

A LIFE WELL-LIVED

WILLIAM JOSEPH RIHN

1930-2015

William J. Rihn, known to all as “Bill,” grew up in Alhambra, California, the only child of Joe and Alice Rihn. Bill attended local public schools and joined the Boy Scouts, eventually achieving the organization’s highest rank of Eagle Scout. Bill was also a Sea Scout, spending time as a teen-ager around Balboa Island and Newport Beach on sea-scout projects. He developed a passion for the ocean and returned to the Orange County coast throughout his life to bodysurf, to fish (unsuccessfully), and to vacation with his family. Later, as a Laguna Beach resident, Bill worked tirelessly to preserve and protect the beaches that he loved.

As a student, Bill had an aptitude for math and science. In a high school class, he once questioned the teacher’s approach to a math problem, and the teacher responded by asking Bill if he could do a better job of teaching the class. Not easily intimidated, Bill agreed that he could, and then walked to the front of the classroom and taught the remainder of the lesson.

Soon after this, Bill was admitted to Cal Tech, graduating in 1952 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. In the same year, he married Elizabeth “Liz” Gibbons, a Pasadena native and artist, whom he met through mutual friends. Bill and Liz established their first home in Monrovia and within a few years had two children, Jennifer and Dennis.

Professionally, Bill developed an interest in seismic activity. During the 1960s, he was working for Teledyne Earth Sciences Division, when the firm was hired to construct an accelerometer for placement on the moon. Bill was named the project’s principal engineer.

The accelerometer was loaded onto Apollo 11, and Neil Armstrong carefully placed it on the moon’s surface, as part of the Passive Seismic Experiment Package. Bill was greatly relieved that the delicate instrument actually worked, given the challenges of the lunar atmosphere. (Photos of the accelerometer that Bill sent to the moon can be viewed on the Smithsonian’s National Air & Space Museum website under images for Apollo 11.)

After the success of the moon project, Bill, together with a few colleagues, founded Kinemetrics, a Pasadena firm specializing in earthquake instrumentation. (www.kinemetrics.com) This firm still operates in Pasadena today under different management.

Bill also had a keen interest in public education and civic responsibility. During the 1970s, he was elected to the school board for the San Gabriel School District. Several years later, after he and Liz retired to Madera County, Bill held a seat on the Bass Lake School Board, which serves the region lying south of

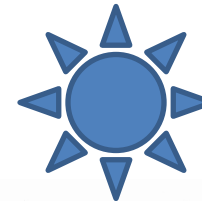
Yosemite. Bill and Liz also worked to establish a children's museum in the town of Oakhurst, which was a few miles from their home in Ahwahnee, California.

Bill's time as a Madera County resident was short-lived, however, when Liz passed away in 2001 at age 68. Bill decided to relocate full-time to South Laguna Beach to live in a beach cottage that he and Liz had purchased early in their marriage as a rental and vacation home. Bill lived at 3rd Avenue and Fairview for the next 14 years where he added another chapter to his full life.

Bill quickly engaged with the community as a member of the South Laguna Civic Association and served as its president for several years. Today, Bill's contributions can be seen in the neighborhood's vibrant community garden and walkable streetscape.

Community members who stopped by Bill's house for civic meetings or simply to chat were able to view the functioning seismograph in his living room and enjoy the art that he and Liz collected on trips to Mexico, Tahiti, the Cook Islands, and Europe. Visitors whose timing was particularly fortuitous may have been offered a piece of lemon meringue pie that Bill made with fruit from his Meyer lemon tree or a slice of apple pie that he baked with apples from his Gordon apple tree.

Bill was an original in the best sense of the word. He will be missed by Jennifer and her husband, Grover Sams; by Dennis and his wife, Cathleen Watkins; by his grandsons, Joe and Nick Rihn; by his sisters-in-law, Margaret Rouse and Mary Gibbons; and by the many friends and neighbors who were part of his circle.



Bill and Liz in Mexico, 1988



Dennis and Bill in San Clemente, 2013



Bill in Lipari, Sicily, 2012



Bill and Liz in Yosemite, 1992