

# A Passionate Fellow

by Jon Caswell



*Bill and Carole Stark*

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**B**ill Stark, 69, has passion for several things. First is Carole, his wife of 45 years, and their two daughters, son-in-law and two grandchildren. He also loves golf and enjoys working with wood, having been a custom cabinet and furniture maker since retiring after 31 years in the Navy. Volunteering and helping others, whether repairing a house, teaching golf to kids or being a Mended Hearts visitor, is very important to him.

Bill’s CVD has affected his life in many ways. “I am more emotional than I was before,” he said. “I’m more aware of my body and think more about my own mortality. I have developed considerable sensitivity in my left chest, which has many weird psychological and physical effects. Without medicine, A-fib would be present.”

Bill rushes through those consequences to focus on the positive. “The good news is that I am very active and do a lot of things without physical restrictions,” he said. “The real challenge is to take whatever you have been given and live the very best life you can, no matter what the circumstances.”

One of the ways Bill lives his very best is by trying to maintain his two-handicap by playing golf a couple times a week. Two years ago, in what he described as “an out-of-body experience,” he shot a 67, one stroke better than his age. “Since then, the golfing god hasn’t been as benevolent,” he said dryly.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Bill Stark (I) with his brothers Steve and Bob at their father Stan's 100th birthday; Bill's daughters Cindy (I) and Stacy; Bill with his father in the summer of 2008 taking a ceremonial shot from the #1 tee.

But Bill's golf stories don't stop there. In 1980 Bill went to a new Navy golf course and joined a group of guys getting ready to play. One of the men was Tiger Woods' father, Earl. As a result of that game, Bill played golf with both Earl and Tiger for many years and was honored to deliver one of the eulogies at Earl's funeral. Bill's daughter Stacy has worked at the Tiger Woods Foundation almost since its inception.

"Golf has introduced me to many wonderful people wherever we have been," he said. In a way to give back to the game, Bill has taught golf fundamentals to elementary school kids for several years.

Woodworking is another hobby Bill started while in the Navy. "I made a desk out of a door and a piece of Formica. We ended up fixing up several houses as we moved around the country to wherever I was stationed," he said. Bill has built beds, desks, offices and entertainment centers of furniture quality. "I enjoy woodworking. It allows creativity, helps others and is fun, as long as I don't get my thumb too close to the saw blade!"

Bill and Carole enjoy spending time with their family. They retired in Washington, D.C. in 1993, but moved to California when their first granddaughter was born there in 1995. Since then they have loved living in the desert in La Quinta near Palm Springs, close to their children and friends.

Although he is long retired, Bill remains proud of his military service. "I was honored and privileged to serve our country in the Navy. I feel even more privileged when I meet WWII, Korean and Vietnam veterans. I meet many of these people through MHI. Many have had amazing experiences, losing friends or being wounded. Every day I thank them for their service."

Bill credits his father as the biggest influence in his life. His guidance was both soft and firm ... the latter when he caught an 11-year-old Bill smoking. "His honesty and integrity can't be topped," Bill said. "At age 93, he had single bypass surgery and two years ago he married an 80-year-old woman. He was 101-years-old this Thanksgiving!"

After learning about MHI at cardiac rehab, Bill and Carole attended their first MHI chapter meeting in 2003, a few months after Bill's triple bypass surgery. "I liked what was going on, and I soon became a visitor," he said. "I think visiting is one of the key things MHI does, whether

it's for a patient or family member, or done as a phone call or a meeting. We currently have 12 accredited visitors in our chapter and they do a terrific job. The visitors I had answered all my questions about medicines, reactions to those medicines and provided me the necessary discipline to exercise. I feel cardiac rehab is essential in the path to recovery, and I still go there on my own."

When the chapter treasurer wanted to be relieved, Bill volunteered. Three years ago he was asked to take on the presidency. (In July, he was also elected president of the board of directors of the Coachella Valley American Heart Association.) "What MHI does is very important. The reward I receive is helping patients and their families, giving them hope and encouragement because we have been there and done that," he said.

"Having a heart issue is not simple for the patient or family. Our visits help educate them. You are a comforter and become a friend. I treasure participating in MHI because we help people get through a very emotional period by providing insight from a patient's perspective. Besides, what I've observed is that the people who really get involved have a lot of fun.

"Whatever plaudits I may receive must be equally shared by my family and the many wonderful people in Chapter 281.

"I have not had a perfect time these past seven years due to medicines, A-fib and chest sensitivity. However, I think the Good Lord gave me some of these issues so that I could better relate to others having heart disease. My wife, family and friends have provided much encouragement, and we are living the best we can every day. I have a great cardiologist and enjoy terrific support from our cardiac rehab center. Everyone needs to be diligent in managing their own health care. Understand what medicine, vitamin and/or herbal regimen you are on. Provide that data to all your doctors. Question what those meds are doing and ask to change them and seek alternatives if they don't agree with you. Learn about alternative approaches to healthy living. Don't be a couch potato. Be happy that your valve job, pipe job, stent or ticker enhancer can give you many more years of a happy and productive life. I also think that we need to assist in fostering ways to prevent heart disease. Our chapter meetings and speakers help, but we Americans need to do this on a national scale." ❤️