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REMINISCING ABOUT BILL BRIDGE AND HIS REMARKABLE LEGACY

*C. Paul Rogers III**

BILL Bridge and I go way back—at this writing, forty-two years since we were graduate law students together at Columbia. At twenty-eight, we were both still wet behind the ears.¹ There were only six of us in the program, and we spent a lot of time together. We shared three offices, took most of the same seminars, and lived in the same co-op complex. Then in 1980 I accepted a position on the SMU law faculty and joined Bill, who had come to SMU three years earlier.

At Columbia, I quickly learned that Bill is scary smart, very well-educated, and incredibly well-read. He could talk intelligently about virtually any subject then and, of course, now. In fact, I was a little intimidated at first by Bill's quick and facile mind. That was soon minimized, however, as I got to know Bill and learned that he was full of fun and mischief and was pretty much irrepressible.

Bill embraced life and needed very little prodding to undertake an adventure. For example, we went to Game Four of the 1976 World Series in Yankee Stadium together, where we absolutely froze in the wind swirling around the third deck,² and to Opening Day the following April, where we froze once again.³ We also watched Bill's beloved Georgetown Hoyas play in Madison Square Garden and attended every home Columbia football and basketball game. With a larger group, we even ventured up to Litchfield, Connecticut, to see our country's first law school.

During that year I learned that Bill has a quick wit and a wicked sense of humor. Some of us were just entering legal education, and we tended to make a big deal out of receiving in the mail examination copies of

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1. Thanks to the efforts of Walter Gellhorn, Bill Young, Randy Edwards, Charles Frankel, and others of the inestimable Columbia law faculty we emerged a little less so.

2. The Cincinnati Reds defeated the Yankees 7–2 to sweep the Series, four games to zero. I remember very little about the actual game other than freezing for about three hours and how quiet Yankee Stadium was after the Reds won.

3. We decided to go to Opening Day on the spur of the moment and asked Professor Bill Young, who was the faculty member in charge of the graduate law program, if he would like to play hooky and join us. I have always thought that his response was classic. He said, “No, thank you. I'm afraid I actively dislike baseball.”

books in our fields from the casebook and hornbook publishers. We would daily ask one another, “Get any free books today?”

We took two seminars together in the fall, and one afternoon one of our colleagues (who later became a successful law school dean) was presenting a paper to one of the seminars when he began to look very pale and unwell. He tried to soldier on, but after some prodding, admitted that he could use a break and some water. He got up, walked to the seminar door, and fainted dead away. He was only out for a few seconds, and as he came to, surrounded by everyone in the room, the first voice anyone heard was Bill Bridge’s saying, “Sam, can I have your books?”⁴

I also learned that if one tries hard enough, it is possible to hurt Bill’s feelings. Columbia has a number of squash courts, and four of us, including Bill, decided that taking up squash would be an excellent way to get some exercise. We pooled our money, bought two squash racquets to share, and then set about learning to play the game. The first (and as it turns out, only) time I played with Bill, I quickly learned that although he has many strengths, athleticism is not one of them.

A couple of weeks later, Bill asked if I wanted to play squash, and I said without thinking, “No, Bill. I’ve got a lot to do today, and if I play squash it needs to be with someone who can give me a good workout,” or words to that effect. Not my best moment to be sure, but as I will relate later, Bill has had the last laugh.

Bill is nothing if not an honorable person, as I also found out during our time at Columbia. As graduate students, we had access to the Columbia Faculty Club and were to be billed monthly. It was a nice club and the prices were reasonable, but because we were all on tight budgets, we did not eat there often—maybe once or twice a month.⁵

The problem was that the Faculty Club never billed us the entire academic year. In late May, however, Bill took the bull by the horns and told the club that it had not billed him. Of course, the club then proceeded to bill all of us. Although I have often groused at Bill about my unwanted Faculty Club bill, what better person than he to teach Professional Responsibility to legions of law students.

As I mentioned, Bill officially joined the SMU law faculty in 1977 and began teaching in 1978. I came along as a visitor in 1980 and was put on a tenure track the next year. I have always appreciated that at least Bill did not block my appointment to a tenure track position because I had been a jerk about playing squash with him.

4. Not his real name, by the way.

5. Since we didn’t have much money, we generally tended to scrimp on our lunches, often getting by on a fifty-cent container of yogurt. It pains me to admit this, but once a week or so, Bill and I would instead buy packages of Zingers, also fifty cents, for lunch. For those unfamiliar, Zingers are similar to Hostess Cupcakes, only with icing both on top and cream in the middle. Not a healthy alternative to yogurt, then or now. Although we have both outgrown that predilection, until Bill’s recent retirement and move to Oregon, once a year or so I would find a package of Zingers in my faculty mailbox at SMU.

Not too many years after I became Bill's colleague at SMU, he embarked on a physical fitness kick and decided to begin riding his bike to work, a distance of about two miles. He went to a local bicycle shop and got his ten-speed totally reconditioned. Once his bicycle was ready for use, Bill did in fact proudly ride it to the law school one morning. He locked his bike in the bike rack between Storey Hall and Underwood Law Library but then made the fatal mistake of accepting a ride home that day. So there his bike sat in the bike rack for probably a decade, gradually rusting away and falling apart until someone from the university maintenance staff finally hauled it away.⁶

But Bill Bridge provided much more than comic relief during his forty years on the law faculty. In fact, his contributions to our community over those many years are unrivaled by even the most selfless among us. Bill has undertaken many unpopular roles at the law school over the years, such as chairing the curriculum committee through thick and thin, even leading a recent revision of the first-year curriculum. There is not a long line for that job. He loves the law library, so he should probably not get extra credit for chairing the library committee many times over the years.

But a truly extraordinary example of Bill's service goes back to the two years that he served as Director of Legal Writing to fill a serious institutional need. I have often wondered how many law faculty anywhere would be willing to go from a full-time teaching position to serving as legal writing director (while also maintaining his course load) for any period of time, much less two years.

Of course, Bill was also one of our superior classroom teachers and was a two-time winner of the Don Smart Award, which remains the law school's highest teaching honor, voted on by the graduating class. Over the years, he taught the heaviest student teaching load of any of us, with large classes every semester from among Evidence, Professional Responsibility, and Criminal Law. In addition, I am quite sure that he holds the record, never to be broken, for teaching courses in our evening division. He literally taught evening classes both semesters for years on end without a break.⁷

Bill was an old-school professor, particularly in his first year Criminal Law class. He selected four experts of the day from his class, which meant that those four students had to stand for the entire class while Bill peppered them with questions from the assigned cases. Then, to show that his bark was far worse than his bite, he would invite the four students to his office after class for soft drinks while he got to know them, asking them where they were from, their majors, and the like.

6. The law school's bike rack was directly on the way from my office to class, so I was able to witness first-hand the slow demise of Bill's bicycle.

7. Bill was a member (and of course, former president) of Town and Gown, a dinner club at SMU that dates from the 1920s and features a speaker each month during the academic year. It meets on the first Monday of the month. For many semesters and some entire academic years, Bill's evening teaching schedule precluded him from attending any dinners, but he always dutifully paid his club dues.

Bill was always a very student-centered professor and for many years was the last full-time faculty member to coach a moot court or mock trial team. In fact, he coached two—the Jessup team and the Vis team, which competes in the International Arbitration competition. He devoted hours and hours to each, holding tryouts, selecting the teams, mooting them, and then attending their competitions. In addition, Bill served for thirty-five years as the faculty advisor for Barristers, a small but important student service organization at the law school,⁸ and served as a vital advisor and resource for our LGBT students over these many years.

Beyond doing official jobs nobody else wanted to do, Bill set himself apart from the rest of us by performing all sorts of unofficial jobs that truly made him the heart and soul of our community. It was always as if Bill were looking after us, individually and collectively.⁹ He has always done this. His father Malcolm, who was a warm and delightful man, had early-onset Alzheimer's. During Bill's first decade at SMU, Mr. Bridge lived with Bill, who took care of his dad for nine years.

One of Bill's most endearing qualities is how well he treats people, irrespective of their station in life. It matters not whether one is a Supreme Court Justice or a cashier in the law school dining room. With the latter, he would know their names by their second day on the job and before long would be asking about their families. Perhaps the best example of this stems from the many years Bill directed our summer Oxford program at University College. He was superb as director because of his attention to detail and the genuine way he treated everyone involved. He became fast friends with not only the Oxford dons we employed to teach for us but also with Sandra and Ian Williamson, who were respectively the head housekeeper and caretaker for University College. So much so that with Bill's financial help, the Williamsons were able to come to the States and visit SMU on more than one occasion.¹⁰

Bill also understood that law faculty remain important to their former students, even years after they have graduated and started making their mark in the profession. During reunion weekends while I was dean, I generally tried to make appearances at as many class reunion parties as I could. This was always a challenge, as the parties were then generally scattered all around downtown and north Dallas. Bill willingly accompanied me every year on that trek. I remember that one year we were espe-

8. The Barristers recently honored Bill's long service as their advisor by renaming their Outstanding 1L Award the Bill Bridge Award.

9. Bill looked after Jan Kennedy after we tragically lost her husband John, Roy Ray after he could no longer come to the law school, and Emily Atlas after we lost her husband, Dan Shuman, much too soon. He kept tabs on our former registrar and director of admissions, Jean Jury, for many, many years and more recently helped Anne Bromberg immeasurably when Alan passed away. And those are just a few examples.

10. Bill is also great about doling out small kindnesses. For many years, Bill and I shared the same barber, Willy Morris, who had his shop in the Hughes-Trigg Student Union on campus. More than once, I got a haircut and attempted to pay, only to have Willy inform me that Bridge had paid for my haircut on his previous visit. I of course reciprocated, but the point is that it was Bill who first had the idea.

cially proud of ourselves because we managed to make appearances at all six reunion gatherings.

Not surprisingly, Bill was a wonderful university citizen during his forty years at SMU. He is a former Faculty Senate president and served on the Faculty Ethics and Tenure Committee for many years as well as the Honorary Degrees Committee, and others too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say he is one of the best-known, admired, and respected members of the law faculty across the university. He was recently honored with the university's "M" Award, emblematic of extraordinary university service.

Together with Fred Moss, Bill was also the most active and best-known of us with the local bar, frequently giving speeches at the Belo Mansion to various Dallas bar groups on a range of topics and annually speaking to the Federal Bar Association on cutting-edge legal ethics topics. He is a twenty-five-year member of the William "Mac" Taylor Inn of Court, where as you might imagine, he is a former president.

My admiration for Bill and the roles that he played does not mean that we did not sometimes disagree. Over the years, we have often disagreed over issues affecting the law school. It may be that we have disagreed more than we have agreed—I am not sure. But Bill has the wonderful quality not to take disagreements personally. That is not to say that he does not show exasperation from time to time, but it is not personal. Although I will say that since 1976, he has refused to play squash with me.

As an institution, it is clear that we are losing so much with Bill's retirement, and that includes a big part of our institutional memory. Bill remembers everything that happened at the law school—whether good, bad, or indifferent. For example, I know for certain that Bill remembers more about my deanship than I do.

It should be obvious from all this that Bill Bridge loved being a law professor and that he was very good at it. It was more than a job for him, and he was a perfect fit as a legal academic training future lawyers. Institutions like the Dedman School of Law are made up of people and the legacies that they leave behind. Bill Bridge's legacy to generations of law students, the university, the law school community, and the bar is profound. He has certainly earned his retirement in Portland, Oregon, to be near family, but he will not soon be forgotten here.