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In Memoriam: Robert H. Dedman, Sr.

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IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT H. DEDMAN, SR.

*John B. Attanasio**

ON August 20, 2002, I was in Hilton Head, South Carolina on the driving range of the Golden Bear Country Club with my son, Michael. We were hitting balls and, every so often, I would tell him that Mr. Dedman told me to do it “this way” or Mr. Dedman told me to do it “that way.” As we were driving back from the club at about 10:30 on that beautiful Tuesday morning, I placed a routine call to my secretary who tearfully told me that Mr. Dedman had died. I just couldn’t believe the news—Mr. Dedman had been on the golf course with Michael and me just a few moments before. As I was preparing this tribute, however, I realized that perhaps Bob really had been on that course after all.

Bob and I came to know each other on the golf course. As any golfer can readily attest, the golf course is a place where one gets to know another well. I came to know Bob particularly well on the golf course, as I was effectively his student there.

Most people who played golf with Bob were, in one way, shape, or form, his students. Bob was a born teacher. On the golf course or the tennis court, or really anywhere, he loved to teach. And well suited to teach he was. Like most great teachers I have known, Bob was fantastically intelligent. He was high school valedictorian, and earned three degrees from the University of Texas while working full time. He earned his LL.M. at what is now the Dedman School of Law in the evening while effectively serving as general counsel for H.L. Hunt.

Like most great teachers, Bob could always put things in simple terms. He once said that “a golf ball should land on the green like a butterfly with sore feet.” Bob also displayed tremendous affection for his students. He was interested in his students not just as golfers or tennis players, but as people. Bob never belittled or embarrassed his students but always pulled for them, wanting them to do better and becoming personally involved in their success or failure. He would grow ecstatic when you hit a great shot, and would get upset when you blew it. Bob was always a gentle teacher, never getting very upset and never staying upset for long.

He was extremely patient and, believe me, my golf game certainly tried his patience. I remember the second hole we ever played. It was on a course that borders on a four-lane highway. A very large hedge, standing about 20 feet high, separates the fairway of one hole of the golf course

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from this highway. I generally slice the ball, hitting it to the right, and this hedge stands to the left of the fairway. Naturally, this time I hooked the ball high over the hedge and onto the highway. After the ball cleared the hedge, Bob and I both paused to listen. After a few seconds, which seemed like an eternity, Bob remarked, "Well, I didn't hear any windshields shatter, so I guess we can move on."

The truth is that Bob Dedman taught me about much more than golf. He taught me about a variety of subjects from law to deal-making to education to politics to flora and fauna. He was a man for all seasons, conversant on a wide variety of subjects from high finance to buffalo ducks. While he knew a lot about so many things, Bob was humble about his knowledge, never wearing how much he knew on his sleeve, and ready to admit when he didn't know the answer to some query. Like most brilliant people, he was intellectually curious, even about his own illnesses. He wanted to learn about them, not out of morbid curiosity, but in order to help others so they would not suffer in the same way that he had. During the last meeting I had with Bob in President Turner's office, Bob cautioned us about the vulnerability of the left side of our faces to skin cancer because we drive on the left side of our cars.

Most important of all, Bob taught me a lot about life. For his best lessons, he said nothing at all. As with all great teachers, he led by example. These lessons can perhaps best be summarized as the virtues that he displayed.

One of Bob's most prominent virtues was patience. Trying to teach me golf demanded this quality. However, Bob displayed a much more profound patience in a part of his life that had little to do with golf. Suffering was a part of his life that most people knew nothing about, and even those few who knew something about it, knew comparatively little. Bob suffered from a lot of illnesses in the latter years of his life. He once poignantly remarked to me that he sometimes felt like Job in his suffering. Yet virtually no one even knew about his many travails, and he hardly breathed a word about his health problem *de jour*, even to those who knew him well. One of the last times we had lunch together, for example, Bob appeared at lunch with his upper lip swollen and black and blue. He told me that he had a carcinoma removed from his upper lip that morning. I had played golf and tennis with him the previous Saturday, and Bob had said nothing about this impending surgery. He then proceeded to eat lunch as normal, even though he undoubtedly must have been in considerable pain.

Besides being patient, Bob displayed sheer courage in dealing with his various maladies. He faced his illnesses head on, not flinching from trials of pain or suffering, and never complaining. As his and my favorite poem *If* relates, Bob treated triumph and disaster the same way.

Another of Bob's virtues was humility. Even on his own courses, he never demanded special privileges, and generally would not even say who he was. He never discussed his own fabulous talents. In fact, he con-

stantly joked about his shortcomings, and attributed his many successes to luck.

Bob was one of the most talented people whom I have ever met. When he was high school valedictorian, he was also being scouted to play professional baseball. He shot 67 in golf on his 67th birthday, and he frequently played tennis with touring pros.

I have already mentioned Bob's achievements as an attorney, and his achievements as a businessman are well-known. His record in education is also well-known. For example, Bob served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Southern Methodist University during the difficult time after the NCAA gave SMU the death penalty, taking away its privileges to participate in intercollegiate athletic competition. Bob's leadership was instrumental in helping the University to survive this debacle. He helped SMU to grow beyond this episode and put it on a path to become one of the great universities in the United States.

You had to know Bob very well before he would even mention any of these achievements. Further displaying his deep humility, Bob's humor was frequently self-deprecating, never making someone else the butt of his jokes.

But the virtue that dominated Bob's spirit was love. One expression of this love was his storied generosity, for which we are all very grateful. As his daughter Patty expressed in her beautiful eulogy at the Highland Park United Methodist Church service, the word "philanthropy" comes from the Greek: *philos*, meaning love and *anthropos*, meaning mankind. Bob certainly loved mankind, and his generosity was only one expression of that love.

Bob loved his family. He would rather be around his family than anywhere else. He profoundly loved his children, his grandchildren, and, most of all, he loved his beautiful wife and fifty-year partner, Nancy. His love for them is reflected in their gentle spirits; in the beautiful, moving, affectionate eulogies that daughter Patty and son Bob delivered at his funeral; in the sense of profound loss written on the faces of his grandchildren; and in the grace and kindness of his wife Nancy toward all of us who mourn this great loss with her. Bob's love will live on in their spirits and in the future generations of leaders that Bob and his family have helped to train.

Essays

