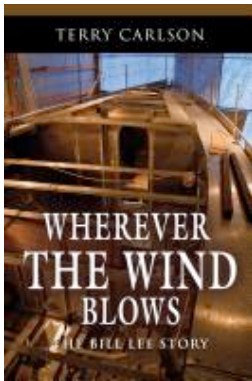




TERRY CARLSON

WHEREVER
THE WIND
BLOWS

THE BILL LEE STORY



Author Terry Carlson's friend seemed to have it all: successful entrepreneur, great family, respect in the community, and good health. He was a man's man, gifted with the ability to use his own two hands to build anything he envisioned. While building a 60-foot aluminum sailboat, Bill Lee was diagnosed with colon cancer. God was about to lead both Bill and Terry on a quest to discover something with which no worldly success can compare - grace.

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INTRODUCTION

EARLY SEPTEMBER 2010

Bill turned on his digital tape recorder. He didn't have a problem understanding his oncologist. As a matter of fact, in Texas they would call this doctor a "straight shooter". Bill wanted to record his conversations so later, after today's chemotherapy treatment, he wouldn't have to rely on his beleaguered brain to remember what was said. As his doctor turned away from the computer screen, Bill continued to concentrate on the gray and white image of his torso.

"Well, the CAT scan is looking good. It's moving in the right direction as we were hoping. From looking at the report, things are shrinking and that's what we wanted to see."

Bill nodded and scooted up in his chair.

"The disease is smaller and there are no new findings that it is spreading. With the type of disease you have, things can pop up rather quickly somewhere else. The liver doesn't show anything new. The size of that one lesion has decreased and now measures 1.211 centimeters in size and before measured about 2 centimeters in size."

"Okay," Bill said while nodding once more.

"This soft tissue mass that was pushing on the ureters has decreased, so there is no compression on them and the flow is open again. The nodules you have on the peritoneum have also decreased in size and there are no new ones. So this is pretty good news for only five rounds of treatment."

Bill leaned even closer. "How many more treatments will I need?"

"I want you to get more exposure to this chemo because it is working, so that means the more exposure, the more shrinkage. Eventually this treatment will reach a plateau where things will not

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shrink any further. So one could argue that once the chemo has reached its maximum effectiveness, then that would be the best time for surgery. At the same time, we don't want to drag this too far out and miss the opportunity for the operation. Are you due for the whole chemo treatment today?

Bill smiled slightly and ran his fingers through his thinning hair. "Yeah, full meal deal today."

CHAPTER ONE
FROM FIRED TO FIRED UP
Terry

It's early December, 2010. I'm relieved in one sense but anger and frustration sting my eyes as I squeeze into my Honda Civic. While leaving my employer's parking lot for the last time, my mind is reeling. What has happened over the past two years?

Today, ADT Home Security laid me off—well, actually I was fired for not meeting minimum sales goals for the third month in a row, but “laid off” sounds less condemning. Three short years ago I received the company's coveted Centurion Club Award for exceeding my personal sales goals for the year at 115% to plan. I enjoyed an all expenses paid trip to Los Vegas then; now it was a pink slip and a trip to the unemployment line. Of course I saw it coming; how could I not. Too many good sales people had either quit or been fired over the past several years.

I loved my job when I began working for ADT in 2005. Since 1984 my career had consisted of selling sweets to my customers, from M&M's and Snickers, to Twinkies and Ding Dongs. Over the years, I badgered my dentist to give me a break on my bill for all the business I was sending his way. Now, I could help people stay safe instead of helping them get cavities.

Everything changed with the beginning of the “Great Recession” in 2008. The job I loved turned into a nightmare of micro-management and negativity. From attending one mandatory meeting and calling in to one conference call a week, all salesmen now had to attend meetings three to four times a week along with two to three weekly conference calls. I wore out the speed dial function on my cell phone while keeping my

sales manager informed of my activities throughout the day. Cold calling activities were always mandatory; now they became an obsession. Fifty phone calls a day, seventy-five mailers a week, knock on doors of at least six to eight neighbors after every sales appointment. Oh, by the way, if you didn't sell three self-generated leads in a month you wouldn't receive telemarketing appointments until you did.

Salesmen and women were dropping like flies. I took a few months off to deal with depression brought on by the constant pressure to perform. Then came the three month period without a single self-generated lead and I was fired.

As I mentioned earlier, I was relieved in a sense. The huge burden of intense expectations were lifted off my back but with being fired came self-loathing. In my wildest dreams I never thought I would be fired from a job. Previously, I lost jobs from lack of work, companies going out of business, and injury. Never did an employer tell me I had failed at my job.

Throughout my school years, I was the boy who excelled: seventh and eighth grade American Legion Boy-of-the Year Award winner; Stanwood High School Torch Honor member; varsity basketball player on a district championship team and graduated 16th academically out of one hundred eighteen students. Those are just a few of the brownie points I earned from my youth. After high school I had high expectations for myself.

As my Honda merged north onto I-405, I spent the next fifty minutes criticizing myself for not finishing my college education, for not finding another job before getting fired, and for not spending enough time with God. I even found time to blame this whole mess on being overweight (your mind can find creative ways to condemn yourself). I did such a good job of beating myself up, I was emotionally battered and bruised by the time I walked through the front door of my home.

Most of my friends had successful careers, so why couldn't I? My wife, Karen, was quick to remind me that my career was only one small part of who I am as a person. She told me to reflect on our children. My two daughters, Katie and Jaymi, are both happily married to Godly men who have committed their lives in service to Christ. My son Michael is

also happily married and close to finishing his Masters of Divinity degree at Fuller University in Phoenix. Karen also reminded me that as a grandpa, she is watching me show the same love and positive affirmation toward our grandchildren as I had done with our children.

As much as I appreciated and agreed with what my wife said, I still ached inside. In my mind I failed her in one of the most important roles as a husband—to provide for her. I had become a squirrel without acorns; a shark without teeth; a honeybee without honey. The bleakness of the approaching winter fell heavy on my shoulders, so I reacted like any bear does during winter. For self-preservation I drifted into hibernation, eating and sleeping the cold days away. I awoke long enough to celebrate Christmas and New Years Eve with family and friends but after taking down the Christmas tree on January 1st, I crawled back into my cave.

To help me get out of my funk, Karen suggested we reconnect with some old friends. She invited Bill and Lauri Lee over for dinner. In July, Bill had been in remission from colon cancer, only to have his sleeping monster awaken. While we would see them at church, Karen and I hadn't spent an evening together with them for years.

We originally met them on their first visit to Camano Chapel, our church home. The church leadership, at that time, was emphasizing the need for our congregation to welcome newcomers after each service. One Sunday as Karen and I stood to leave the morning service, we noticed an unfamiliar family seated a few rows behind us. The ruggedly built man wore a thick beard on his broad face. His wife had kind eyes and a friendly smile. We introduced ourselves to Bill and Lauri. From then on we found them after each service to offer friendship and support as they adjusted to their new church home. Their three boys were around the same ages as our children and soon we became close friends.

We grew so close, our children almost became interchangeable. Let me explain: One Sunday after the 8:30 morning service, Karen began what turned out to be a lengthy conversation with Bill and Lauri. I'm a huge Seattle Seahawks fan and the team played an early football game on T.V. that morning starting at 10am. It was now 9:45 and Karen showed no sign of ending the talkfest with the Lees. Bill wasn't a Seahawk fan so he wasn't in any particular hurry to leave either.

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It takes exactly twenty minutes to drive from the Chapel to our home, so even if we left that second, which would have been a miracle, I would still miss the opening kickoff. Now I'm not an anti-social person, but precious seconds were passing and Karen could call them later and pick up right where they had left off. I was searching for any opportunity to interrupt their little powwow.

Our son Michael, and their son Daniel, were becoming good buds. I warned Karen, that by this time, Michael and Daniel had probably tied up their Sunday school teacher with jump ropes and were filling their faces with animal crackers and apple juice confiscated from the snack cabinet. I volunteered to run over, grab our little munchkin, and meet her and our girls at our car. So I nonchalantly excused myself and sprinted over to his classroom, snatched our towheaded toddler, and briskly exited the education building toward the parking lot.

While dragging my son behind me, I was silently congratulating myself when a little voice called up to me. "Where are we going?"

I glanced down and realized I was leading Daniel to our car instead of Michael. I scooped him up and rushed back into the classroom. I found Lauri and Bill questioning the Sunday school teacher of their son's whereabouts. This wasn't my proudest moment but our friendship survived.

After a period of time, Karen and I began a couples Bible study with some friends from Camano Chapel which included Lauri and Bill. Our group stayed together for five years. Eventually, taking children to and from football, basketball, soccer, and baseball functions put a strain on everyone's free time. So did band concerts, teacher/parent conferences, Campus Life, Awana, Cub Scouts, new babies, and the plague of frogs—uh, I mean the plague of fatigue. Couples began dropping out faster than double elimination night on *Dancing With The Stars*.

Then Bill started his own business, which demanded more of his time, and they reluctantly left the group. When the Lees dropped out, the group disbanded and we slowly lost touch with Bill and Lauri. Some wise guy once said, "All good things must come to and end," which sounds like something King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes on one of his more cheerful days.

So we reconnected with Lauri and Bill in early January 2011 as a way of luring this hibernating bear out of his den. That evening with old friends not only woke me up but sparked an excitement inside of me I hadn't felt for a long time.

After dinner I asked Bill to give me an update on his battle with colon cancer. I didn't have any expectations on where this conversation would go. Maybe he would tell me how miserable he felt from months of chemotherapy treatments. Maybe he would talk about the remorse he felt for not getting a colonoscopy years earlier when the cancer would have been easier to treat. Surely he would share how he was struggling to make sense of this while trying to trust God to heal him. If I had cancer, that's how I would respond to my own question.

What he actually said blew me away. It was remarkable. He shared story after story about how God was revealing himself to Bill, mostly through his ten year journey of building a sixty foot aluminum sailboat in a shop he erected behind his home. Bill is every bit a "man's man" in every sense of the word, but what makes him unique is his ability to "tell it like it is" in a very simple, often humorous way.

He did share how awful chemo is. He did regret not getting a colonoscopy earlier and he did struggle at times trusting God through the pain and uncertainty that cancer brings. With every candid truth shared about his war with cancer, came a breathtaking revelation: God was using Bill in his weakened condition far more than ever before.

Sleep was tardy that night. While my body was motionless, my mind was more active than a plugged tummy on Ex-Lax. Bill was an excellent storyteller. Each "God story" he told was like hearing a Bible story read, only the main character wasn't over 2,000 years old from a far-away land; Bill was a friend who lived fifteen minutes away on Camano Island.

I awoke exhausted but still excited. Bill said he had many more stories to share with me sometime. I didn't want to wait until "sometime"; I wanted to hear them now. He had shared powerful, faith building events in his life and hearing them stretched *my* faith muscle.

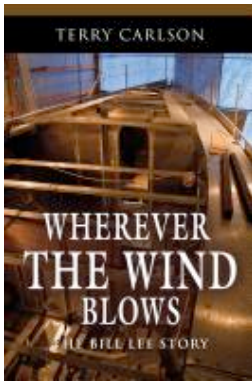
As I drove to work it became apparent to me that Bill had to share these stories with others. More people needed the opportunity to experience the renewed enthusiasm of seeing this living God actively

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engaged in our lives. I casually mentioned to him the night before that he should right down his stories. "What on earth for?" was his reply, so I didn't push it further. For the rest of the day though, I stewed over how to approach Bill with the idea of having me write down his stories. That night my mind was a cage. Inside that cage was a pesky rodent, high on caffeine, racing around on his hamster wheel.

I awoke tired again. Either I needed to call Bill today or buy sleeping pills. Would he think I was being pushy, or nosey, or prideful, or insensitive? (You can see I worry way too much about what other people think of me.) After procrastinating for most of the day, I finally worked up the nerve to call him. I told him how powerful his stories were and they needed to be preserved, even if only for his family to pass down from one generation to another.

I was amazed at Bill's response. For months, he felt God telling him to write down his stories. Because of the novel I had recently published, he considered asking me to help. He hesitated though because he didn't understand why anyone would want to read his stories. He also didn't want to burden me with a project which could take up too much of my time and might not lead to anything more than wasting a lot of ink and paper. After receiving my phone call though, he now believed this was another way God was guiding his path, so he agreed we should meet and record his "God stories"



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