HOW IT ALL BEGAN: The Corliss Driving and Traffic School is proof that if you work hard and are committed to providing a good product, dreams do come true!

Our business opened in June of 1994, but the story begins many years before that...

Bill and Pam Corliss never had any idea that they would someday own a business. As teachers in the Visalia Unified School District, we had extremely rewarding careers in education. We actually met as young teachers at Mt. Whitney High School, had a “campus romance” for three years and were married in 1977. We both graduated from Cal State University, Chico, but never knew each other while we were there. During the 70’s, Visalia Unified did a lot of their recruiting for teachers from Chico, a well-respected school for education majors. We both ended up in Visalia, a place we had no idea existed, as we had both grown up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Our education careers have been exciting. Pam taught English and Photography for 35 years at Mt. Whitney and spent most of her career as the school’s yearbook adviser. Bill, an English major and History minor, started at Mt. Whitney teaching English and coaching football, wrestling and baseball. After seven years at Whitney and after serving as an Assistant Coach to Charlie Casale in the football program, Bill was excited to be offered the Head Football Coaching position at Exeter High School in 1980. After one year of running a successful program, the Head Football position opened at Golden West, and Bill came back to Visalia Unified, where he coached the Blazers and taught English. Bill continued as the Blazer coach for 7 years. During those years, Bill was also recruited to teach Behind-the-Wheel Drivers Training, which as we all remember, was done through the public school system.

Bill’s experience in classroom Drivers Ed started in 1985, when there was a need for an additional instructor at GWHS to teach an “overflow” class of Drivers Ed. Bill volunteered and that eventually led to his taking over all the Drivers Ed classes when the former Drivers Ed teacher retired. Bill’s story as “Mr. Drivers Ed” had started. Bill continued to teach all the Golden West Drivers Ed classes and also took over the coordination of the Drivers Training program. This eventually led to his being assigned as coordinator for all of the VUSD driving programs.

During this time, Bill became very active in CASE, the California Association of Safety Educators, a statewide organization of Public School Driving Educators. CASE promoted rigorous training and education standards for the teachers who were teaching the youth of California how to drive. At the end of the 1980’s and in the early 1990’s, CASE faced an unexpected challenge. Members of the Private Driving School Industry began working to convince the California Legislators that teenage driving instruction should not be provided and paid for by the public school system, but should be done by private driving schools. The battle began and Bill was one of the CASE members fighting at the state level to keep Drivers Training in the public school system. The conflict went on for a number of years and the story is long and complicated, but in the end, the private driving school industry was victorious and Drivers Training programs were removed from the public schools.

It was just about that time that our oldest daughter, Cristin, was ready to start her own Drivers Training. Bill was shocked to discover that the only educational requirement to teach drivers training in the private sector was that the instructor had to be 18 and a high school graduate. That did not make any sense to Bill, since the DMV required that a person riding in the car with a student had to be 25! After being encouraged by many fellow educators and friends in the community, Bill researched the possibility of opening his own “teacher based” driving school-a
driving school where he could provide the same quality of instructor that parents were used to receiving. After mountains of paperwork and red-tape, the Bill Corliss Driving School opened its “car” doors in June of 1994—with one car and one instructor...Bill Corliss. We were a very small fish in the big pond of previously established private driving schools. It was very hard to make ends meet in the early years...Cars and Insurance are expensive! But, we had so many friends in the Visalia community (who also had children of driving age) and we had made so many contacts during our many years teaching, advising and coaching that word of mouth began to spread fast and we quickly had to add instructors and cars. We have truly been a family business, with Bill coordinating all the driving-related activities, Pam working behind-the-scenes as the CFO, and even Cristin and our other daughter Carli washing the cars in the early years and now instructing themselves.

We are amazed at how fast the business has grown since 1994. Bill retired from Golden West in 2005 to concentrate on the Driving School full time. Interestingly enough, number one daughter Cristin was hired to take his place teaching Drivers Ed! Pam recently retired from Mt. Whitney to focus on some of the new avenues we are pursuing, including increased classroom Drivers Ed classes (we currently do all the Drivers Ed for CVC, VCS and Woodlake) and our new venture-Traffic (ticket) school. We are also starting to work in online programs, which is an adventure in itself.

As we have grown and have been required to change with the times during the past 15 years, we have never lost our focus. We are fellow parents, teachers and educators in the community first, and business owners second. Although it has been an adventure to get this business going, if you ask Bill, he would gladly take it back to the public school system if possible. But since that became impossible, we are committed to continue to provide a secure, trusting environment for your sons and daughters. We are also excited that both of our daughters have returned to Visalia after college. Cristin is an Assistant Principal at Green Acres Middle School and Carli is a History teacher and the Activities Director at Mt. Whiney. Our daughters will take our driving school into the future when we decide that we are just too tired!

We have continued to maintain our policy of hiring local teachers and law enforcement professionals as our instructors. We have had prior personal connections with all of our instructors as fellow colleagues and friends before we invited them to become instructors. We have also been blessed with a faithful and parent-friendly office manager, Susan Fawkes, who makes our lives a whole lot easier.

We welcome the opportunity to work with your son or daughter as they begin their driving adventure. As always, we appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Bill and Pam Corliss