



friendship force  
INTERNATIONAL

## Thanks to their father, Bill Hagan, the Hagan family has loved Friendship Force for 40 years!

*Wayne Smith Medal of Honor Recipient, Board of Directors Friendship Force International, Past President of FF Dayton*



Bill was the kind of guy that everyone immediately loved. He always had a smile, a handshake, a joke, a magic trick, a song, or words of encouragement. He was a wanderlust who passed it to his five children and all nine of his grandchildren. Bill and his wife, Mary Ellen, showed us our worlds needed to be bigger than just our towns. He first participated in FF exchanges in the 1980's. He became very active after he retired at age 60. It was a hobby that turned into a second career.

As his daughter-in-law, living in Atlanta, I was privy to many important occasions in his FFI career. One of the proudest moments for me was when he spoke at the funeral of Wayne Smith, Friendship Force's founder. Bill was one of seven dignitaries from around the world, including a former president, that were asked to give eulogies at Wayne's funeral. This was very difficult for any of them to write, let alone speak. Bill spoke from his heart and it was eloquent. I have never been so proud. We always knew how important Friendship Force was to him, but it was at this funeral that I realized how important **he** was to Friendship Force.

As the parents of five children, the Hagan family always traveled together. Here are a few Journey stories we want to share about Bill and his kids enjoying Friendship Force ambassadors and hosts from around the world during the past 40 years.

**Dayton to Cali, Columbia, 1980** - The First FFI exchange for Dayton, Ohio! Donna Simek joined her parents. They chartered a plane for a mutual exchange, where the Dayton club flew to Cali, Columbia, and then their club boarded for Dayton OH. Donna said that "Our hosts Lalu and Maria lived in the mountains, so our car ride to their home was like an amusement park ride on switch back roads. I spoke Spanish so I was the interpreter." Several times Lalu would point his finger at me and say "Tell your father....", but Dad always managed to get his point across without me. There were many stories, but the one that Dad laughed about the most was our trip to the local church for mass. As we were praying, a dog walked up the aisle of the small church with a stone floor and wooden pews. He was covered in something awful smelly and wove his way through every pew rubbing up against everyone. The older ladies were trying to shoo him out and all we could do was laugh.



**Dayton to Pau France, 1984** - Bill was supposed to be on this trip but had to cancel at the last minute. Mary Ellen had to fulfill his responsibilities. This was a role she had not anticipated. Bill asked Janet Hagan, his daughter-in-law, to take his place to help her. Janet had never been to France but was fluent in French. Mary Ellen stayed with George and Pierrette Larripa of Pau. They did not speak English and she did not speak French. Janet was a huge help. It was the beginning of a lifetime friendship shared by many of the Hagans. Bill and Mary Ellen would go on to travel with the Larripas many times over the next 30 years. To find a friend for life is a huge gift. A friendship that goes on through three generations, on both sides, means we've become family.



**Costa Rica to Atlanta, early 1990s** - Mark Hagan and I hosted two couples from a Costa Rican club in the 1990s. One couple spoke English and one couple, Juan and Maria, did not. We took two cars to the airport and I picked up Juan and Maria. My car broke down on the way home. It was late at night in Atlanta. I managed to get a tow truck to take us home and drop off the car. It made for a long, long evening with only language dictionaries to communicate.

The next day, Bill and Mary Ellen came through town and wanted to meet our Costa Rican guests since their Dayton club would go there in six months. That night we rolled up the living room rug and our ambassadors put on Spanish dance music. We all danced the night away.

Juan, using his translator, told Bill, "you and Mary Ellen are going to stay at my house." They stayed at his house six months later, and the very first night when Bill flushed the toilet, it overflowed. Bill told the story that it kept flowing and flowing and ran out of the bedroom and into the living room. It was their first night there so he did not even know where his hosts' bedroom was located. Bill just kept yelling "AGUA! MUCHA AGUA!" They all laughed about it later that both their first night in Atlanta and their first night in Costa Rica went wrong. Bill found out that Juan had lost his father one week before he met Bill. So even during sadness, broken down cars, and overflowing toilets, memories are made in the open hearts that await them.



**Dayton to Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 1993** - On this trip, two of Bill's children travelled with him, Mike and his wife Janet, and his youngest daughter Pam. Mike, Janet, and Pam were all home-hosted by a lovely younger family, Kevin and Lynn Parkes, in Ipswich, a small city just outside of Brisbane. They had two young children, Klynton and Kristin. The three of them enjoyed the end of their day with the family around their kitchen table every night for "tea." The most memorable event was when we landed in Brisbane; the city of Ipswich was hosting a parade for a public holiday. The Parkes family life at that time involved attending BMX biking competitions with their son Klynton. They also ran the BMX Club of Ipswich. So, Mike, Janet, and Pam joined the them and walked in the parade that evening. The kids had decorated BMX bikes, streamers and all. Although tired from the long trip, the 3 of them loved the "come join our family and city" welcome!



**Dayton to Pau, France, 2003** - This was Linda's first FF exchange. Of all the exchanges that the Dayton Club had taken, this one was special because Dayton was the founding club. Linda says, "Our exchange was hosted by a group of French families who welcomed us into their homes and treated us to warm hospitality, friendship, and wine. My parents and I enjoyed our stay in the home of the former Mayor of Pau, Jean-Pierre, and Magali, who not only gave me French cooking instructions and shared French cuisine, but most of all, the French wine!"

Dad's passion was very heartfelt during the farewell dinner at the end of our week in Pau. Dad was asked to say a few final words. As the French passed out red berets to all of us, he delivered his speech, thanking our hosts and Pau dignitaries in French! I was so proud of him as he had no training in French, except for reading wine bottles! He surprised us all and received a standing ovation

from the crowd. Bravo! As their oldest child of five, I have learned through my parents' eyes that traveling is always an adventure, and that knowing that we all share this same world, we need to experience it every chance we can."



**Dayton to Pau, France, 2003** – Luckily Mike and Janet stayed with George and Pierrette Larripa. They felt very fortunate because George took Mike, Janet, and Bill flying in his 4-seater plane many times. This was a follow up exchange from the 1984 exchange between Dayton, Ohio - the home of the Wright brothers and Wright Pat Airforce museum - and FF Pau, a club consisting almost entirely of pilots. Pau and Dayton share a long history of flying. Surprisingly, they were hosted by many of the same French families from the 1984 exchange. This friendship is still very strong today. In fact, Mike and Janet are heading to Pau for Pierrette's 80th birthday party in July 2020.



**Shimonoseki, Japan to Dayton, 2003** - Bill and Mary Ellen hosted Reiko and Yoshifumi Tsumori from Shimonoseki during this exchange. Mark went up to visit his parents for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of flight and met Reiko and Yoshi. Fast forward to 2019, sixteen years later, and Mark planned a vacation to Japan. He emailed the Tsumoris and they were thrilled. A couple of bullet trains later we were in Shimonoseki. We spent three nights with them and they treated us like royalty. The conversations around the kitchen table with an e-translator taught us so much about their culture. Reiko insisted on giving me a kimono and showed me how to put it on.



**Greater Boston to Lamphun, Thailand, 2020** - In 2018, Bill's middle daughter Donna Simek and her husband Bob, opened up a new Friendship Force club in Boston in her parents' memory. Mark and I were lucky enough to go on their very first exchange to Lamphun, Thailand, in January, 2020, and it was the best exchange we have been on in 25 years. Pim and Tarn stole our hearts. Tarn, who is 6 years old, told us his heart hurt for days after we left. Our hearts hurt too!

This was the first time that Mark and I were 25 years older than our hosts. Now we are the same age as Bill was when he first joined Friendship Force. It's funny how life comes full circle.

COVID-19 had just started to show up near us in Thailand. We flew through many different Southeast Asian airports wearing masks to come home. We felt this fear a full month before America felt it. We came home and watched the whole world change. Mark and I wondered if we were on one of the last FFI exchanges, and how sad that would be. This is the time the world needs more Friendships!



Bill used to say "until you eat at someone's kitchen table you really do not know them".

We are all hoping we can continue with those kitchen table conversations soon!

**Sincerely, Vicky Hagan - Bill's daughter-in-law - June 7, 2020**

**The Hagan Family: Linda, Mike, Janet, Mark, Vicky, Donna, Bob, and Pam**

Please share any memories of Bill and Mary Ellen to [vickyhagan@comcast.net](mailto:vickyhagan@comcast.net)

*Here is the last picture Mark and I have of Bill at our kitchen table.*