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Tribute to William V. Dorsaneo, III

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TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM V. DORSANEO, III

*Chip Babcock**

I first met Professor Dorsaneo thirty-plus years ago. I was a new member of the Texas Supreme Court Advisory Committee (SCAC), which began my education in how much I did not know about the law. Bill was, by contrast, a towering figure on the Committee and already a legend in the Texas Bar.

We have served together on the SCAC for all that time, and for the last twenty-one years, I have been the chair. One of my duties is to appoint sub-committees, with the permission of the Court, and the very first (and best) selection was Bill as chair of the appellate rules sub-committee. The Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure bear the imprint of Professor Dorsaneo's impressive knowledge and insight.

The Court, in fact, asked us to completely rewrite the Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure several years ago, and Bill and the other distinguished members of the sub-committee presented to the full SCAC and, ultimately, the Court with much improved procedures that achieved the goal of minimizing the "traps" in the Rules.

One of Professor Dorsaneo's pet projects did not, however, come to fruition. He led an effort over several years to produce a recodification of the rules of civil procedure. The project resulted in a body of work that was logical, practical, and caused the rules to hang together in a more orderly sequence. But it was never approved by the Court. I suspect, without knowing, that eliminating sixty-plus years of citations to the rules by their historical numbers was too much for the Court. While I sympathized with Professor Dorsaneo's ideal, not to mention the countless hours he put into the project, I worried, as a practicing lawyer, about the confusion that would be caused by completely reordering and renumbering the rules.

In my first years with the SCAC, before I became chair, I saw the obvious affectionate and close relationship Bill had with my predecessor, Luke Soules. The two of them were true students of the procedural aspect of trial practice. Luke would read advance sheets (I mean all of them) and send cases to his colleagues that he thought would interest them, especially Bill. Of course, all the procedural cases went to the Professor often with brief but insightful notations pointing out the significance of the case. Many of these observations formed the basis for comment in Professor Dorsaneo's seminal multi-volume work on Texas Trial Practice.

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The SCAC is an extraordinary collection of fifty of the best legal minds in the state combining the experiences of judges (both trial and appellate), the Academy, and trial practitioners, as well as district and county clerks and a court reporter. Being in the company of that group can be intimidating—I certainly was intimidated. But the cream, as they say, rises to the top, and Professor Dorsaneo was (and is) a leading voice in that group. The breadth of his knowledge is truly stunning, and he contributed to our debates in an insightful and collaborative way.

We are all better for having known and worked alongside him. Texas law is greatly enriched by his contributions. If I sought agreement to these sentiments, I could do no better than to mimic Bill's trademark cock of the head while looking straight at you and emitting the sound, "Hum? Hum?"

Aside from the intellectual stimulation of working with him, it has been great fun.