hall celebrated its 50th anniversary. With any luck, Edward will be playing for the theater's 100th anniversary, carrying on Bill's legacy for decades.

Because of Bill's passion, vision, dedication, sacrifice, and leadership, the Old Town Music Hall has become a cultural landmark and beloved Los Angeles institution. The two Bills created an experience that is truly unique that evokes a rare sense of childhood awe and amazement for the young and old, enjoyed and to be enjoyed by past, current, and future generations.

In addition to being the talented visionary proprietor of Old Town Music Hall, Bill will forever be known and remembered as the loving and generous 'grandpa' that many never had and adopted as their own, as the 'counselor' and confidant who helped so many through the most difficult times of their lives, the 'proud papa' and savior to many shelter cats of various colors and temperaments, the 'loyal friend' who was always up for a late night chat or an urban adventure on the Metro Rail, the 'L.A. historian' who shared his love for the city with his many friends, the 'comedian' with a joke (or song) for all occasions, and as the 'loving partner' who never forgot a special occasion always bearing gifts of chocolates and roses presented to his appreciative partner with tears of love and joy in his eyes. Bill gave from the heart.

On June 28, 2020; at the age of 80, Bill succumbed to prostate cancer and passed away peacefully at his home in South Los Angeles surrounded by loved ones. His last words were "I love you, I love you" whispered to his heartbroken partner. Though Bill is now undoubtedly among the angels in heaven and serenading them with beautiful music, he is greatly missed by all he left behind.

Thank you, Bill, for dedicating your life to preserving, showcasing and advocating appreciation for early 20th century American music, film, and the theater pipe organ. We promise you that in addition to the many young people you mentored in music and life throughout the years, the Old Town Music Hall will continue to thrive as your legacy and gift to the world.

You lived an impactful life that mattered!

Thank for your love, thank you for the movies and beautiful music, thank you for the many meals, thank you for your guidance and mentorship, thank you for the adventures, thank you for the memories! I love you too, Bill, I love you too.

Bill is survived by his longtime partner, Danny Tokusato, and sisters Diane Calavita and Joan Hoff. A funeral and service were held at Green Hills Memorial Park in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. Donations to the non-profit venue in Bill's memory may be made through the website: [www.OldTownMusicHall.org](http://www.OldTownMusicHall.org).

# Cemetery

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## **Green Hills Memorial Park**

27501 S. Western Ave.

Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, 90275

# Comments

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“ Beautiful Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of William C. Field.



July 16 at 06:35 PM

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“ Always enjoyed being with Bill at the ATOS conventions. A wonderful friend. He will be sorely missed.

Paul Maynard

Egan Maynard - July 13 at 05:47 PM

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“ Heaven is now a better place. RIP, Bill  
Thanks for the memories, and say hi to GW for me.



William L. Coale, Ph.D. - July 10 at 11:31 AM

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“ We will miss Bill, he and the "other" Bill gave so much happiness for so many years. He will be missed.

Mel Johnson - July 09 at 10:20 PM

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“ Cindy Croshaw lit a candle in memory of William C. Field





**Cindy Croshaw** - July 08 at 09:42 PM

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“ 2 files added to the album Bill and his love, Old Town Music Hall



**Mary Storm** - July 08 at 08:51 PM



“ We loved to sit in the second row so we could see Bill play the mighty Wurlitzer and watch the instruments make their magic.

**Mary Storm** - July 08 at 08:54 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Bill and his love, Old Town Music Hall



**Mary Storm** - July 08 at 06:55 PM



“ My late husband, Keith, and I loved attending the matinees with Bill playing the mighty organ. He will be greatly missed! Rest in Peace!

**Mary Storm** - July 08 at 06:58 PM

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“ I will always cherish the chats Bill and I had over the years at the Music Hall. We both enjoyed the antics of Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy and shared many tidbits and comments on their films. Godspeed Bill - you were an L. A. treasure...

Bob Duncan

**Bob Duncan** - July 08 at 03:20 PM



“ A gentleman. A visionary. You are missed.



Tracey - July 08 at 03:18 PM



“ 18 files added to the album Bill and his love, Old Town Music Hall



Sharon Zelman - July 05 at 05:18 PM



“ 16 files added to the tribute wall



Sandy Reed - July 03 at 10:11 PM



“ I have visited OTMH since 1968 with their premiere of their very first silent film program. Wayne and I, and all the members of the Jeanette MacDonald Int'l Fan Club always appreciated the fine showcases for Miss MacDonald's films that Bill Field would present each year. We also loved the variety of performers that Bill Field would present throughout the years. We will always keep Bill in our hearts and memories. Our condolences and prayers go out to Danny and all the workers and volunteers that helped Bill all these years.



LARRY STOUCH - July 03 at 03:34 PM

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“ So many wonderful memories of our friendship with Bill. Driving over to Costco to help him get food and drink for the theatre, being with Bill at a Latino open market, where he bought a leather jacket for Danny, and sharing a lot of laughter.

WAYNE LAWLESS - July 03 at 02:39 AM

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“ Members of the Appreciating Jeanette MacDonald Club visited the theater often when her movies were shown! This is a photo of Bill with some of the group.



Sandy Reed - July 02 at 05:02 PM



“ Dwayne, Larry, Sandy, Bill, and Jerry

Sandy - July 03 at 04:12 PM



“ That's Dayne,,, the phone changed it

Sandy - July 03 at 10:25 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



danny\_tokusato - July 01 at 06:00 PM