

## 15. The Bolton Brothers: William Paxton and Edward Earl (Dick)

By

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With 12 ½ years difference in age between the Bolton brothers, Bill, the older brother was looked up to by Dick, who was only 6 ½ years younger than me. In view of the small age difference between us, I viewed Dick as my older brother in my pre-school days in Central City, and I never called him “Uncle Dickie”. Mom said Dick used to complain that I was following him around everywhere in those early years.

Charlestown was so crowded with the sudden influx of people during World War II that they had difficulty housing them and providing adequate schools for the children. (1) There was an early 1900s-vintage brick school building on the square in Charlestown named for Jonathan Jennings, the first governor of Indiana. He was married in Charlestown at the Green Tree Tavern and is buried in Charlestown Cemetery. One of the two housing projects thrown up by the federal government during World War II was named for Jonathan Jennings. The other, Pleasant Ridge, was where our family lived. By the time I started school, the Pleasant Ridge Elementary School was holding classes. However, the crowding was so great when I was in the third grade in 1951 that I went to school only half a day in a classroom in the project Community Building. Dick spent some time in classes at the arsenal on the grounds of the ammunition plant.

Dick was held out of school some of his early years, probably due to epilepsy, so when he graduated from Charlestown High School in 1957 at the age of 20, I had just finished the 8<sup>th</sup> grade there before moving to the much smaller school at Greens Fork, Indiana. After the Boltons came to Charlestown, Dick’s friends tended to be people younger than him throughout his public-school years and immediately thereafter.

Dick loved to tell long involved tales, and he was somewhat of a prankster. At times when he visited Aunt Marg he borrowed a bobby pin to clean his ears. Once he reached up to his right ear with the bobby pin and proceeded to slowly pull out a foot-long stream of something, frightening the devil out of Aunt Marg. He had carefully folded a strip of green paper and concealed it in his ear before coming in the house. It was startling to see him slowly extract it while grimacing.

One of the long stories I remember hearing from Dick supposedly involved a young man and a girl who were parked on a country road at night. They discovered they had a flat tire when they tried to leave, but unfortunately they had no jack to change the tire. Dick went to great lengths to describe the spooky scene and the quandary in which they found themselves (long before cell phones were commonplace). Suddenly they saw headlights approaching and a long black vehicle pulled up. It was a hearse, with a coffin clearly visible in the back. The story went on and on, with the tension mounting as the creepy undertaker helped change the tire. The punch line came right after the young man thanked the good Samaritan. The undertaker replied, “You are certainly welcome. We’d be the last ones on earth to let you down!”

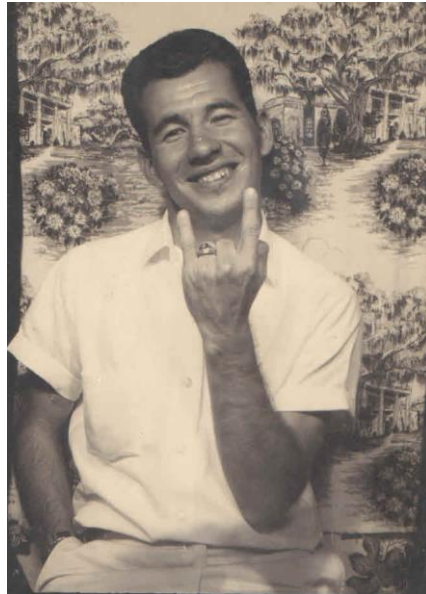
Dick was a very popular young man in high school. Several of his friends were from the more affluent families in Charlestown. Jeffrey Simpson, son of a Charlestown lawyer, was a good friend, as was Jerry Dickerson. Dick and Jerry were student managers on the CHS Pirates basketball team. Dick told me a story about how he really messed up on a trip to Aurora for a basketball game. When they opened the trunk that was normally packed with the team's suits, it was empty. Dick had forgotten to pack them. Fortunately, the Aurora team graciously loaned their "away" uniforms to the Pirates, so the game was played without further glitches.



Dick Bolton and Jerry Dickerson with Coach John Wood and the Pirates in 1957

There was a great dichotomy between the somewhat rundown Bolton house at 2804 Highway 3 and the homes of some of Dick's Charlestown friends. He must have been embarrassed by that (and perhaps by his sister Betty), because he would try to keep his friends from coming in the house when they arrived to pick him up. He was spoiled by Mamaw, who would bring food to him while he lay on the bed in the front bedroom. His older brother, Bill Bolton, also gave Dick special treatment, and he made sure that Dick was always dressed in the latest fashion while in high school.

In his teenage years, there was a bit of a mean streak in Dick, and he concocted derogatory nicknames for some members of the family. His sister Betty he called "Sack," and his nephew Mike Kelley was christened "Monk". In fact, he didn't have much tolerance for the feeble-minded Betty during that period of his life. His joking and nicknaming even extended to some of his closest friends. In late August 1962, Dick, David Payne, Charles Watts, and Jerry Dickerson drove west to visit Yellowstone National Park. When they returned, while telling us about the beautiful scenes and the adventures they had, Dick paused to say, "We would have seen much more if 'Peterson' hadn't forced us to stop every half-mile to have another rapturous orgasm looking at the natural wonders." I was glad to see that Dick developed a more tolerant and accepting attitude toward people in later life.



Edward Earl (Dick) Bolton

The talent that his sisters and other family members exhibited for music was found in Dick also. He had a beautiful voice, and he performed in several musical events in high school. During his senior year, he sang "Wonderful Copenhagen" at a joint band and chorus concert. At another recital in the high school band room, he was introduced by band director Paul O. Sawyer. Before he entered the room, Mr. Sawyer told the audience that Dick had one of the most beautiful voices he had ever heard, but then he qualified his statement by saying that he will never do anything with it. Dick sang "On the Road to Mandalay" that evening, and he was in great form. Wikipedia notes that famous baritone singers have recorded that song, and there is even a popular version of it done by Frank Sinatra.

There is a family story that the Mormon Tabernacle Choir found out about Dick's vocal talent and attempted to recruit him. Dick got wind of the fact that they were coming to the house, and when they knocked on the door, he was said to have hidden under the bed.

Dick also appeared in plays in high school. He was in "Waltz Time" in February 1956 and played two roles in the "The Robe" the following year. It was during that solemn performance that Dick muffed his lines, but he cracked up the audience by ending with ". . . or something like that!"

Dick never did much with his voice after high school, as far as I know. I tried to get him to sing "The Lord's Prayer" at our wedding in Bloomington in June 1973, but he refused, saying he hadn't sung in so long that his voice would probably crack. I heard him sing the piece at his high school graduation ceremony in 1957. During that performance, he had a mild seizure, and Jerry Dickerson stepped forward to gently push his head down. He picked up where he had stopped and never missed a beat to the end of the song.

This was typical of other petit mal seizures that I witnessed. Dick would be talking about something, his head would move back slowly, and his eyes look upward. He would hold that pose for a short time and then come out of it, continuing his thought at the point where it was interrupted by the seizure. I never witnessed a grand mal seizure, but Dick did occasionally have them. One of those occurred while he was playing basketball at an outdoor court near the Jonathan Jennings project, and it scared the daylight out of his friends.

There was a brief period during the early 1960s when Dick and I were college classmates at the IU Southeast campus, then located in downtown Jeffersonville. We had a class or two together, but I don't think he took many more classes after that. I had blown my opportunities for good scholarships at colleges or universities by accepting an appointment to the U. S. Coast Guard Academy. At this point, I won't dwell on why I decided to leave the academy except to say that I left under honorable conditions. A later chapter tells more about my Coast Guard experiences, but for now, let me return to how Dick helped me out when I returned from the academy.

Dick was working as a stock boy in the Gateway Supermarket in Jeffersonville, when I made it from the Louisville train station to Jeffersonville on my return from New London, Connecticut. I stopped in the store to see if Dick was there. We exchanged a few words, and I told him I was going to hitchhike to Charlestown 10 miles away. I had no luck getting a ride until finally someone from Charlestown picked me up after Dick told him to give me a lift.

It was difficult to find a job in the area at the time. I had a chance to go to work on the assembly line at the Colgate plant in Clarksville, but that didn't pan out. Several of my Charlestown friends and I had applied, and we all made the first cut. We had to go to New Albany to take a test for manual dexterity and have a physical exam. There were several aspects to the dexterity test: putting washers on a series of bolts, turning pegs over with one hand and putting them back in holes on a wooden board, etc. I noticed one guy who was really ripping through these tasks, but I didn't think much about it. The physical exam was another matter. Colgate must have been interested in how much pain we could endure because the sadistic doctor who performed the prostate exam seemed to be prospecting for gold in our dental fillings with his enthusiastic probing of our rectums. I remember returning to the Colgate office and looking at Charlie Watts when I sat down. The pain was obvious on my face, and Charlie just shook his head and looked up. Called in for the final interview, I was shocked to hear these

dreaded words: “We can’t hire you because you flunked the finger dexterity test.” I was without work in the Louisville area until Dick got me on part-time at the Gateway Supermarket. Eventually, I got a job as a lab technician at the Devoe & Raynolds Paint Factory in Louisville, but I have always been grateful to Dick for helping me get over that rough spot in my life.

After high school, Dick dated one of my classmates, Judy Cummings for quite a while. We double-dated for the senior prom in 1961.



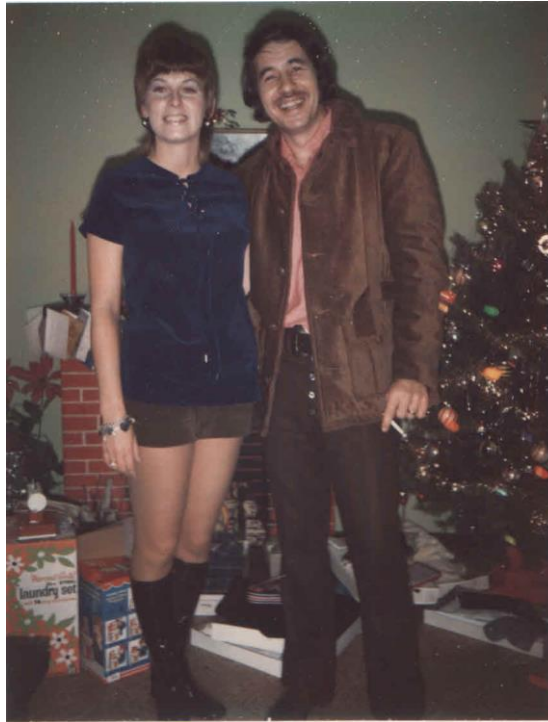
Gary Wiggins, Sandy Couch, Judy Cummings, and Dick Bolton in 1961

I lost track of Dick after I started working in Louisville. I do recall one incident when I had a date with a girl who was really interested in Dick. She was older than me and lived in Otisco. We had been to a movie in Louisville and stopped at one of the drive-in restaurants in Jeffersonville. It was a steamy, rainy night, and as we sat in the car waiting for our order, we noticed Dick getting into a car just opposite us. He was very drunk. Our windows fogged up in my car, and the girl very carefully cleaned the window on her side, so she could get a better view of Dick. That was the only date I had with her.

Later, Dick sometimes worked with our friend Charles Watts to lay carpet while Charlie was getting started in his carpet business, but he eventually joined Uncle Tip as an employee of General Electric in Louisville, a job he held until he retired. Dick had many stories to tell about his employment there, quite a few centered on the stupidity of the management. I got the impression that Dick was somewhat of a peacemaker and negotiator between labor and management at GE, a role that he might not have been particularly comfortable in.

Dick was married to another of my high school classmates, Janet Cheesman, on June 21, 1968. I think Janet was briefly married to a sailor (in Washington state?), but I can find no official record of that. She and Dick must have been good friends before that time because Janet’s mother asked Dick to go to Washington to bring Janet back to Charlestown. A July 7, 1972 letter that Aunt Marg wrote to Seabay speaks of Dick and Janet’s plans to adopt a child, something that did not happen. Their daughter Stephanie Lanai Bolton was born on September 12, 1976.

I'm not sure when Dick and Janet split up. He married Donna Fay (Bottorff) Sampson in January 1985, and Janet married James W. Barrett in 1994.



Dick and Janet Bolton in 1971

After Bill Bolton's stint at Pendleton, he returned to Charlestown a somewhat changed man. A certain prison-influenced cocky tone had made its way into his voice. He never talked to me about his time at Pendleton, but Mom visited him and Buddy Kelley while they were there. She brought back the news that Buddy was a volunteer fireman at the facility. Bill said Buddy loved to fight fires so much that he would literally drop the fork from his hand during mealtimes if the fire alarm went off. One Christmas while we were living on Halcyon Road Bill brought me an odd present. It was a comb and brush set that was clearly made and packaged for a lady.

Bill Bolton was a rounder. He kept in his dresser drawer an award certificate that reads:

In recognition of a unique, tall-walkin', smooth-talkin'  
master of the fine art of Going With The Flow  
**William Bolton**  
is hereby inducted into membership in the  
George Dickel Tennessee Whisky Water Conservation Society,  
Acquiring herewith all the rights and privileges appropriate  
to such a rare and dedicated drop-by-drop appreciation of  
precious liquids of All kinds.

Bill had women friends, but he never married. Next to his bed he kept a large picture of a woman that we knew as “Big Momma”. She was a married woman, and Bill was always careful not to visit her when there was a chance her husband was around. She was probably the same woman that Bill had me drive him to see in the Greyhound Supermarket parking lot in Clarksville one day. This was during a period when his driver’s license was suspended. (2) When we reached the parking lot, his lady friend appeared with her teen-aged daughter. Bill and she got in the front seat and the girl and I were in the back seat, awkwardly trying not to notice that Bill and her mother were making out.

Bill didn’t shy away from sharing his lovemaking talents with black girls. Uncle Tip told me how he and Bill went to a black section of Louisville that Uncle Tip had never been in. Obviously, Bill had been there, because as Uncle Tip said, “As soon as Bill sat down, the prettiest little n----- girl I’ve ever seen ran over and jumped right in Bill’s lap and said ‘William Paxton, how the hell are you?’”

In August 2013, Dick told me a story about Bill Bolton as he and I drove from his house to Grayson’s Funeral Home in Charlestown to arrange my mother’s funeral. It underscores Bill’s lack of racial prejudice in matters sexual. He said that Bill was enjoying the charms of a black married lady in Louisville one day when he heard the woman’s husband storming up the stairs. Without hesitation Bill jumped out the window and tore off down the street “buck naked,” so to speak. Somehow Bill managed to convince some sympathetic locals to give him enough loose change to call Dick and apprise him of the desperate situation he was in. Dick came to the rescue with a new set of clothes drove away quickly, eluding the jealous husband who had been combing the side streets for his wife’s lover.



Dick Bolton and David Grace after Nell (Bolton) Crowley’s Funeral in August 2013

I've wondered why Dick would tell me such a story, given the circumstances in which it was told, and I've concluded that this is what we do a lot in our family. When some particularly sad or troubling occurrence faces us, we tell a funny story or a joke. Dick had lots of them.

Bill Bolton started working at P. Lorillard Tobacco Company in Louisville in 1955. He was well thought of in the company and worked there until he retired. He told me once how nothing was ever wasted at Lorillard. The loose tobacco scraps that fell on the floor during the manufacturing process were swept up and fed back into the processing machinery.

One of the mementoes he kept from the plant was a metal medallion labeled "Lorillard Safety Award Louisville Plant." Something he apparently did not value as highly was the pewter pitcher engraved "WILLIAM BOLTON" that may have been a retirement gift from Lorillard. I found it in the garage after he died. Bill had been using it to pour oil in his car and other machinery.

The old house at 2804 Highway 3 was Bill's home until Mamaw, Papaw, and Betty Joyce Bolton died. Bill then tore down everything, leaving only a gazebo that was erected over what was the front porch of the old house. He bought a new modular home and had it placed just north of the old home. Gone was the cockroach-infested house to which he had eventually added his own bedroom and installed a bathroom. Gone too was the large shed out back where Betty went when she was angry or upset or was being punished for something she had done. Also gone was the workshop that Papaw had out back where he did his woodworking and kept his tools.

Bill lived in his new home until his death from cancer in 1993. Bill dipped snuff and was a smoker. He initially did not want any treatment for the disease. When he did seek medical help, he was told that he could be cured. Bill clung to that hope and cursed the doctors before he died for lying to him, as he phrased it.

The title to the property of the old home place had been signed over to Bill Bolton just before Papaw died. He passed it on to my mother, who lived there for 10 years before entering a nursing home in Nashville, Indiana. My wife and I bought the 1/3 shares of the property owned by Dick and my mother. My younger son, Tom, lived there for a few years after that. We then sold it to Kenny Lemmons, a good neighbor who had always been very kind to my grandmother, often mowing the large field that separated their properties without charge.





The Gazebo at 2804 Highway 3

#### NOTES

1. "World War II Comes to Indiana: The Indiana Army Ammunition Plant." Part 1: <https://blog.history.in.gov/world-war-ii-comes-to-indiana-the-indiana-army-ammunition-plant-part-i/> Part 2: <https://blog.history.in.gov/world-war-ii-comes-to-indiana-the-indiana-army-ammunition-plant-part-ii/>
2. I think that the court listing for a William F. Bolton on p. 1 of the *Charlestown Courier* for February 11, 1960 is our Bill Bolton. He was arrested for drunken driving and driving while his license was suspended. Sentenced to 10 days on each charge and fined \$25. Drivers license suspended for 2 years.

For the most recent version of this chapter (2/14/2023), see:

<https://hoosierpewter.com/WBS/WBS-0015.pdf>