

# Heaven needed a great lead trumpet player!



William C. "Billy" Hodges passed away peacefully on Sunday, June 1, after bravely battling cancer. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 4, 1928, Billy played trumpet professionally for over 50 years, even in high school, where he traveled with bands during summer vacation. He played in some of the greatest of the old big bands, including The Dan Berry, the Erv Hinkle, Sauter/Finegan, and Ray McKinley bands, among others, and did two tours with Benny Goodman. Billy joined the U.S. Air Force and was chosen as the first lead trumpet player in the U.S. Air Force Airmen of Note Band, (formerly the Glenn Miller Air Force Dance Band). He also played the trumpet in the "Glen Miller Story" starring Jimmy Stewart.

In 1958, Bill came to Las Vegas, playing all over town for such great acts as the original Rat Pack, among others. He played in the house bands at several hotels, and was working at the El Rancho when it burned down in 1960. He married former wife Bonnie in 1960, and they had two children.

After joining the house band at the Riviera, he continued to play local TV specials, such as the old Merv Griffin show, and the MDA telethons. He played lead trumpet and served as Band Manager at the Riviera Hotel for many years, before retiring to enjoy his favorite hobbies, including photography, boating, and making the best custom mouthpieces to be found.

He was widely considered to be the best lead trumpet player ever in Vegas, and he set the standard for others who followed. Billy was very modest about his musical achievements and had the remarkable ability to talk to anyone. He had a brilliant mind and a great sense of humor. Bill was a gifted musician, a devoted father and a loyal friend to those who had the privilege of knowing him. He is survived by his son and daughter, a sister, and two grandchildren. He will be missed by many.