

Storyteller's Preface

AS YOU READ THIS STORY, it may sound like it's my story, but it's not. Above all, it's our story—my wife's and mine. Since Dawn and I were married, we have experienced each moment of this journey together.

Moreover, it's not just our story. It's the story of a proven philosophy shared by many, simply seen through my eyes. The principles and ideas you will find throughout the chapters of this book are universal. So, in a sense, this is a philosophy book, with stories about beliefs, values, and truths that affect us all. To give you a preview of what you will read, there are some fundamentals I'd like to share with you.

Thinking, rational people aspire to be successful. What is success? Success is happiness. It's the personal realization that you're doing what you are meant to do—doing that which brings you joy and pleasure.

I'm not talking about hedonism. I'm talking about ambition, the desire to build something, and the foresight to know what it will look like when it's finished.

Success is about having aspirations, setting goals, and working toward that realization. It's about how to live your personal journey.

Think of it this way: Every human being alive today can be absolutely certain of only two things—birth and death. The rest of life is encapsulated in a finite period of time. Our minds, especially when we are young, convince us that we are immortal. Uh-uh. Not true. The time that you have is limited, and its duration is completely unknown.

So what to do with the unknown amount of limited time you have? *Live it now*. Each minute of every day must have purpose. Planning for tomorrow is okay, but only if it helps you determine what you do today. Your memories before death and your legacy after death will be a reflection of the sum total of what you did in each of your todays. That's who you are.

Because this time factor is so critical, I want to be certain that I have guidelines for living that will keep me focused. These guidelines channel my energy and steer my actions to define who and what I am. They determine how I raise my kids, how I build my house, how I make my marriage endure, and, of course, how I grow my grapes and make my wine.

Through forty years of business and professional life, a person gathers a lot of advice and sorts it according to its value. If you have a good attitude, this exercise will result in a set of values that guide

the way you run your life. A value can be something you believe in or it can be a line you just will not cross. Your values determine your actions, and your actions determine who you are.


I have effectively moved my values through a six-step, iterative, decision-making process that I've applied over and over again throughout my life. The process is based on these six values: *creativity, vision, innovation, collaboration, motivation, and measurement*.

In this book, these six values are revealed through a series of stories about my life with Dawn and our adventures in the wine business. In some chapters, one of the values may stand out more than the others. If you read carefully, however, you will notice a repetitive process at work—each one of the values is applied again and again.

I believe that, as you find entertainment in the stories, you will also discover a way of making valid decisions in line with your own personal values. You, too, can adopt a values-to-action decision-making process to guide you on your personal journey to discovering your purpose, your business success, and your personal happiness. I hope it helps you and your friends achieve the happiness that Dawn and I enjoy.

Live life fully now. Don't wait!

BILL WILLIAMSON




Part One
About the Journey

CHAPTER 1

Where It All Began

*History begins and memories last
The future it seems is borne of the past*

 I'M A BABY BOOMER. Born in Australia, I was raised by my mother who had plenty of practice raising boys. She was the eldest daughter in a farming family and often was called to play the role of mother to her four younger brothers.

My dad was a Spitfire fighter pilot during World War II. When he returned home to the farming community where we lived, there was little work for an electrical engineer, so we moved to the city where Dad could find work. When I had to leave the farm, however, I felt I was being denied part of my birth-right. I missed the farming life and enjoyed every moment of every summer that I visited my cousins, uncles, and grandparents who remained on the farm.

I did well in school, especially when I liked and respected the teacher or I could see clearly the value of the subject. In college, too, learning was easy when I could see the value in it. When I couldn't, I had little use for the subject.

While I was at college, I went to work for a software company. I found that I liked helping people and so I put my natural talents to work in sales. Within twelve months, I was the top salesman at Sperry, a Fortune 100 company. Later, at both Xerox and Pitney Bowes, I became a top managing vice president.

Throughout my early career in business, I was active in sports. My true love was competitive surfing. At one point, I faced a tough choice not to spend the rest of my life on the sand with an umbrella in my drink after enjoying the Australian coastal waves—but I digress.

When I worked for Sperry, I lived in Sydney, but I was assigned to work in Canberra, which was about the same commuting distance as New York to Washington, D.C. I was living in a hotel four nights a week, but, in those days, that wasn't such bad duty. I was living at the Hotel Canberra, where many other traveling professionals stayed, and I had an expense account. I easily fell into a pattern of having a good meal and drinking nice wine every night.

The headwaiter at the restaurant in the hotel was a fellow named Ernie. He and I would chat a bit each

night, but he was busy, so I simply ate alone, having no other conversation except for the few pleasantries I exchanged with Ernie. Eating alone soon got a bit boring.

After about six weeks, I arrived at the restaurant one night, and Ernie greeted me with his typical formality. "Good evening, Mr. Williamson," he said. "How are you this evening?"

"I'm fine, Ernie, thanks for asking, but could you please remember that my name's Bill," I chided. "Y'know, Ernie," I added, "I'm sick of eating alone. I want a different table. Please seat me at that big table in the corner."

"That is a table for ten," he replied. "How will that help you?"

"A lot of my fellow travelers also eat here alone, so whenever one of them comes in, ask if he or she would like to be seated alone or join me at 'Bill's Table,'" I answered. "I like to share conversation and companionship when having a meal. Don't you agree that's better than eating alone?"

"Absolutely, Bill. Right this way," Ernie said as he squired me to the big table in the corner.

On that night in 1970, Bill's Table was born. Ernie sent four people over, and the five of us began a nightly tradition of eating well, drinking fine wine, and engaging in interesting conversation. In no time, Bill's Table became a popular destination for visiting

lawyers, politicians, journalists, and salespeople. We all had expense accounts, and we regularly persuaded the wine cellar to give up its best. Furthermore, because most of the people at my table were staying in the hotel, we could remain at the table after the restaurant closed. After hours the chef, Bert, would join us. Together we delighted in the wines being poured, and we often encouraged Bert to return to the kitchen to create a special preparation for the table.

Every night featured a wine and food pairing, and we would explore how the wines interacted with foods prepared with a variety of herbs and spices. My palate improved as I sampled some of Australia's best wine, including Henschke's Hill of Grace, Penfolds Grange, and others.

I don't know if Bill's Table is still an evening ritual at the Hotel Canberra today, almost forty years later, but I do know that a modern-day version is a tradition in Healdsburg, California, where I now live. On Wednesday nights during the summer, Dawn and I host dinner for visiting wine club members at Dry Creek Kitchen, one of Healdsburg's finest restaurants.

The tradition includes pairing our wines with each of the five courses served. We also ask that each couple joining us bring a bottle of wine that they love (but not one of ours) and tell the rest of us why they love it. This sharing process gives all of us the oppor-

tunity to experience other wines and understand what people like about them.

We have another tradition that we celebrate with friends. Dawn and I host the Williamson Epicurean Dinner on the first Friday of every month in the wine library of the Hotel Healdsburg. We collaborate with Chef Dustin to develop unique six-course dinners, made with fresh seasonal ingredients, that pair perfectly with six of our wines. Ten wine club members join us for an elegant private dining experience. Dinner often lasts four hours. We share our wine and food pairing ideas with visitors and friends—and, of course, we continue the Bill's Table tradition of camaraderie, conversation, and conviviality.