



Kuhner's Corner: My buddy, Bill

Bill Kelly is gone but will never be forgotten



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A giant of a man has left us. I got the shocking news from my wife, Grace: Bill Kelly has died. He passed away from a massive heart attack. My life—and countless others—will never be the same.

Bill was the CEO and founder of Bill Kelly Financial Services—the sponsor of my show, “The Kuhner Report.” Yet, he was so much more. Bill came from humble roots. Born and raised on a farm, he knew what it was to be poor. Like many Irish-Americans, he valued the importance of hard work, self-reliance and personal responsibility. He was not born into wealth; he earned it. Bill embodied the American Dream: He pulled himself up by the bootstraps to create a successful, thriving business. In fact, like many talented entrepreneurs, he had endured bankruptcies before finally achieving great success.

What I admired most about Bill was that he never forgot where he came from. He knew the value of money, and never lost connection to his hardscrabble childhood. He was very generous with his employees and staff. He believed in the Catholic principle of paying a living wage. He was a Christian businessman, who understood that, along with wealth, there was a responsibility to care for one's workers and fellow citizens—especially, the poor and most vulnerable. Bill was charitable almost to a fault. He gave turkeys to students and families at schools in low-income areas for Thanksgiving. He generously supported Fisher House and homeless veterans, making sure they got the help they deserved. As someone who had served in the National Guard and Air Force, Bill understood the immense sacrifices our veterans make. He never forgot them.

Due to his Irish Catholic heritage, Bill instinctively sided with the underdog. He had a special affinity for African-Americans. At his core, Bill remained an old-school John F. Kennedy Democrat. He championed civil rights, and greatly admired Martin Luther King Jr., especially his call for a color-blind society. Bill gave to countless causes that sought to improve the inner cities, increase educational opportunities for poor blacks and clean up crime-infested neighborhoods. No one—and I mean no one—in Boston genuinely cared for the black community more than Bill Kelly.

The same applied to St. Patrick's Day. Bill (rightly) despised political correctness, and how it was being used to undermine the cultural identity of Irish-Americans. He staunchly opposed the efforts of radical leftists to infuse St. Patrick's Day with the LGBTQ agenda. He felt that the Irish had earned the right to celebrate their heritage, faith, unique contributions and hard-won struggles in America without bowing at the altar of "diversity." Bill would often tell me: If the gays want their day (or week or month), that is their business—and right. But the shamrock must not be replaced with the rainbow flag. When the organizers of the St. Patrick's Day parade—in Irish Boston, of all places!—finally capitulated to the forces of liberalism, allowing homosexuals to openly march under the rainbow banner, Bill realized it was no longer his America. Irish Catholicism was dying. Christians were becoming strangers (and outcasts) in their own country.

His most sacred cause was the defense of the unborn. Bill believed abortion is murder. He understood that no civilized society can allow for the mass slaughter of an entire class of human beings. For Bill, abortion was the slavery issue of our time—a deliberate attempt by the government to strip babies in the womb of their God-given human rights. Bill was a sincere Christian. He argued that all people—unborn babies, the disabled, the poor, the elderly, the weakest and most vulnerable in society—were created by God. Hence, they had an innate worth and intrinsic value. To think otherwise is to embrace pagan barbarism and what St. Pope John Paul II called the "culture of death." Bill loved children.

The greatest miracle of his life was the birth of his son, William Jr.—"Little William" as he is frequently called. William was born when Bill had just turned 54; he and wife, Kelly (yes, that is her real first name), did not think it was possible to conceive a child at their respective ages. Bill was convinced it was a miracle; that the Lord had given him a

second chance to truly enjoy fatherhood and focus his time, energy and attention not on building up his business as he had done for years, but on being a devoted, attentive father to his boy. Bill died at 65. He was too young. William, 11, will now have to live without his father. He is too young to have lost his dad. Bill was also immensely proud of his daughter, Mary Madeline, 20. Like Bill, she is a devout Catholic, highly intelligent, ambitious and hard-working. She is currently in college. Her goal is to follow in Bill's footsteps and help run the family business. She is also too young to have lost her dad.

Bill's rock was Kelly. They were more than husband and wife. They were best friends, partners and confidantes. Bill often told me that he knew, no matter what the obstacle or adversity, he could always count on one person: Kelly. She had his back—always.

And Bill always had mine. As a conservative populist, I am surrounded by enemies in Massachusetts. Liberals and Democrats fear me because I challenge their one-party rule and suffocating grip on power. The RINOs—from Gov. Charlie Baker to the Romney Republicans at the Boston Herald—despise me for exposing their phony, ineffective opposition. Despite the vast forces arrayed against me, I knew there was one man I could always trust: Bill. He never flinched. He never wavered. He never surrendered. He was old school. Character was everything. Bill believed that the suit did not make the man; rather, the man made the suit. In many ways, he reminded me of my Croatian grandfather—tough, honest, courageous, brilliant, insightful, loyal, generous (almost to a fault), and a man of moral integrity. He was a man of a bygone era and a different, better time. In short, he was a truly great American.

He was many things: a devoted family man, a staunch patriot, a successful businessman, a passionate philanthropist, a proud Irish Catholic and—above all—a dear friend.

Bill: You saw my full potential when others didn't and encouraged me to pursue my dreams. In a dirty, corrupt industry you were a beacon of light. From the bottom of my heart, thank you! You were like the brother I never had. I honor you; I cherish you; I will never forget you.

May God bless you—now and forever.

-Jeffrey T. Kuhner is host of "The Kuhner Report" on WRKO AM-680 in Boston.

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