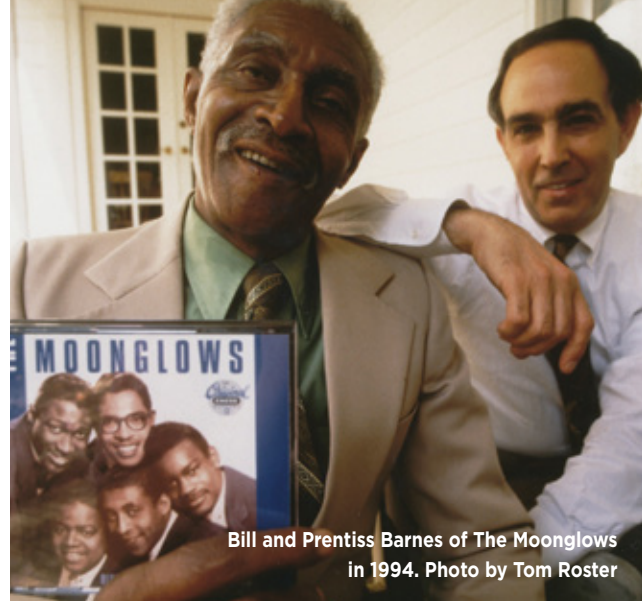




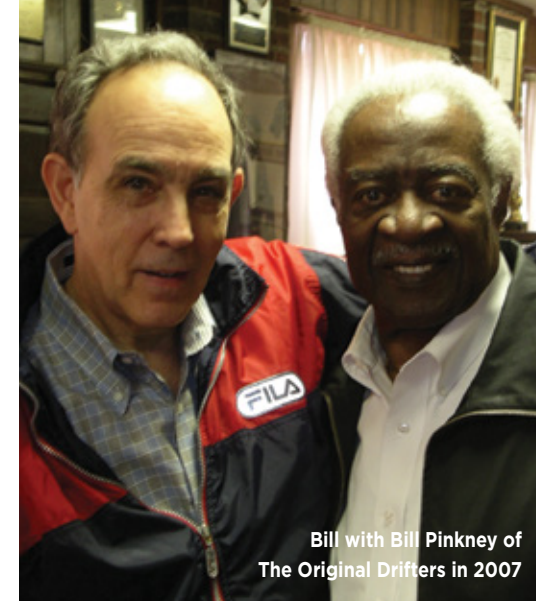
Bill as a guest of The Moonglows at their 2000 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction



Bill and Prentiss Barnes of The Moonglows in 1994. Photo by Tom Roster



Bill singing with The Moonglows in Jackson in 2002



Bill with Bill Pinkney of The Original Drifters in 2007



Bill performed with The Moonglows at the Vocal Group Hall of Fame

# “THIS *Magic Moment*: MY JOURNEY OF FAITH, FRIENDS, AND THE FATHER’S LOVE”

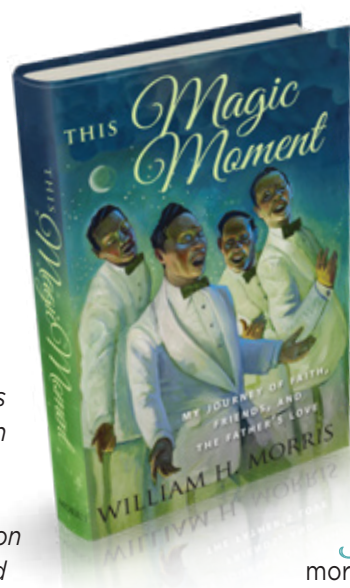
## A conversation with Mississippi author William H. (Bill) Morris

by Sandra M. Buckley

By all definitions, William H. (Bill) Morris is a successful man, with a prosperous insurance firm, beautiful family and famous friends. But as he will tell you, there is much more to his life's story. Recently, Morris debuted his memoir, “*This Magic Moment: My Journey of Faith, Friends, and the Father’s Love*,” a captivating account of his lifelong love of music and unlikely friendships with doo-wop music icons of the 1950s and 1960s that divinely led to transformation of lives and the music industry. It is a chronicle full of heart, humor and healing. I invite you to join me in this memorable conversation with him about life, love, friendship, faith and “magic moments” that inspired his book.

**Q: When did your interest in music begin, and how did you come to appreciate the distinct styles of the doo-wop era?**

*A:* I grew up in a house filled with music, and I loved all types — from classical and big band to gospel and rock and roll. I was introduced to doo-wop and R&B music as a teenager, about the same time I was starting to attend dances. These were passionate love songs with beautiful harmonies, and most importantly, ideally suited for slow dancing. I began listening to WOKJ in Jackson, WLAC in Nashville and WDIA in Memphis, which were some of the only stations accessible in the area that played the African American sounds of rhythm and blues



and doo-wop. I would also go to Capital Music in Downtown Jackson to sample the newest 45s. My friends and I had never heard anything like this music. We absolutely loved it and could not get enough. For many of us, the love affair with that era of music has never died, and we still enjoy listening to those great songs today.

**Q: When you were a student at Ole Miss, you spent your summers back home in Jackson putting on dances to earn money. How did that entrepreneurial experience help shape your future — both professionally and personally?**

*A:* My father wisely decided that I would benefit more from my college education if I had “skin in the game,” which meant paying for half of college myself. One of my jobs was working on a loading crew at the Pine Sol plant, where I was the only white guy. They played R&B and doo-wop music while we worked, and I came to love that music even more. Before long, I realized that organizing and promoting dances was a much better option to earn money for college. I could do something I truly enjoyed while raising the money I needed. To be successful, I had to pick the dates and locations, hire the right groups, know what to charge and execute all of the promotion. Having this type of entrepreneurial experience at such an early age instilled both ambition and confidence in me that has served me well throughout my adult life.

**Q: Why did you decide to pursue a profession in insurance instead of sticking with music promotion?**

*A:* Fourteen of the dances I hosted were big successes. The one that wasn’t made me realize that music promotion was an unpredictable career and would not give the financial stability I wanted to support an eventual wife and family. My father was a successful insurance executive who was devoted to the welfare of his clients, and they loved him for it. I decided to follow his path, which proved to be the right decision. I am proud and grateful for the success I have had with the firm, and as I discovered, it was possible for me to also pursue my passions for music, photography and writing at the same time.

**Q: As fate would have it, your insurance career later had you crossing paths with legendary performers of the doo-wop era, The Moonglows. Because of this, you had multiple opportunities to sing on stage with them. How did that happen?**

*A:* While in Washington, D.C. for an insurance meeting in 1980, I discovered The Moonglows were performing in town. The Moonglows are considered by many in the know to be one of the best of the doo-wop era. They sounded amazing, just like

their records. At intermission, I felt compelled to meet them and before long, we were joking around and singing together. The leader of the group, Bobby Lester, heard something in my voice and insisted I do a song with them in the next set. While I was passionate about their music, I never considered myself a singer, especially not at this level. I had never held a microphone in my hand. When they called me up to the stage, I tried to decline, but they insisted. It obviously turned

“

**If you choose to only have friends that look like you, think like you and act like you ... you are going to miss rich blessings.**

out well, because other professional singers who had come to hear The Moonglows wanted to know what group I was in. It was a huge thrill for me, but also something I recognized as too extraordinary not to have some purpose in my life. A year later, I found out what that purpose was. It was to give me something that I could use

to connect with Prentiss Barnes, one of the group’s original singers, who was now living in Jackson, broken and in need of a friend. My eventual friendship with Prentiss led to friendships with Harvey Fuqua (also of The Moonglows), Bill Pinkney (The Original Drifters) and reconnecting with Rufus McKay of The Red Tops. Music was our common bond, and we loved to sing together. I was blessed to be included singing with them on many different stages, including major venues.





**Q: Tell us about Prentiss Barnes and how you met. Was there any racial tension in the beginning?**

**A:** Prentiss Barnes, who was from Magnolia, Mississippi, was the original bass singer with The Moonglows. He was retired from the group when I sang with them in Washington, D.C., but that still played a huge role in our becoming friends. Almost exactly a year after that event in D.C., I picked up the Clarion Ledger to see the cover story about Prentiss who was now living in Jackson. He had been disabled from a car/train accident a decade earlier and was physically, financially and spiritually broken. The same voice that had urged me to meet The Moonglows now urged me to help Prentiss. When I called, he seemed uninterested until I told him about singing with The Moonglows. A connection was made that led to a three-decade friendship with one of the sweetest men I have ever known. The joy of witnessing his transformation from that low point in his life to later being able to accompany him to historic events like his induction in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will be with me forever.

There was never racial tension with me and Prentiss or with any of the other guys. We had a shared passion for music and a shared faith in God and that was all that was important. We became friends in the truest sense. Whatever differences we had in terms of race, backgrounds, views ... just did not matter.

**Q: Is racial harmony a focus of this book?**

**A:** One of the greatest things about this story — a white Mississippi businessman becoming dear friends with four African American legendary singers — is that even though race makes the story more interesting, it is not the focus of the story. We all loved and cared for each other, and we all brought beneficial things to our relationships. A message that I do hope comes through from the book is that when people focus on what they have in common and not what they don't, friendships can thrive. If you choose to only have friends that look like you, think like you and act like you ... you are going to miss rich blessings.

**Q: What was the biggest surprise for you on this unexpected journey you took with some of American music's greatest talents?**

**A:** The biggest surprise was that these amazing singers liked my voice and let me sing with them. From that first time singing with The Moonglows in Washington, D.C., later singing onstage with The Original Drifters and the greatest thrill of all — performing with original members of The Moonglows on stage at Boston Symphony Hall. Professional singers do not let "amateurs" on stage to sing with them ... and especially not legendary singers who have achieved the pinnacles of success. Those experiences were far beyond anything I could have dreamed would ever happen.

**Q: Why did you title your book "This Magic Moment"?**

**A:** "This Magic Moment" is not only the name of one of the Drifters most famous songs, it is a metaphor for life. We have many "magic moments" in our lives that lead to other "magic moments" if we take the time to recognize them. Sometimes, it is only when we reflect back that we realize how everything worked so perfectly together to bring about a divine purpose.

**Q: You journaled every morning for the past 38 years. Was that instrumental in composing this memoir?**

**A:** I could have never written the book without my journal entries. I wrote about what had taken place the day before, things that were said, the emotions I was feeling at the time. I would read those entries at the end of each year and be amazed to see what had happened and how connected everything was. If this or that had not happened exactly as it did, then the next thing would not have happened and so on. I call it my quiet time. I spend time virtually every morning reading scripture and other inspirational literature followed by writing longhand in my journal. I write about my friends and family, reflections on what I have read and most of all I express my gratitude. I consider my journals my love letter to the Lord, and I have written over 3,000 legal size pages thus far.



Bill with Mary Wilson

*"I love that Bill is chronicling his friendships with Prentiss Barnes and Harvey Fuqua (both of The Moonglows) and Bill Pinkney (The Drifters), sharing his magic moments with them and other contemporaries." — Mary Wilson, original member of The Supremes and author of "Dreamgirl: My Life as a Supreme" and "Supreme Glamour"*

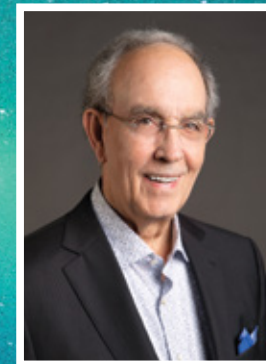
**Q: Who do you hope that this book will appeal to, and why?**

**A:** My intent in writing this book is to bless people and to celebrate the lives of these music legends who left such an indelible impression on my soul. Some readers will enjoy reminiscing about the times, music, people and events included in the book that are also a part of their own memories. Others will appreciate learning more about doo-wop and early R&B music, its history, Mississippians' contributions and the impact it has had on our culture. My greatest hope is that all readers will be reminded and inspired to realize the power that music, friendship and faith can have in our lives.

**Q: Has your family served as a strong support for you — not only of this book endeavor, but also of your longstanding friendships with these men?**

**A:** I am deeply blessed to have had Camille, my loving wife of 47 years, and my two beautiful daughters, Camille and Kathryn, share in this journey with me. They also came to know and love these dear friends and understood that my relationships with them were part of a greater plan. ✨

Visit [www.williammorrisauthor.com](http://www.williammorrisauthor.com) for more information.



**William H. (Bill) Morris**, a lifelong resident of Jackson, Mississippi, is the founder and president of The William Morris Group, an industry-leading insurance consulting and marketing firm. Because of his love for the R&B music of his youth, his ability to

sincerely connect with people and what he credits as divine leading, Morris developed deep friendships with members of two Rock and Roll Hall of Fame groups of the doo-wop era, The Moonglows and The Original Drifters, which he shares in his newest book, "This Magic Moment: My Journey of Faith, Friends, and the Father's Love." As president of Hallelujah Productions, Morris had the privilege of producing The Original Drifters' first two gospel CDs. He has also published a coffee-table book, "Ole Miss at Oxford: A Part of Our Heart and Soul." Morris and his wife, Camille, have two grown daughters and five grandchildren.

**MEMBERSHIP ADDS MORE TO YOUR ADVENTURE!**

Unlimited Admission for 13 Months  
VIP Express Entry  
10% off Purchases at the Gulf Shop & Café  
Discounted Guest Tickets  
10% Off Birthday Parties & Summer Camps

**ENHANCED GUEST EXPERIENCES**

Exclusive Exhibit Preview Parties  
Member Appreciation Events

**AND MORE!**

MISSISSIPPI AQUARIUM  
[msaquarium.org](http://msaquarium.org)  
f t i n

2100 E. Beach Blvd. | Gulfport, MS 39507  
©2020 Mississippi Aquarium. All Rights Reserved. A 501(c)(3) Not for Profit Corporation.

SAVE 10% WHEN YOU BUY 4 OR MORE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIPS

**\$86** PLUS TAX  
GROUP PRICE PER PERSON

**INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP**

**\$95** PLUS TAX

<http://bit.ly/ElectricMSAQ>  
Passcode: COAST2020  
Offer Expires: 6/30/2020