

Priceless Endearment

By Bob Schmeichel

As I was visiting Bill Buus and his wife, Karen, about their '56 Chevy, it became very apparent in our conversation that we weren't just talking about any car at this point in their lives. As Bill told me of his early childhood memories of his father and all his abilities, the relevance of his story came out with very strong emotions. As far back as he could remember, his father was a very talented self-taught individual able to fix pretty much anything old put in front of him. So growing up on a farm near Adrian, Minnesota, family, friends, and neighbors became accustomed to relying on his dad to fix anything broken to make it last. Bill said it was a normal way of life for his father to be taking care of others before himself, which makes Bill's pride run very deep.

During Bill's early teenage years, his father bought a '56 Chevy 2-door sedan out of Sioux Falls that was used to haul everything needing repair as well as being a daily-driver family car. Bill smiled and laughed out loud as he was telling me that his dad, more than once, used the car to bring home a bull calf in the trunk from a dairy farmer nearby who didn't want any bulls. He'd put the calf in the trunk and shut the lid and drive home. Thinking about this situation, I have got to believe it would be funny and totally unexpected for anyone else not knowing anything when opening the trunk and seeing a cow jump out. What the ----- Taking care of whatever, as I hope you are seeing the visual picture I am trying to paint, usually involved the black '56 Chevy. After quite a few years of memorable service, his dad sold the car to a guy from Marion, South Dakota, who had been bugging him to sell it for quite awhile. After doing that and as time passed by, Bills' dad admitted he missed the familiar sight of the black '56 Chevy around the farm and was bound and determined to have another one for fun rather than as a work car. Years went by and eventually in 1985 his dad found and bought another one in Sioux Falls. It was a really nice car to begin with that Bill's dad threw himself into doing almost everything that involved restoring the car back to better-than-new condition. He had done everything mechanically underneath that he could as well as the outside of the body himself, which took almost four years. The one area that he felt he wasn't talented enough to tackle was the paint job. So in the summer of 1989, he struck up a deal with a neighboring farmer to paint his '56 and in turn he would combine his corn. For those of you who don't know how that works, it's called "bartering." Trading labor for labor, which was widely used in the thirties, with no money exchanged and as I did it myself too in the 80s, continues today when it feels fair with no more than a handshake agreement. The farmer who painted the '56 enjoyed doing it so much that he started a body shop in Adrian that is still going strong today. After getting the car home, Bill's mom and dad installed a new reproduction Bel Air interior in the car themselves and joined the Tri-Five Club out of Edgerton, Minnesota. Bill was so happy to see his dad finally doing something for himself for a change, instead of everyone else, and really enjoying it.

Life was great for about five years until Bill's dad started having some health issues, which kept him away from driving the '56 anymore. Bill realizing after four years that the car wasn't being driven any more, he approached his dad asking if he had thought about selling it. With six siblings, dad said, he didn't want to be in the middle of what could turn into an argument. So over the next year and a half Bill approached each of his siblings to see if they had an interest in the '56, of which none seemed to have any. So in 2005, Bill bought the '56 from his dad and took it to "Back to the Fifties" event for its first outing in five years. The car worked quite flawlessly and was parked back in dad's garage when they returned home. Bill's dad called him a few days later wanting to know why, since he had sold him the car, it was still sitting in his garage. Bill explained it would be gone as soon as he finished building a new garage to hold it, which happened a few months later. Bill's explanation to his father, I am sure, made him realize the car was going to be well taken care of and enjoyed by the right person.

Bill mentioned over the last 10 years there have been a few times that the '56 has really left some heartfelt family-related memories. Once was driving the '56 with his mom and wife to his dad's funeral and the other was chauffeuring their daughter to her wedding and her saying, "It felt like grandpa was with them that day." Bill told me he put personalized plates on it a few years that read "POPS 56" because he felt like it was still his dad's car. Over the last few years people have asked, "Bill, why don't you put a V-8 in it so it can go faster?" His response is always, "I am getting older now, so maybe the car will help me slow down." With its 235 six-cylinder and straight stick trans, it still gets me there, it just takes a few minutes longer, and I am not going to change anything until it doesn't work anymore, kind of like my dad would have done. Making it last as is, the first priority!

