

Bill Broderick

Life-long Skeptic and Humanist

by Eric Thomas
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His Humanist Legacy will continue with the Quinte Secular Humanist Association continuing the organization Bill founded.

Our remembrance of Bill has to start with, “we heard you, Bill.”

It is important for our collective reflection of how Humanism is promulgated to appreciate the impact of our mentor who had challenges hearing and speaking. No more poignant accolade can be made than to salute the personal success of Bill by reminding ourselves that, “we heard you Bill.”

The juxtaposition is that Bill’s written body of work, that was prolific, rarely reverted to an historic oral tradition. As his friend, I shared the observation with Bill that he used Gutenberg technology when he was old enough to have been trained before the printing press. His response was a justified and appreciated criticism of my lack of tact, writing skill, and the perils of counting on presence as a communication tool.

Bill’s impact on Canadian Humanism was a reflection of his commitment to communicate effectively. Erudite to a fault, with a style that he described as “journalism for everyone,” his exhaustive knowledge was shared succinctly in an understandable fashion. One of the acknowledgements of Bill’s legacy was a front-page article in the *Belleville Intelligencer* written by Luke Hendry. In that article he chronicles Bill’s writing career and his passion for astronomy.

Just how effective Bill was at engaging people whom he met and leveraging their perspective is exemplified by his showing my teenage son his collections of minerals, daggers and telescopes that decorated his apartment. He made these occasionally obtuse relics interesting for a young man who understood little of his embattled speech. Is the measure of erudition effective engagement of a young mind?

On one of our first coffee trips, Bill challenged me to consider a street-front presence for Humanists in our local community. While not brought to fruition yet, he never gave up on the



Photo by Raphael Borja, Q Net News

concept of proactive Humanism. We laughed at the sartorial splendor of he and me looking like “Haree Krishna” and our acting like pamphlet-pounding anarchists in downtown rural Ontario.

The *Belleville Intelligencer* interview also asked if Bill had reconsidered his empirical skepticism regarding a life after death when faced with his own mortality. His answer to this “Pascal’s Wager” was a humorous “not in this lifetime.”

At our regular meeting of the Quinte Humanists in October we pushed the envelope of Humanist practice. We Humanists, by definition, have no dogma, doctrine, nor obscure ceremony. I suggested we start our monthly meetings with a reverent question, bordering on a ceremony: “Has anyone heard from Bill?” If so, we can give up on the whole Humanist thing. Bill would have us prove that we heard from him, collect that James Randi million-dollar reward for proving a supernatural phenomenon and donate it to Humanists in Canada. But that would be fraught with humour as well, wouldn’t it? Bill was emphatic, correct and is now silent.

Our beliefs, based on fact, from his tutelage, are in humanity, evolution, science, the here and now.

Affectionately, we will remember that we heard you, Bill Broderick. Thank you.