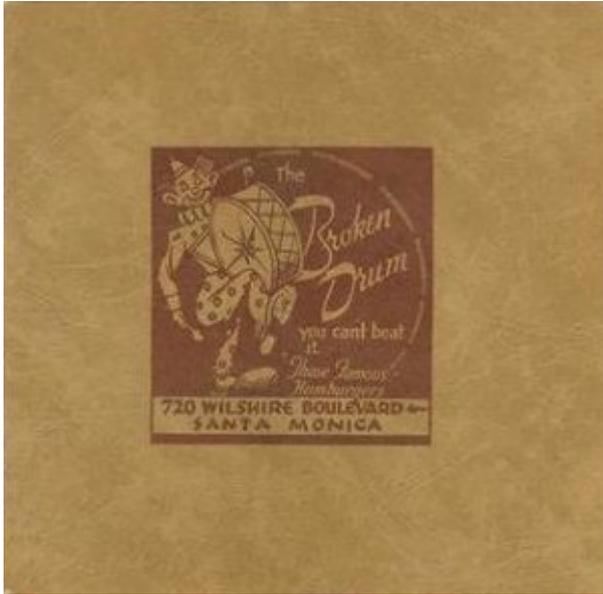


Tales From the End of the Bus Line: The Broken Drum

written by Megan and William Broughton | July 6, 2016



[Tales From the End of the Bus Line](#) is a long-distance collaboration between daughter/father Megan and Bill Broughton to collect the many adventures of Bill's young adulthood in Van Nuys, California. Installments (and photos that should or shouldn't see the light of day, if we're lucky) are penned by the two of them.

I was on the Kawasaki, so it must have been '81 or '82, going over the Sepulveda pass to see Nancy. It was her birthday and I had called to see if she wanted to go to dinner. She'd said, "Sure, come on over and we'll walk down Wilshire to the Drum." It all sounded so simple, and really it was, but I've managed to foul up simple before, and today would not prove different.

Nancy was living on 9th Street in Santa Monica, a couple hundred yards north of Wilshire, in a top floor apartment that Bob and I had once moved a sofa bed out of. You know those things, they look like a couch, but you pull a handle or twist a lever or something and out pops a small and uncomfortable bed with a razor thin mattress that's a Chiropractors best friend. The walkway in front of her door was about three feet wide, with a drop from there down to the pool, and this thing was six feet long, so just getting it out the door called for a great deal of faith in the stability of the railing and cursing for smashed fingers. It turns out this was the easy part. As we started down the stairs, we discovered you don't really need to pull a lever or twist something to open these up; they can fly open at anytime, and this one did, thumping its way down the stairs and dragging us with it, making this a new experience for the both of us, and probably for the sofa as well. I was remembering this as I climbed those same stairs, especially since there were still marks on the railings. Nancy wasn't quite ready (I think she had

just got home from work), so Earl, her boyfriend at the time, and I talked for a while.

He said I would like the Drum – it was a nice place and had been on Wilshire between Lincoln and 7th for almost forty years, that they were open until four in the morning and had the best hamburgers in town. Earl had lived in Santa Monica I think about ten years by this point, and still does, in a rent controlled apartment down on 4th somewhere with rent so low it would make your eyes bulge out. As we walked out to Wilshire and headed west, it was still light enough to see down to the restaurant's big sign of a Clown carrying a drum with one side caved in. To the right of him were the words "The Broken Drum" and underneath "You can't beat it."

We went in and got a booth, and a waitress handed out menus and a wine list. Why Nancy and Earl had me choose the wine I have no idea. I didn't know the first thing about wine, New Hampshire not really being known for any such libation except perhaps Mogen David, which is made from Concord grapes. To this day, if you hand me a glass of wine and ask my opinion, all I can do is tell you what it reminds me of (although I've been told I'm usually not too far off in my evaluations). Anyway, I asked what they were going to eat, knowing enough that whites go with fish and reds with meat. I only knew this because I'd seen Sean Connery as James Bond throw Robert Shaw as the Russian bad guy around a train compartment in a movie, for ordering red wine with fish. My learning comes from the weirdest places. We all agreed on pasta dishes with meat sauces, so I started in the Burgundy section and went downwards on the list. At some point I went into the Italian wines without realizing it, asking for one that caught my eye and pronouncing it to the poor waitress as "she-an-tee." She asked me to point, then smothered a smile and nodded, saying, "That's actually a really nice choice for what you're having for dinner." Then she left, still smiling. Earl, with a puzzled look, asked to see the wine list, read it and then said, with his own smile, "Bill that's "chianti," its Italian." Whoops. The wine came, was uncorked and tasted, and did go well with dinner, even if a moron picked it. Nancy got a lot of mileage out of that one, ribbing me about it for years, calling it the birthday gift that kept on giving. All Earl ever said about it was that it was a very good choice of wine, regardless.

The embarrassments had not finished yet though. When it came time to pay the bill, I found out I had lost my checkbook, and had no cash with me. Earl very graciously picked up the tab, and although we kept our eyes peeled all the way back to Nancy's, we didn't see it. We looked in Nancy's apartment as well, but still found nothing. Because I didn't carry a wallet, just the billfold, everything was in there. It was to show up in a most unusual fashion. Two days later, on Monday when I went downstairs to go to the bank and tell them I'd lost my checkbook, I found it tucked under the bungee cord on my Kawasaki's rear seat. To this day I have no idea how it got there, one of my neighbors in the apartment building must have found it on the walkway and put it there for me. Why they didn't knock on my door I have no idea, but my driver's license and all the cash I had tucked into it was still there. Call it fate, karma, just plain ol' dumb luck, or what you will. I rode back over to Santa Monica and wrote out a check to Earl. And now, thirty-five

years later I can say, "Thanks again, pal."

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Since moving to Napa, there's been a tacit assumption amongst friends and family that I "know wine now" and "can tell what's what." I know how to read pricetags, how to select a wine based off whether or not I like the NorCal town it's from, and I know that red is better in most every occasion except for when you are socially obligated. Really, it's not based on the food you're eating but rather based on what you want. And I want first: wine, and second: red. So there are all my secrets.

There are plenty of people in Napa who do "know what's what," and I very happily let them do their thing to great effect. This allows me to not assume an iota of viticultural responsibility, a scenario of which I am a pretty big fan. Do not forget, I am my father's daughter and while he always feels compelled to swish and mutter, "Berries. Oak. Pine? Mmm butterscotch" and I tend to take the "drink quickly and silently" route, we are, after all, similar people. Typically, the person who orders the wine is served the first taste and I have come to depend on someone else having to do that while I continue pretending to consider anything but the cheapest menu item. But last birthday, the waiter had a different idea and presented me with the tiniest sip of rosé while two aforementioned pros looked on. The first thought was, "I was right, this is awkward." and the second, "I obviously need more." I said, "Oh, this is great" (as if anyone has ever said anything else) and so the world kept turning and I confirmed for the nth time that I live in Napa. Because in the end, really, it's just some damn wine and it's fine (especially if you know how to pronounce "chianti," which, to be fair, is likely the result of this story being told many years ago).

Broughton Parenting: 1

World: (undisclosed)