



Remembering Bill Williamson



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I first met Bill when I was interviewing for a teaching position at Lewis & Clark, in January of 1977. I was a member of the University of Wisconsin faculty, then visiting at Vanderbilt, and looking to move to the Portland area. After fighting a snow storm to get to school for my interview, I then spent the day at the law school, bouncing from office to office for conversations with most of the faculty. The interviews seemed to go well, and at the end of the day Doug Newell and a few other faculty members took me out to a nice dinner at a French restaurant in Lake Oswego.

It was there that I met Bill for the first time. As I later discovered, he had spent the day hiding in his eyrie out in the Rex Hills above Newberg. Then Newell had called him in late afternoon to say, "The interviewee is going over pretty well; you better come in and meet him." I am sure Bill started out favorably disposed to me, because my successful performance during the day got him a free dinner in this excellent restaurant; whereas if I had bombed, he might have been cooking beans at home.

We hit it off right from the start. I cannot remember how we got on the topic, but we discovered that we both had a love of baseball, and both had played the APBA table baseball game for many years. Bill was intrigued to find someone with the same obscure hobby. He immediately wanted my opinion on some of the issues that APBA players find compelling but other people find either irrelevant or mindless: What is the importance of a pitcher's "Z" rating? Do you like a batter with a lot of "14s" on his card? Do you call the hit and run every time a batter has three "31s" on his card?

I saw that I had a dilemma, in an interview, you want to include everyone in the conversation. I could discuss these weighty APBA issues with Bill in depth, which he was plainly expecting to do, but I could see the eyes of the other four people at the table glaze over as we began to converse on what, I am sure, seemed to them boring and incomprehensible. Or I could gently back away from the conversation with Bill and direct a more legally relevant question toward Doug Newell, Ron Lansing, or one of the other people there.

"What the hell," I decided, "I've talked enough law today. Let's talk baseball now." Besides, those other folks had already had the day to get to know me, for better or worse, and Bill hadn't. So we had a long conversation, interesting to us but only marginally understandable to anyone else who was there, and a friendship was born. Or at least, I sufficiently bought him off with baseball knowledge that he did not veto my candidacy.

Bill and I soon discovered we had a lot of interests in common, including the fact that we were also both collectors of rare wines. In April, after receiving and accepting an offer to join the faculty, I made my first driving trip to Oregon, hauling my collection of old Bordeaux.⁽¹⁾ It was to Bill's house and wine cellar I went, as my first stop in Oregon, in order to store them there. On this run, I blew out the first of three radiators I was to ruin over the years, driving up the steep and unpaved driveway leading to Bill's house. I discovered early on that there was a price to pay when you visited Bill at home.

I was in my first summer of teaching at Lewis & Clark when the new building was finished, and the faculty began moving into new offices. Doug Newell, as faculty representative to the building committee, came around with the chart of the available offices. Most had been selected the prior spring, but there were four left. I arrived a week before Steve Kanter and another new faculty member, so Doug said, "You might as well have your choice of what's left."

One office was right next to the Dean's office--not acceptable, because you are always the first person the Dean sees when he needs an unwilling volunteer. Another was at the far end upstairs, next to where we were then running the clinic--not acceptable, because visitors to the clinic often bring their screaming three year olds along, and leave them unattended to bother the nearby faculty. But the third office I noticed was at the far end of the basement, right across from the janitor's supply room, and right next to Newell and Williamson, in an area already being called the Bat Caves. Perfect. I thought I would fit right in.

And I did. For the next twenty-three years I shared side by side offices with Bill. I usually started each morning by wandering in with a cup of coffee to chat for awhile. In addition to our shared outside interests, I discovered a professor with a genuine and continuing enthusiasm for his teaching and his students. While our teaching areas did not overlap much, our interests often did. I could never fail to be interested in the latest unusual criminal case Bill had found in some obscure jurisdiction, which he would chuckle over as he began to include it in his materials to enlighten his students with.

Bill prepared his own teaching materials for years. I do not think students realize how much work it is for a professor to develop his own materials and how much dedication it shows that professor has for his students. Bill did this for many years, often spending the entire summer on a new edition of his Criminal Law text, *The Perils of Abercrombie*. His materials were a blend of thoughtfully chosen cases, designed to acquaint the students with some of the actual issues a criminal law practitioner would face, and Bill's unique sense of humor, often expressed through the guise of Abercrombie, Samantha, and his other fictional characters, who seemed to gain real personalities as they continually transgressed or were victimized in Bill's materials over the years.⁽²⁾ He treasured the rare times a student actually thanked him for preparing an interesting text, but he did the work uncomplainingly year after year, thanks or not.

When the law school faculty, in the mid 1980s, decided that we should teach more natural resource courses with full time faculty, Bill and I jointly agreed to add Oil and Gas and also Mines and Minerals to our repertoires--he would teach the former, I would teach the latter. This was a far greater burden for him than me, as Mines and Minerals was reasonably close to my usual teaching assignments, while Oil and Gas was far removed from Bill's typical courses. Still, Bill went into this new assignment cheerfully and with his usual dedication and enthusiasm. He attended Oil and Gas conferences in Texas and elsewhere, picking up information which he then used to develop the course for Lewis & Clark students. Now he began finding interesting Oil and Gas cases with which to quiz and regale me over our morning coffee.

One thing we decided to do was to take each other's course the first time we taught them. We reasoned that Bill should have some basic knowledge of Mining law, and I should have some basic knowledge of Oil & Gas. Thus it was that I found myself, in the late 1980s, being a student again and taking Bill's class. I discovered that we were serious about this joint venture into the resources courses the day Bill called on me, like any other student, to recite the cases under discussion that day. As I recovered from my shock and frantically borrowed case notes from the students sitting next to me,⁽³⁾ engaging in the student end of the student-teacher dialogue for the first time in years, I was impressed anew by his preparation, his dedication, and his sheer enjoyment of the fun of teaching. I, of course, returned the favor the following term in Mines and Minerals, but was unable to catch him napping. Even when we ventured into areas such as the Rule Against Perpetuities as applied to mineral leases, a topic far more up my alley than his, Bill was not going to be outwitted.

Bill enjoyed nothing more than interested questions from eager students. Like all faculty members, he did not always get this response, and it probably troubled him more than any other law professor I know. He refused to lower his standards, however, to try to curry favor from his students. Bill treated his students with great respect, but he demanded performance from them. He insisted that his students perform in the same manner and with the same ability as he and his classmates had at Harvard. Often some people in his class did not appreciate this expectation, and occasionally someone would come by his office with a whine along the lines of "But I'm just attending night classes, I'm real busy, and I want to slide a little bit." Bill was personally very polite, but professionally he had no patience for that alibi. He was preparing lawyers for the practice of law, and he demanded that his students meet a standard that indicated they were able to practice competently.

Similarly, as we edged into the years of political correctness, Bill occasionally received complaints from the students over his materials or his subject selection for class. Now and then some students became upset that their tender ears and eyes were having to hear or read renditions of horrific crimes of rape and murder. Bill was adamant that students taking his class had to be prepared to practice Criminal Law one day and that Criminal Law involved often grisly and terrible human conduct. He stuck to his guns, often with very little support from the administration, insisting that one cannot be an effective criminal lawyer by pretending that murder and rape do not happen.

For several years it was a lonely battle of principle waged day after day in his Criminal Law classes. Bill's only reward, other than the knowledge that he was doing what he was supposed to be doing--training effective lawyers--was the occasional time when a graduate, four or five years out, would stop by and thank him for his efforts. The graduate would usually say something along the lines of "I didn't appreciate what you taught me then, but after a few years of trial work I really appreciate it now." I think Bill made a bee-line to my office after each such instance, pleased that another former student had at last recognized his efforts.

Bill was an effective and articulate writer when he had something to say in print, but he was not one of those professors who churns out reams of pages replete with hundreds of footnotes. His prime interest was his teaching and his students and the joy he got in trying to spark interest in them in the courses he himself enjoyed so much. I know he sparked interest, in his next-door colleague of over twenty-three years, in areas of the law I had not previously enjoyed discussing until I met Bill.

When the time came for the staff to dismantle his office and get it ready for its next occupant, I couldn't stay around the building to watch the process. It was as if Bill's personality--congenial, vibrant and always determined--was leaving along with the many things he squirreled away in his space during those years.

He was a marvelous, dedicated colleague and a credit to the teaching profession. Academia is lessened every time a professor like Bill Williamson retires.

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(1) My wife and children could wait for a later trip. The Bordeaux and baseball cards came first. You have to keep your priorities straight in academia.

(2) Bill may have retired, but Abercrombie, Samantha, Glarfschnorz and the others have not. When I inherited his Oil and Gas course, late in his career, I gleefully appropriated his characters, who live on to bedevil new generations of law students.

(3) To this day I am still grateful to David De Vere, Class of 1985, and Shellie McGaughey, Class of 1986, for sharing their notes with their fellow student.

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