

PROFILE: BENTZ PLAGEMANN

Bentz "Bill" Plagemann was an established novelist and a contributor of many short stories to *Harper's*, *McCall's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Ladies Home Journal* when he, his wife, Kitty, and young stepson, Brent, moved into the old grey house on Rte. 9W in 1949. Today, thirty-six years later, Bill can't imagine living anywhere else.

Bill was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. He is proud of his pioneer heritage and speaks with great pride about the sod house of his maternal great-grandparents in Madison, Wisconsin and the log house in which his paternal great-grandparents lived in the wilderness of Ohio.

Growing up on an isolated farm, Bill read to entertain himself. When he entered high school, he found he had already completed the reading requirements for all four years. At age fourteen, he decided to become a writer and began sending off his short stories; but he had to wait another fourteen years before his first story was accepted by *Story Magazine*. During those lean years Bill worked in bookstores in Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and at Brentano's in New York.

World War II interrupted his career, and he joined the Navy. Bill said he felt sorry for the men he met who did not know what to do with their lives because he knew he could write. Assigned to a hospital ship in North Africa as First Petty Officer, he was the only man to go ashore, arranging for medical supplies for the wounded, where--in one of those twists of fate--he developed polio. He was first flown to Naples for treatment and then to Warm Springs, Arkansas. His experiences in the navy and with polio are recounted in his books, *The Steel Cocoon* and *My Place to Stand*.

Bill's writing continued to flourish; he laughingly admits to writing about 35 love stories. One of his first novels, *All For The Best*, which he describes as a contemporary version of *Candide*, was received with critical acclaim.

While on a trip home to Cleveland, he met his future wife, Kitty, who was visiting from New York with her young son. Bill was invited to teach a course on short story writing at New York University. He said it was an offer he couldn't refuse because he could continue his courtship of Kitty at the same time.

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When they moved here, Palisades could truly be called a hamlet. Bill became actively involved with the library and the Presbyterian Church. He described his experiences in our small town in a series of short stories for *McCall's*, which were later published in the book, *This Happy Place*.

Those were the days when there were so few children around to play with young Brent, when Mr. Soutar taught one combined class for the 1st to 3rd graders, and hot lunches were served by the mothers in the old schoolhouse across the street. There were not enough boys to make up a baseball team; they allowed the girls to play but were too embarrassed to play other schools for fear they would be found out. The Little League was thought to be somehow connected with the United Nations! When Palisades started to grow with new houses being built, Bill says things changed for the better. More people meant more involvement in community affairs, more money to get things done, more children for Brent, and a resident minister for the Presbyterian Church.

Bill began writing a series about the Wallace family, starting with *This Is Goggle*, based on life with his stepson and wife. He says he had one brush with the theatrical world when Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory wanted to produce a play about Goggle. Bill recalls that it was a disaster from beginning to end. Although the play did open in Princeton and Washington, D. C., it never made it to Broadway.

Bill now lives in a delightful one-story house close to his old home. He, Kitty, and Wally Heath designed it to make his life easier and more comfortable as he spent more time in a wheelchair. His beloved Kitty died nine years ago, and Bill has since found it more difficult to publish. He is still writing, however, on subjects that intrigue him and about episodes in his life. I would love to see them published, for Bentz Plagemann is a wonderful storyteller and social commentator.

Many of his books are in the Palisades Library and the Tappan Library, including *This Happy Place* and *This Is Goggle*. Unfortunately, some are now out of print. If you have not yet had the pleasure of reading them, I recommend that you do. You will have an enjoyable time.

KAREN JEFFERIES