A reflection Bill wrote about Fr. Bill

In Daddy's obituary, we said that Daddy was an eloquent preacher, an independent thinker, a passionate idealist, and a loving father. What we left out was that he was an ardent do-it-yourselfer.

Whether I inherited a "DIY" gene or got the bug through repeated exposure, the fact is that I am similarly gifted, or afflicted, depending on who you ask and when you ask. Growing up I stuck to Daddy like glue, and anytime he took out tools, I was there to help.

One thing that every DIY person knows is that all projects get evaluated by the population they serve.

For example, Daddy and I have each heard, "Oh Bill, I'm SO RELIEVED you could change that tire." Or "Thank Heavens you knew which breaker to flip." Conversely, you sometimes hear: "can't we just PAY somebody to do something once-in-a-while?"

DIY projects can bring unforeseen outcomes. Take for example the 5-gallon batches of root beer we made at the rectory when I was a child. The process was: sterilize bottles, mix the ingredients in a big crock, bottle the root beer and cap it tightly, and let it sit for a week to ferment. The first time we did it, Daddy said, "this will be great – we'll make the batch before we go camping for a week, and when we get back the root beer will be ready." What could go wrong?

We sterilized 5 gallons of coke bottles (that's a lot of bottles), and followed the process. Then came the question, where do you store 5 gallons of bottles? Daddy's study was lined with book shelves, and the top shelves were mostly empty because you needed a ladder to get up there. Daddy said we could store the bottles on their sides, all around the room near the ceiling. No problem, right?

We got back from the camping trip, and everything had happened according to plan. The fermentation had occurred, the bottles were pressurized…like really pressurized…to the point that several bottle necks had broken! Root beer bottle necks were in the middle of the study, the floor was covered with broken glass and sticky root beer, and root beer had cascaded down the spines of the books to the floor below!

Still, some bottles had survived. There is no root beer better than the root beer you made yourself. Success!

On some DIY projects, you get convinced that your solution is so good…so bullet-proof, that you don't even need to consider possible consequences. Like the time we got a new refrigerator – the first one with a built-in ice maker – and Daddy and I had to run a water pipe to it. We cut the water off to the house, drained the line, and prepared to solder in the icemaker tap. Problem was, the cut we made existing pipe was at the lowest point in the house, and no matter what we did, we couldn't stop the water from dripping into the joints, cooling the solder too quickly and leaving us with leaks. "AHA!"…Daddy said…"Uncle Ray

told me about a fix for this just the other day, from a Popular Mechanics article…stuff bread into the pipe in each direction, and it will act as a dam until we get the solder joint made. Then, when we turn on the water, the bread will be flushed out of the pipe." "PERFECT!" I said…and it worked. The solder joint held the pressure, and we ready to put the tools away and declare victory.

The problem was, the bread crumbs found their way to EVERY water outlet in the house – the new ice maker, all the sink aerators, and every toilet flush valve. It seemed like YEARS before we had iced drinks with truly clear ice!

OK, you get the message. Daddy was a do-it-yourselfer, I got that from him, and we had a lot of fun doing it. (We actually had a lot of successful projects, but those aren't the ones you remember.) That's understandable, right? Parents and children often have shared interests. Sometimes its sports, sometimes music, sometimes cooking…for us it was doing stuff with tools.

Here's what sets Daddy's story apart. My father, a man for whom the word "Father" was such a huge part of his identity, lived 89 of his 93 years without a father of his own. His greatest DIY accomplishment was becoming the man who taught me **BY EXAMPLE** how to be a husband and a father. You see, at the tender age 4, my daddy was with HIS daddy when he died in a car accident. Imagine: at age 4, in the 1920s when the term "man of the house" meant a lot more than it does today, Daddy became the man of the house.

As I said, each DIY project gets evaluated by the population served. How did he do? The best.

I am in awe of what he accomplished, and what he taught himself to be.

Daddy probably wondered sometimes whether his children were paying attention to the many things he did for us. We were. And here is a short list of our observations:

- He loved his wife, his children, and this parish

- He loved his mother, and his sister and her family

- He was warm and kind

- He tucked us in each night with the same beautiful prayer we each can recite

- He was friendly, and he was our friend

- He was dependable – always there – our "Rock"

- He was a leader

- He had a terrific sense of humor

- He was caring, supportive, and ready to help

- He taught tirelessly and patiently

- He was our father, and he was our priest

Many of you know that last August my wife died abruptly. Losing her continues to be the hardest thing I have ever faced. Shortly after Melissa died I visited Daddy, and he, better than anybody could, helped me recognize that the Peace of God transcends all understanding. It is easy to love those words and find comfort in them, until you have NO CHOICE but to accept them. Daddy, my father and my priest, helped me.

Since Daddy's death I found a newspaper article featuring a sermon he wrote a long time ago, in which he states: "In today, yesterday and tomorrow are one. As the separate banks of a river are one in the river's bed, so yesterday's actions and tomorrow's hope are one in today's life. Just so, the death of Good Friday and the resurrection of Easter are fused in Easter Even…The tomb is where old life ends and new begins.

Daddy is on that other bank, and Daddy is with us.

---Bill Hoffman Jr., June 10, 2017.