

Vic High A Memorable Part of Bill Wakeham's Extraordinary Life

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by Linda Baker, Class of 1969

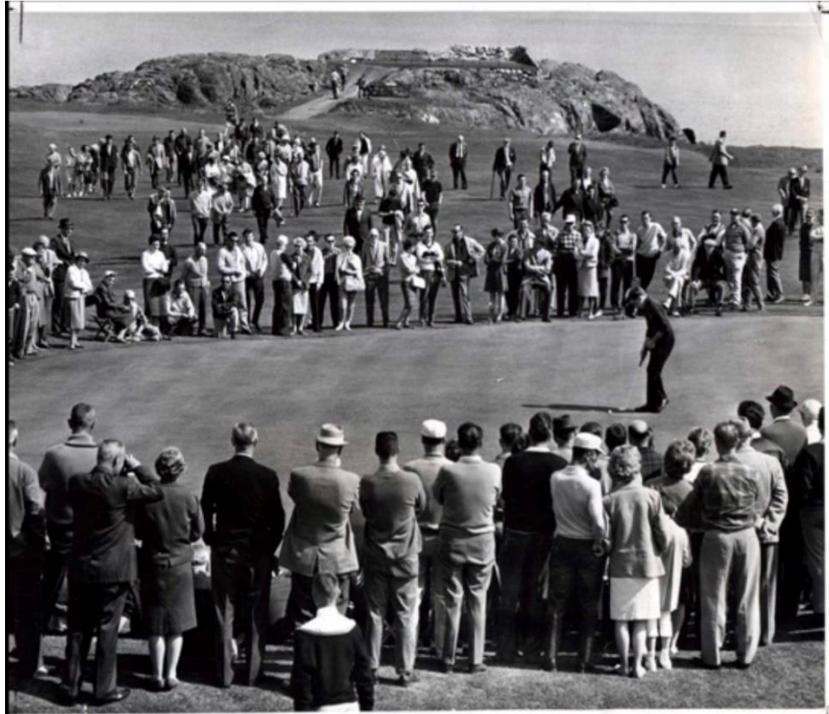
with photos and memories from Judy (Wakeham) Gill, Class of 1960 and Bill Wakeham, Class of 1959.

Apparently Vic High's legendary teacher Lawrie Wallace knew a sports star in the making back in the 1950s. Why else would he have willingly turned a blind eye to young Bill Wakeham (Class of 1959) quietly leaving class early on Fridays to run out to Fernwood Road in time for the 3:18 bus. Wallace must have known there was no way Bill was going to miss tee time at Uplands Golf Course on Fridays, and the start of another weekend spent practising his beloved game.



An extraordinary career playing golf and winning tournaments around the world – 71 of them to be exact - eventually led Wakeham to induction into the BC Golf Hall of Fame and the Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame, accomplishments we know Wallace would have applauded.

His first tournament wins were at age 15 – the Victoria and Vancouver Island Juniors, and the BC Junior Championship. At 16 he won the Canadian Junior title. He won the BC Amateur twice and represented Canada in the World Cup in Japan and the Commonwealth Cup in Australia, where the team finished second in the world, both times.



Bill winning at Victoria Golf Club, with a big crowd around the greens. These crowds weren't usual in Victoria, but Bill was beginning to bring fame to the city, and there were no 4-day golf tournaments on TV in those days.

Bill turned professional at age 25 and his multiple wins included the BC Open twice, the Manitoba Open, Ontario Open, and three US titles, Lilac City Open, Washington State Open, Northwest Open, the only pro to win all three. Bill eventually amassed a total of 71 titles. He became Head Pro in Victoria at both Metchosin and then Royal Oak Golf Courses, where his humor and caring of both the public and members were always appreciated.



Golf wasn't exactly part of the curriculum when Bill was at Vic High, but if it had been Bill could probably have taught the course. "My dad got me started in the sport," says Bill. "And he was my only coach. I was 8 or 9 years old when I had my first set of clubs. Before that, I'd take my dad's putter and go whack balls in the park near our house."

Bill joined the Uplands Golf Club at age 12 and would spend every day for two full summers cycling there from the family home on Richardson Street, PB & J sandwiches and fruit in hand, and golf until 9 PM. "I just loved to practice!" says Bill.

In fact, his obsession with practising used to include hitting balls from their home on Craigflower across the road to Gorge Vale Golf Course – by porch, living room and front bedroom lights – and then running across early the next morning to pick up all the balls he'd hit.

"Over about 10 years, I had the course record at nine courses on the island," says Bill. "Colwood 63, Gorge 65, Uplands 64, Glen Meadows 70, Victoria Metro Open at Cedar Hill 59, Victoria 29, 33 for 63. And lots up-island. Cowichan 64, Mt. Brenton 64, Nanaimo Open 70, West Coast Open in Alberni 61. Oh, plus Waialea in Maui playing with my dad. I shot 66 with a hole-in-one on No. 16. What a day that was!"

Bill also remembers living in Vancouver for a time, and he and his dad were often up before dawn heading for the University Golf Club's early free-for-juniors tee time. One pre-dawn foray they were stopped by the police who thought the car was driving itself. Imagine the copper's surprise finding out Bill's dad had let 11-year-old Bill drive their little Morris Minor that day, peering through the steering wheel to see the road. 'Aw heck, officer, there's nobody around,' pleaded dad, and they were sent on their way as long as dad took the wheel.



Bill, 2nd from left, and the 1962 Canadian World Amateur Golf Team in Japan.

Bill attended Central Junior High School and remembers well some of the teachers there in the mid-50s, particularly those with golf memberships. Moving on to Vic High in 1957, his years there must have been busy ones, between classes and schoolwork, his two jobs delivering the Daily Colonist and working as a busboy at the Empress Hotel, playing hockey on a city team at the old Memorial Arena, and being on a golf course practising every spare minute. Spare minute? Thankfully he must have made those minutes count.

Bill's sister Judy (Wakeham) Gill, Vic High Class of 1960, remembers those busy years. "Bill must have been a challenge for teachers," she emails from her home in Ottawa, "because although he loved his high school experience and all his friends, he was really more interested in golf. Our home was the drop-in centre while he and I were at Vic High. A few of the pre-grad parties were held at our house. My parents would roll up the living room rug so the kids could dance while Bill's best friends, the Gary Howard combo, would play. Gary Howard, Dave Hopwood, Mel Hendry and Max Schoenfeld."

"The grads also rented a hall on Quadra Street," Judy continues, "which the teachers tried their best to ignore. Our parents were always the ones asked to chaperone, and if anyone snuck in a beer, Bill was the designated driver. He was only focussed on golf. But everything was pretty innocent in those days."

(see [insert link to](#) separate story on Judy (Wakeham) Gill, Class of 1960)

"I was only one of two students at school who had a car," says Bill, "a 1947 4-door Ford. It wasn't unusual to come out to my car and find girls in it waiting for me! But it's the only way I could fit everything into my life."

"I loved Vic High," says Bill. "Everyone was so friendly and accepting. We'd go ice skating together, and we loved watching the Totems play. Darrell Lorimer was on the team then."

"I remember one day in Tommy Mayne's Social Studies class, I got permission to go to the washroom," says Bill. "I could tell somebody had been smoking in there but just went back to my class. (Principal) Harry Dee came to our class a few minutes later. 'Bill! You've been smoking in the washroom!' he said. Well of course I spoke up, explaining that I didn't smoke and was probably the only guy at school who didn't. He believed me. He was a good guy, and we eventually became friends."



From the 1959 Camosun: Here is a Tech boy who is already renowned for his skill at golf. This ability has paid off in a scholarship for Bill at Denver University, Colorado. He also enjoys hockey and is always ready for a good time.

Bill decided not to move to Denver to study, maybe because he was already doing well at what he loved. More likely, says Bill, it was because Denver gets cold and he likes to shoot 65. So if it's any colder than that, he doesn't want to play!

But one of Bill's greatest Vic High accomplishments must have been beating his gym teacher Porky Andrews at golf, more than once! Sister Judy, Vic High Class of 1960, remembers it well.

"There were inter-club matches in the region," says Judy, "and several times Bill came up against his Phys Ed teacher, Porky Andrews, beating him five times out of six. I remember Bill coming home one Sunday and telling mom he was sure he was going to be in trouble with his gym teacher. He said he'd skipped classes on the Friday, missing Phys Ed to go practice for the tournament. And he'd beat Porky again. I think that was when Porky made Bill do extra laps around the track."

"Porky became a great friend," says Bill. "Although at school we were never to call him Porky. He was an amazing guy, a fabulous athlete. We were all lucky to have him as our teacher and role model."



Bill and sister Judy (Wakeham) Gill