

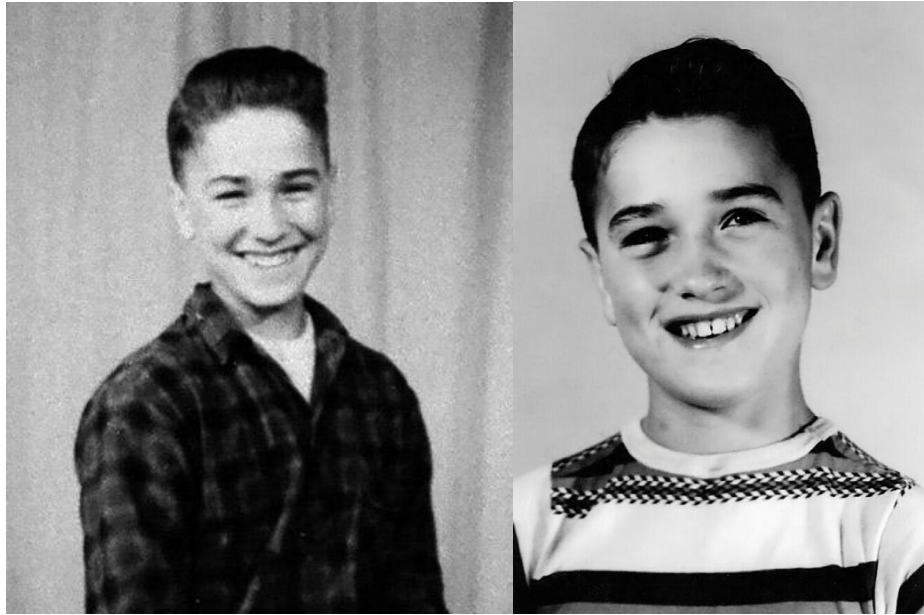
William Lawrence Davidson - 1947 - 2003

A Tribute

I have always felt that the Wood's Christian Home, where Bill and I spent a good part of our childhood lives, was an island, isolated from the rest of the world and beyond it, Westward, there was forest, prairie and the foothills pulling one towards the glittering peaks of the Rockies. Pulling one away, I thought, from people and painful things. Both Bill and I were drawn to those mountains, went beyond to the West and in Bill's case as far as he could go, out to the wild coast. He wanted to be alone it seemed and to meet great challenges. I always imagined I would climb great mountains. Bill did and in pioneering, epic style. I engaged all my life in artistic dabbling, Bill made art and made a living of sorts from it. Bill had many friends and admirers. Both of us courted death, his by conscious courageous choice and mine otherwise. In the end, that dark companion took him in an instant, whereas I just missed on many occasion. Given our childhood experience, I regard my triumph as one of mere survival. I will very likely get old. Bill by contrast lived heroically and on the extreme. His was a life. He died, near as far west as one can go, at the onset of winter in 2003. He left to mourn him the mother of his son (named, poetically, after a fair wind) and also very many who loved the man and even more who admire all that he accomplished - the way he lived his life. Frankie Dwyer (as Billy would have known me during our time in care)

His life:

Bill came into the Wood's Christian Home in 1953. He was six years old. He arrived with a brother and two sisters. His youngest sister was adopted and moved away soon after their arrival. The other sister and his brother stayed with him. Bill left the home in 1964, when he would have been sixteen. That was around the time when the notorious Engelke was upper boy's supervisor. Bill was one of the witnesses at trial. There are many references to Bill in the Grad, the school yearbook. I will see if I can hunt some of those up and add here later. Bill looked like this while he was at the home.



After leaving the home, Bill got involved with the Calgary, Alberta mountain climbing community. Here is an account from the Alberta Sports History Library, Mountaineering and Climbing timeline 1970-79 as to the impact he had: "Calgarian Billy Davidson astounds climbers in the Yosemite Valley by making an early ascent of North America Wall on El Capitan in 1970. Over the next four years, Davidson brings extreme aid climbing to the Rockies, creating such routes as *CMC Wall* (1972) and *Yellow Edge* (1974) on Yamnuska, *Iron Suspenders* on Wakonda Buttress (1971), and the north face of Gibraltar Mountain (1971)." Recently, Pat Morrow, (...the first person to climb the seven highest summits on the world's seven continents in 1986) said this about Bill, "I was seventeen when I first met Billy, in the bar at the Empress hotel where the Calgary Mountaineering Club hung out. I never did get to climb with him, but enjoyed his stories in the pub and admired his fearless approach to what amounted to the hardest test pieces of the day, done in an understated manner befitting a member of the CMC." Pat kindly provided this photo of Billy, on an approach to the Yamnuska wall and wearing his homemade packsack:



Here is another, which portrays Billy - on the right - engaged in the rescue of an injured climber:



How Bill came to the West Coast and what motivated him to take up kayaking is not known to me. He became a legendary figure out of Bella Bella - where he spent most summers in his shack. He took to painting as a means to finance his lifestyle. He was an 'outside' artist, talented but painted on various scraps of wood panel and such in a 'West coast' style that has unique, dramatic aspects. He never became as studio artist or, that I can find, painted on canvas or larger scale. The Eckness gallery holds much of his surviving work. The website is < <https://theeknesscollection.weebly.com/kayak-bill-davidson.html> >

Bill spent two months of the summer living in his shack (picture inserted later, courtesy of and with permission from Pat Morrow) painting to raise money for food and oolican oil. Much of the rest of the year he roamed the outer coast in his distinctive ocean kayak named Ayak. One account says he wintered at Sointula on Malcolm Island. While voyaging, he lived a subsistence lifestyle, mostly off the sea and had various rudimentary camps. His voyages and skills were reputed to be epic and are much admired in the ocean kayaking community. Much can be gleaned from various Blogs and mentions of Kayak Bill in trip accounts by kayakers. Here are some:

Looking for Kayak Bill - by Neil Frazer < <https://3meterswell.blogspot.com/2017/11/looking-for-kayak-bill-by-neil-frazer.html> >

Kayak Bill Camps < <http://westcoastpaddler.com/community/threads/kayak-bill-camps.8051/> >

Another < <http://mynewfoundlandkayakexperience.blogspot.com/2010/02/kayak-bill.html> >

A requiem < <https://3meterswell.blogspot.com/2017/12/kayak-bill-requiem.html> >

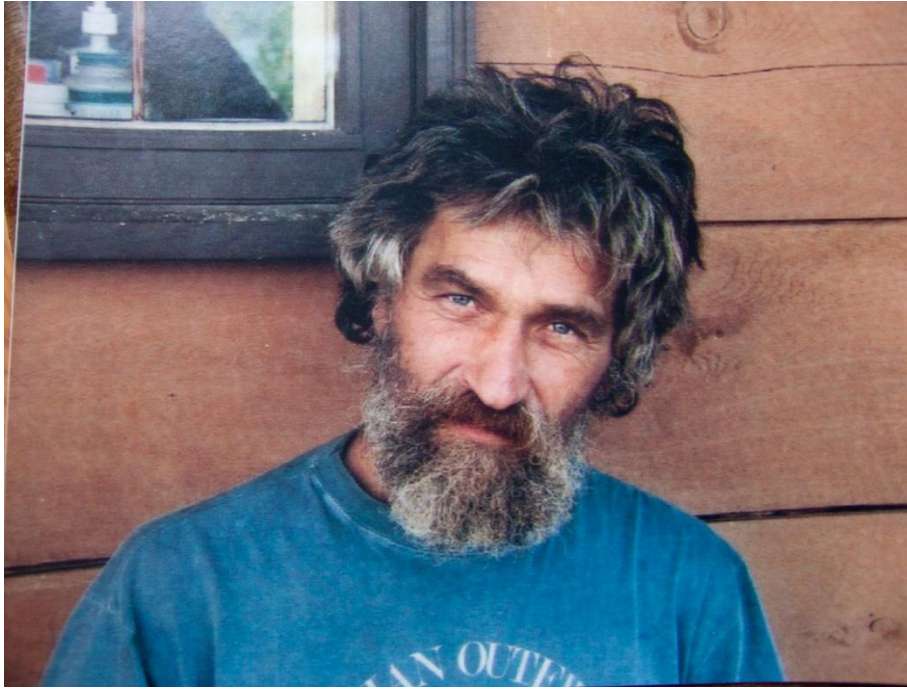
Here are photographs of Billy's shack at Bella Bella:



In 2004, Billy's ashes were scattered at Donegal Head at the East end of Malcolm Island. (Donegal head, according to mariner's advice) is "cliffy, with a beach, strong tidal currents and is frequented by killer whale pods." Put that image in your mind. Perhaps you might glimpse something through the lifting fog.

Something going away, a large kayak, set low in the water, the lone occupant, paddling strongly, and heading westward.

Here is a portrait of Billy as he looked during his years on the coast.



Finis