

Bill Kotyk, Pipe Collector and Friend

By

John P. Seiler

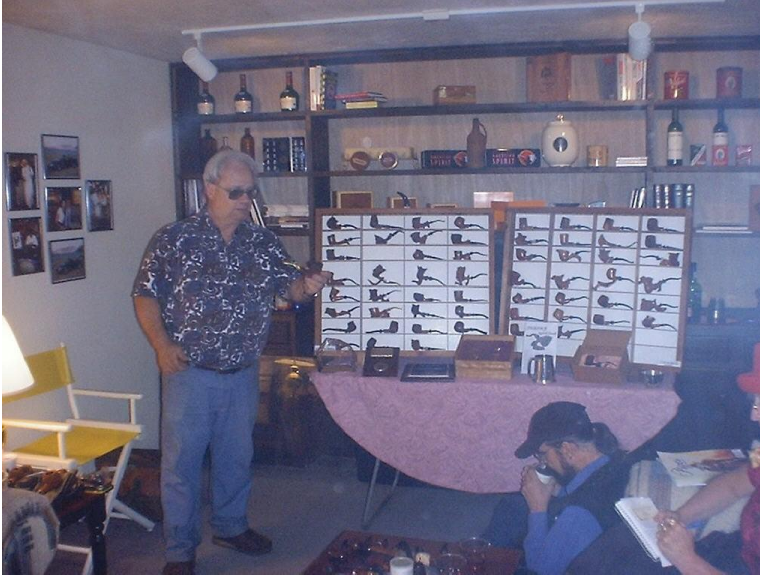
My dear friend, William D. (Bill) Kotyk passed suddenly and peacefully on Wednesday January 23, 2019, at the age of 79 in Washington Hospital. Bill was a stalwart of the pipe collecting/pipe smoking community. He attended many pipe collecting shows in the U.S., starting in the late 1980s. In his every-day life, he was a retired school teacher. He graduated from Ball State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in industrial arts. He taught at the junior-senior high school level courses primarily in shop, but also taught economics and history for twenty-five years. He had served his country with a tour of duty in the U.S. Coast Guard.



Resting before the Chicago Show

I first met Bill in the late 1990s at the North American Society of Pipe Collectors (NASPC) show in Columbus, Ohio. He was the short guy in the red shirt running all over the place. I soon found out that he only lived about twenty minutes from me. Pete Martin and I had co-founded a pipe club months earlier at a pipe shop in Washington, PA. We asked Bill to join this small club. The first meeting he attended, he brought his fantastic collection of Micoli pipes to show to those in attendance. We knew we had found a treasure. When the pipe shop closed, the Washington County (PA) Pipe Collectors started meeting at his home on a monthly basis and continued to do so for another eighteen years. Bill took pride in the fact that, to the best of his knowledge, we were the only pipe club to have a “layaway plan”. If you wanted a pipe from him, it went on the mantle piece and you paid it off in installments. Once it was paid off, it was yours. You would often see, at the end of a pipe show, Bill running around to all of his exhibitor

friends to request the remaining samples of open tins of pipe tobacco just to bring back to his club members to try. He enjoyed passing on pipe smoking methodology, tobacco blends, pipes, pipe literature and his vast knowledge to new pipe smokers. When Bill spoke, people listened.



Bill at our first local meeting

Bill also knew many of the vendors and pipe carvers in the pipe collecting community. He often made arrangements with them to obtain special edition pipes for the club members. He had a deep and enduring friendship with Jay and Louise Jones of Hermit Tobacco, Steve Monjure of Monjure International, the Tarler family who founded C&D tobacco, and Sam Learned, Ian Walker, Thomas James Richards and Steve Weiner who were/are noted pipe carvers. I know that I will miss mentioning many of his friends and I apologize for it.

What can you say about his award winning collection of Micoli pipes? His pipe collection was just fantastic, and one of a kind. Bill was known by many as “Mr Micoli”. His pipe collection consisted of about 15% of the total output of the pipe carver, Mick Burns. Photographs of his collection can be found on pipedia: <https://pipedia.org/wiki/Micoli> . This collection took awards at the CORPS, Washington DC, Chicago, and other pipe shows during the time period in which he displayed the collection.



The Micoli Collection

Besides locally being active in the Washington County (PA) Pipe Collectors, he was an early member of the Pittsburgh Pipe Club. On the second Saturday of the month, he often drove over 50 miles to pick up his friends Fuzzy and Homer to attend the meeting at Allegheny Smokeworks in BlawKnox, PA so that he and his friends could be there just to sit, smoke pipes, chew the fat, and share his immense knowledge of the hobby.

I would have to say that Bill was my best friend for the past twenty years. We had many mutual interests outside pipes and collectors such as collecting ephemera on Sherlock Holmes and JRR Tolkien. When I traveled for work and had the opportunity to visit book shops, I would often call him to see if he had the ‘great find’ that I made. If not, I would purchase it for him. Likewise, he did the same. When I wrote the “Emperor Leopaldo” saga of pipe short stories (https://pipedia.org/wiki/John_Seiler) he read each story before it was finished and offered his opinion and suggestions. You may even find mention of him in one of the stories. For the past five years, like clockwork, each Wednesday night, Bill would come over to my house in the evening and we would sit and smoke several pipes, talk about every topic imaginable, and watch a movie or listen to a pipe podcast (Yes, Brian Levine, we did listen to your pipes radio show and Bill thoroughly enjoyed your interviews with Alan Schwartz and Mary and Mike McNiel). Although we were at different locations on the political spectrum, we had many interesting discussions and it never affected our friendship.

We had many interesting adventures together when traveling to and from pipe shows. One trip of interest was on a return from the CORPS show where Russ Oulette gave him a sample of some “steamroller” pipe tobacco. During our trip home he lit up a bowl and got sick. I can still see images of me driving with him with his head out the window being sick. On my first trip with him to the Chicago Show, he made me listen to eight hours of Rush, such a torture. Then there was the Chicago trip that cost us a tow, a new

battery, and a new alternator for his van. Bill was a fixture at the Chicago show always having three tables along the back wall.



Me, Louise Jones, and Bill Kotyk

Unloading and setting up at a pipe show with Bill was always a challenge. We would start setting up and off he went talking with one of his friends, or looking over the “merch” at other tables. It was rare that he was ever totally setup when the doors opened to the public. “And teardown”, don’t even ask about that.

Bill was the most laid back person I ever knew. He never had a bad word to say about anyone and he would give you the shirt off his back – well maybe not that specific one which was probably red, but another shirt. As such, I was often frustrated by his seeming not to care about time-sensitive things and his lack of taking topics seriously.

Bill had his share of high end S.Bang, Teddy “Eagle”, Shabbi, Michael Parks, and pipes made by other highly respected pipe carvers and companies. However, lately he highly esteemed and smoked regularly pipes made by Ian Walker (Northern Briars), Thomas James Richards (Thomas James Pipes), and the Rinaldo Brothers (Thanks Steve Monjure). Generally, he liked large sized pipes, Dunhill Group 6 or larger, or Rinaldo “Megas” sized pipes. With respect to his selection of pipe tobacco, he appreciated McCranie’s Red Ribbon as his favorite Virginia tobacco and was fond of making a special blend with Virginia and McConnel’s Original Oriental. He had found that after his Cancer surgery (about 17 years ago) he could not take any English blends or those with latakia.

So how do I conclude this missive? We had a pipe smoker in our club, Fr. John Karwin who passed a number of years ago. Fr. John had kept a notebook in which he had recorded his findings on each type of pipe tobacco he smoked during his lifetime. When we saw it there were over 2,000 entries. I have an image that in a heaven-located pipe shop, Bill, Jay Jones, and Fr. John sitting around a table discussing pipes, pipe tobacco,

and other ephemera. There is an empty seat at the table, and I hope that some day it will be for me. –“Wish You Were Here”, Pink Floyd ‘Other Side of the Moon’