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## 'A huge hole to fill in London': City's beloved town crier remembered

LONDON, Ont. — A southwestern Ontario city is mourning the death of the city's beloved town crier, a man whose jolly face was a familiar sight in London.

Bill Paul died of natural causes on Saturday evening. He was 66.

In his role as town crier, Paul attended countless community events and festivals, typically with a bell in hand.

Among his many pursuits, Paul was the founder of the entertainment company Laffguards and host of a Fanshaw College radio show called Straight Talk.

Ed Corrigan, a former city councillor and friend of Paul's, said he's going to remember the town crier's generous nature.

"Bill just gave, gave and gave," Corrigan said in a phone interview with The Canadian Press on Monday.

"He was a wonderful person. It's going to be a huge hole to fill in London, and even beyond that, across Canada, because he was always doing something here for the community."

Paul's community involvement dates back to his time as a student, said realtor George Georgopoulos, who was a classmate of his at Central High School.

While there, he said, Paul served as editor-in-chief of the school paper.

Georgopoulos said receiving the news of Paul's passing felt like "a punch in the stomach." He's going to remember his friend as an entertainer who loved making people smile — and was also fueled by it.

"Getting a chuckle out of a child, that's what filled him," he said.

For more than 45 years, Georgopoulos said Paul phoned him up to sing "Happy Birthday."

Adam Corrigan Holowitz, artistic director of AlvegoRoot Theatre in London, said this was a tradition Paul kept up with numerous Londoners. Paul kept the names, numbers and birthdays of people in his "birthday book" and called them up every year.

"He once told me, he says, 'You know, it's really hard to stay down if you spend two or plus hours a day singing Happy Birthday over the phone to people,'" said Corrigan Holowitz.

As someone who grew up seeing Paul at every summer festival and cultural event in London, Corrigan Holowitz said he's going to remember the crier as someone who "loved the city (of London) and loved the people in this city."

"He really was a fixture," he said.

"So it's hard to imagine our city when we get back to these events, not seeing him there."

Brendon Culliton, who's organizing a celebration of life for Paul, said he's going to miss seeing Paul spreading positivity around London. He said he'd often spot the town crier making balloon animals for children and chatting people up.

"To be there for one another and be there for community and making people smile, like that was what he was all about," said Culliton.

Many people have taken to social media to pay tribute to Paul.

In a tweet, London Mayor Ed Holder shared his condolences with Paul's family.

"If you didn't know the name, you certainly knew the beaming face, and booming voice. Over the years, Bill selflessly and enthusiastically brought joy and laughter to countless numbers of Londoners," Holder wrote.

"The best way to honour his memory, in my view, is to spread laughter and joy ourselves — the way Bill did for decades to friends, family, and strangers alike."

London Public Library wrote in a post on Facebook, "Thank you, Bill Paul, for your care of and dedication to our community. You showed us the significance of acknowledging events from birthdays to London's milestones."

A virtual celebration of life will be held for Paul on Oct. 17.

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