

LIFE IS LIKE A SAVINGS ACCOUNT

By A. James Fuller



William Kiesel '63

His office on the twenty-third floor of the Bank One Building in downtown Indianapolis offers a panoramic view of the city. From this lofty position, one can take in the spectacle of the city spread out below along with the distant vistas. It is a fitting point of observation for William Kiesel, a senior vice president at Smith Barney which is a division of Citigroup Global Markets, Inc. But it is also an appropriate view for Bill Kiesel, the servant philanthropist. A 1963 graduate of Indiana Central College, Kiesel applies his financial and planning skills in effective ways to help guide a university, a church, a hospital, and a community into the future. His personal philosophy reflects his life of service: "Life is like a savings account; the more you put in, the more your interest pays, and then there is more to take out at the other end." As

the vice president of the Board of Trustees for the University of Indianapolis, the chair of the Development Committee for the St. Francis Hospital Foundation, a member of the Board for Behavior Corporation, and an active member of the United Church of Christ, Bill Kiesel lives out his alma mater's motto, "Education for Service."

Kiesel traveled a long way to get to that office in the downtown skyscraper. Born in 1938 in Madison, Indiana, he experienced a difficult childhood. While his paternal grandfather was the president of a small-town bank, his maternal grandfather always listed his profession as "painter/wallpaper hanger." In reality, he was a gambler who ran a regular poker game in Madison. Kiesel's father worked as a truck driver and, when the boy was about six years old, the family moved to Indianapolis, where they lived in the Fountain Square area in a rough neighborhood. In the midst of these financially-challenging times, Kiesel spent many months living with his grandparents in southern Indiana. When his father was about sixty years old, the trucking company for which he worked went bankrupt, and he found out that he had no retirement savings. So, he went to work driving the delivery truck for Madison Avenue Florists. During this time period, Bill's father worked in the maintenance department at Indiana Central College. Kiesel attended the Indianapolis Public Schools, progressing to Manual High School before transferring to Southport High School as junior. He graduated from high school in 1956, got a job, and got married.

This was the traditional route to take in his family. But Kiesel, a Hoosier through and through, loved to play basketball, so he took a few classes at the Purdue extension campus in Indianapolis, mostly so he could play on their team. He also worked at Eli Lilly in the shipping department and hoped to move up in the company someday. In 1958, a friend called to tell him about the new evening division at Indiana Central College. This program offered night courses for working adults, an innovative idea at the

time. Kiesel's first reaction was to say, "But they don't have a basketball team!" Yet, the evening division classes caught his interest to the point that he soon enrolled as a business major. This was not his first experience with Indiana Central, however. Sometime before, he had gone with a friend to play basketball at the college. The two young men joined in a game and were enjoying the chance to play indoors during the winter. Before very long, however, the police arrived, led by professor Robert Brooker, who announced that the basketball players were not supposed to be in the gym. When it was discovered that Kiesel was not a student at the College, he was arrested and taken to jail, where his parents were called. He found himself in trouble with his father as well as the school and the law. That was his first experience with Indiana Central and professor Brooker, who later became a good friend and client.

Later on, enrolled at Indiana Central, Bill Kiesel fell in love with the campus atmosphere and the academic values of the school. He discovered that "education was not the horrible monster that [he] thought it was." Enrollment in the evening division allowed him to work full-time and still earn his degree. There was almost no interaction between the day and evening students, however, which did not allow him to become fully immersed in campus life. But he thinks that he got "the perfect education," as the liberal arts core gave him a broad spectrum of learning and taught him value skills, while the business courses he took at night were often taught by business people who provided real-world experience as well as textbook knowledge.

Several professors from his college days stand out for Kiesel as exemplary, including historian Fred Hill, English professor Virginia Cravens, and sociologist Marvin Henricks. These and other instructors positively influenced the young man, who was greatly impressed by the fact that they took an interest in him. Although he didn't realize the importance of the individual attention and friendly atmosphere at the time, he experienced it more palpably a few years lat-



B

er when he enrolled in the graduate program at Butler University. He quickly came to miss the way that Indiana Central professors would sit down and talk with him about his life and his progress. The personal touch was extremely valuable, encouraging learning in ways that only individualized attention can provide. He remembers fondly the classes he took with economics professor Bob Coker, including a small, advanced class that often met in the professor's back yard. There, they discussed the subject while professor Coker's wife served cold drinks and cookies.

How differently academic enterprise proceeded at Butler! There, professors were not sympathetic to the life demands of working adults, and one instructor dressed down Kiesel in a humiliating fashion when he approached the faculty member about a minor problem. By that time, the combined stresses of work, home, and college were wearing on him and marking more significantly what he saw as the stark contrast between the warm friendliness of Indiana Central and the cold, unbending nature of Butler. He eventually earned a gradu-



ate certificate from the popular American Institute of Banking program at the Indiana University extension campus, and later returned to Indiana Central to teach as an adjunct professor in the evening division for about five years.

Kiesel continued to work in the shipping department at Lilly during the first couple of years he attended Indiana Central. One day, Harold Jennings, the head of the shipping department, inquired about Kiesel's academic progress and his future career plans. When the young man mentioned that he hoped to move up at Lilly, his supervisor told him, frankly, that progress would be very slow for someone without a baccalaureate degree and pointed out that many of his supervisors in the shipping department had BS and BA degrees. Kiesel had gone to college because he thought the education and degree credentials were necessary to get ahead in his career, but now his hopes for promotion and a long-term career at Eli Lilly were dashed. And, as a married man with a child on the way, he needed to find a new job right away. A relative arranged an interview for him at the Indiana National Bank where Bill accepted a position as a relief teller, substituting wherever he was

needed. He was thankful to find a job, though at a substantial pay cut. At Lilly, he had been paid \$65 per week while his bank salary amounted to only \$62 a week. The decrease in pay hurt the family finances to the point that Kiesel was forced to sell his 1957 Chevy convertible to pay for the medical care needed during his wife's pregnancy.

Despite the loss of his beloved car, the young man excelled in his new position at the bank. Not long after he started, the personnel director, Don Edwards, asked Kiesel for his thoughts about the training program. This was a routine procedure, but the young relief teller surprised his superiors by suggesting a new style of training. Based on the methods he had experienced at Lilly, Kiesel suggested that the bank adopt a plan that moved trainees around the bank, working in different jobs as they did so. This system allowed the new personnel to become more familiar with the overall operation and offered supervisors a chance to observe the newcomers and make better decisions to match employees' skills with the job requirements in each department. The new plan impressed the bank officials so much that they offered Kiesel a new job as Training Director. This appointment represented

a quantum leap up the personnel chain, yet Kiesel accepted the challenge, working in this position for about a year. Then, in 1963, he moved to the investment area of the bank, a service offered as a perk for good clients. At that time, the seven employees in the small investments office made investments as a favor to certain clients, not as profit-making venture. Kiesel soon changed the department's status, turning the service into a retail operation with sixty-five employees and a more intentional investment process, making the investments division an important profit center.

His experience at Indiana National Bank led to a new opportunity in 1970. A group of stockbrokers, who had left City Securities to start their own brokerage firm, asked Kiesel to help them with this venture by serving as manager of the bond department. He took the job and stayed with them for ten years, helping to grow the company and set up five branches that employed a total of sixty-five people. His job amounted to approximately 80 percent administrative work and 20 percent sales work. He realized that most of his income was coming from sales. The experience he gained in this position led to another career change in 1980, when he became a broker at Merrill Lynch, working mainly on institutional sales. The skills requisite for the brokerage position brought together those acquired in his past experiences, since he sold mostly to banks. Later in his ten years at Merrill Lynch, he moved to retail sales.

In 1990, Bill Kiesel changed offices again, this time moving to Smith Barney, where he has worked as a broker for the past fifteen years. Problems with another broker at Merrill Lynch led to his move. By the 1980s, Kiesel was deeply involved in work on behalf of the United Church of Christ, traveling frequently on church business. He arranged for the other broker to cover for him while he was away, but soon discovered that this procedure resulted in Kiesel losing commissioned dollars that were due to him. Although he eventually recovered the money, Kiesel disapproved of the office manager's handling of the situation, so he decided to leave the firm.

As a Financial Consultant, Bill Kiesel assists others on a daily basis in planning their financial futures. His clients trust him and take his advice on what to do with their money. His advice and planning has helped many individuals pave the way to their own security and prosperity. In addition to his professional endeavors, Bill Kiesel is also a philanthropist. Along with donating money to various community initiatives, he gives generously of his time and talent, especially to several institutions that are very dear to him, such as the United Church of Christ, the University of Indianapolis, Eden Theological Seminary, and the St. Francis Hospital Foundation. He serves on the governing boards of all four institutions and is usually involved in development, where his skills enable him to raise money for the institutions. Kiesel has supported other significant projects as well, for example, spending many years working for BehaviorCorps. Because of the nature of his career, he is “not afraid to talk about money or ask for it,” and he has helped raise millions of dollars for a wide range of philanthropic endeavors.

Church, school, and hospital all benefit greatly from his leadership and money-raising abilities. His conviction that “faith is important to service” underscores his essential commitment to Christ as a foundational element of his philanthropy. Bill has served on the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, the University of Indianapolis, since 1976, and he chairs the Development Committee for the St. Francis Hospital Foundation. He sees service as an extension of his faith, his Christianity functioning as a catalyst for his charity work. Personally, his faith has helped him in many ways, and, as he looks back over the course of his life, reflecting on growing up in a rough neighborhood, with family problems, and seeing where he is now, he says, “God has had a hand in it.” He remains dedicated to serving the larger Indianapolis community, observing that “because I’ve been blessed, I try to be a blessing.” He has a “passion and an energy for



things I get involved in” and he throws himself into the job. Bill is a high-energy person, “running 120 miles an hour, 26 hours a day,” and, on occasion, he has responded to requests for help by saying, “Don’t ask me unless you want me involved.” In addition to his faith, he thinks that his service comes from being an optimistic person. He is not one to be discouraged and jokes: “I tried being down and depressed once, but I didn’t like it and I’m not going to do that anymore.”

As he reflects upon meaningful advice to share with today’s students, Kiesel offers this recommendation: “Don’t worry yourself to death about what it is you’re going to do.” He believes that, while “we all need focus and direction in our lives, people wear themselves out trying to put themselves into a neat package.” And, he looks at himself as an example of how life changes, and we often end up in a different place than we imagined, having come to be there in ways we never dreamed possible. Kiesel urges students to remember that there is “a higher authority who helps us along the way.”

While he was not aware of the school’s

motto when he was a student, Bill believes that “Education for Service” is “the ethos, is the focus” at the University of Indianapolis. And he is convinced that it shapes the University’s graduates: “I think I can tell who the University of Indianapolis people are when I walk into an office or hospital.” He thinks that they “haven’t learned just a discipline—they’ve learned a lifestyle, and they’re more caring, more courteous, and they are not so self-centered.” Bill smiles as he reflects on today’s students and says, “They don’t yet, but will one day appreciate what the University of Indianapolis has done in their lives—not only in training for a discipline, but in a larger sense—preparing them for the world.” And he is confident that they “will be beneficial to the community and society as a whole.” With such convictions, Bill Kiesel invests in the lives of others, believing that his work is another deposit into the “savings account” called life.

— *Sease Award*¹ 1992

INDEX OF PHOTOGRAPHS: IDENTIFICATIONS & PERMISSIONS

William Kiesel '63

- A (p. 142) Photo of William Kiesel receiving his baccalaureate degree from President I. Lynd Esch in 1963. Personal photograph provided by William Kiesel and used with his permission.
- B (p. 143) William Kiesel (1993). Photograph by Miner-Baker Studio provided by William Kiesel and used with permission of Miner-Baker Studio.
- C (p. 144) William Kiesel as a little boy. Personal photograph provided by William Kiesel and used with his permission.
- D (p. 145) William Kiesel as an older boy fishing with a friend. Personal photograph provided by William Kiesel and used with his permission.